
A Dream Becoming Reality

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In 2016 when my horse Don Philippo, “Phil,” arrived in the United States after being imported from Germany I knew I wanted to compete with him internationally. After two years of hard work and dedication my dream was finally going to become reality. Phil and I have competed at NAJYRC, Festival of Champions, Regional Championships and US Dressage Finals, but nothing can compare to our experience together competing in Europe as a part of the 2018 European Young Rider Tour.

Last winter I had the opportunity of being George Williams working student in Wellington, FL. Over the course of the four months I was able to compete in three CDI’s in order to obtain my qualifying scores to be eligible for the European Young Rider Tour rank list. Phil and I remained number one on the rank list according to overall average, but it was up to the committee to make the final decision of the team they would send to Europe for the tour. In Early April I received the call that Phil and I were named to the 2018 European Young Rider Tour team and we would be representing the United States in three International CDI’s. We had a short three weeks to prepare for the tour, then our adventure officially began on May 9, 2018.

Phil and I arrived safely in Belgium at the beautiful Jewel Court Stud which was our “home base” for the duration of the tour. Our first CDI was in Compiègne, France and it only being two weeks after we arrived in Belgium I was a bit nervous, but definitely excited. Leading up to the first show George Williams gave me several lessons focusing on keeping the energy within the canter pirouettes since Phil has a tendency to get slow behind in the collection. George had me do transitions in the canter from working canter, extended canter, and collected canter, but keeping them brief so Phil didn’t have the opportunity to get slow behind when we came back to the collected canter. Once a good collected canter was established we started incorporating quarter turns. If Phil began to get slow then I could ride out and quicken the hind legs before doing another quarter turn. This exercise really helped me in being able to concentrate on the quality and rhythm of the canter rather than the turn of the pirouette. When I began thinking of the half pirouette as two quarter pirouettes then the quality and rhythm of the canter would remain the same.

Our first show in Compiègne, France was a success despite a few bobbles in our Young Rider Test. It was such an incredible feeling going down centerline in my first international competition and receiving a 67+%. After reviewing the videos of my test with George we both agreed that although I ride a very accurate test, at the next show I needed to take more risks and ride a bigger trot. George really wanted me to “go for it” in the extended trot and really show the judges a good, crisp transition.



During my time in France I was also able to watch some of the top Young riders in the world. It was cool to see that even they make mistakes in their test, but they aren't afraid to take risks and really go for it when they need to. I also had the opportunity to watch Catherine DuFour on “Cassidy” which was such a cool experience.

In preparation for our next CDI in Aachen, Germany George and I focused on maintaining a trot with more energy. George really stressed that Phil needs to be sensitive to my legs and he should feel like I could do an extended trot at any moment. If he needed a little reminder to stay ahead of my aids then he had me give Phil a little “bump, bump” with my leg then relax again. It is crucial that they are going on their own and you aren't begging with your leg for them to go forward. George also had me incorporate the passage into our trot work which really helped Phil in his expression and reach in the trot shoulder in and half passes. In preparation for the canter work we used half steps as a reminder to keep the hind legs quick and underneath him which also helped improve our canter pirouettes.





I had such an incredible and positive experience at our second show in Aachen, Germany. To start out our time in Aachen I had the pleasure of meeting Klaus Balkenhol which is such a cool experience in itself. Phil and I had a fantastic Team Test despite one mistake at the end. Compared to our test in France George and I agreed that it was much more energetic and uphill, but we still thought I could “go for it” even more in order to raise my scores. To end our time in Aachen Phil and I received a 70% in the individual test which was so exciting! Not many people can say they scored a 70% in Aachen.

Aside from competing in Aachen I had another opportunity to watch some of the top dressage riders in the world and I got to cheer on Shelly Francis and Jennifer Hoffmann. It was so cool to watch Shelly have her first European Win in Aachen, so exciting! We were stabled with Jennifer and Shelly which was also very exciting as I got to see how they do things in the barn and how they prepare for their upcoming competition throughout the week.



After Aachen I gave Phil a few days off, I definitely think he deserved it, but then it was back to work in preparation for our final show in Hagen, Germany. I was really looking forward to showing at Hagen because it was my first Nations Cup and we felt that as a team we were very strong and could be competitive for the bronze medal. George and I agreed that we should continue focusing on keeping the energy in the trot and canter and to focus on the small details that could help raise my scores. George wanted me to make my transitions as crisp as possible and to really show the judges a deference, for example, he had me really collect Phil in the corner before the extended trot to really get him to sit so as soon as I was straight on the

diagonal line I could “fire out” into the extended trot, then when it was time to transition back to collected trot George had me go back to that really collected trot so the judges could see the difference in the trot and that I wasn’t afraid to show it.

We arrived in Hagen and the atmosphere was already so incredible. The jumpers were there also which made the environment much more electric. Phil and I had two days of great schooling and Phil passed the jog which is always a sigh of relief. On team day he felt great. I had my trot work exactly where I wanted it to be, he was forward and energetic, but he still listened closely to my aids and really came back to me when I needed him to. Our canter work wasn’t our strongest, upon picking up the canter he already felt tight so I knew I needed to get him ahead of the leg which I was able to do in the canter half passes. We had beautiful half passes and flying changes and our first canter pirouette was big, but I was able to keep the rhythm and bend which I was happy about since George and I agreed that if he felt stiff or behind the leg I needed to ride them a bit large so Phil wouldn’t spin or swap leads behind.



Our second pirouette was not as good as the first. I felt him creeping behind my leg again and wasn’t able to get him ahead in time for the pirouette so he got slow behind and lost the rhythm. The rest of my test was very good and George and I were definitely happy with the nice moments that I had. We weren’t able to snag the bronze medal, but our first Nations Cup was a huge success none the less!

The Individual test was next which I was really looking forward to. I had a good time spot and Phil felt great in the warm up, we had great canter pirouettes and the trot work was super. The bell rang and I began my test like normal, but I knew something was off. Phil did not feel like himself, but I couldn’t figure out what was wrong until a few moments later when I realized he had gotten his tongue over the bit. I made the decision to retire which was heartbreaking, but I knew It was the right decision to make for Phil. I was definitely disappointed but no one is to blame. I was still so happy for my teammates as they both did awesome in the individual and moved on to the Freestyle!

After a long day I received some exciting news! The Judge at C granted me permission to ride in the freestyle! I was so excited and was really looking forward to riding my freestyle on Sunday.

I was last to go in the freestyle, Phil felt great in the warm up again and I could tell he was ready to Rock and Roll to his music. I had so much fun riding my freestyle. Phil was right there with me the whole time and it was one of the best test I have ever ridden. I could not have been happier with the way Phil was and I am beyond proud of him for giving me his all and being an amazing partner on this journey. We ended up third place in the freestyle!



Photo Credit: Lily Forado

My time in Europe came to an end, but it was an experience of a life time, one I'll never forget. I learned so much while training, showing and watching other riders compete in Europe. George was a fantastic coach for Phil and I and really helped us improve with each ride. The knowledge that I gained in Europe I will be able to bring home and apply it to my everyday riding and showing. Phil was a rock star and I could not have asked for a better partner and teammate to take on the journey with me!

