

### ***America's Laura Graves chases her right to the line.***

*by Louise Parkes • photos: FEI/Liz Gregg*

In a dramatic conclusion to an extraordinary battle between two mighty forces, Germany's Isabell Werth (48) posted a back-to-back victory at the FEI World Cup™ Dressage Final 2018 in Paris, France on Saturday, April 14.



America's Laura Graves (30) and Verdades put all the pressure on the defending champion when pinning her into runner-up spot in the Grand Prix, so in Saturday afternoon's deciding Freestyle Werth had it all to do to put that behind her and come back out fighting. But with her trademark steely determination, the phenomenal athlete produced a pristine performance to see off the challenge and lift the coveted trophy for the fourth time in her incredible career.

It was right down to the wire however, and she knew that the slightest error was out of the question when second-last to go. Graves had already posted a massive score of 89.082, which, the US rider admitted, surprised even her. "I knew anything was possible. I knew it would take a score like that to possibly get a win and it was a huge personal best for me!" Graves said.

However Werth mustered all the skill and experience of a lifetime to squeeze her rival out of pole position with the winning mark of 90.657. She described yesterday's Grand Prix defeat as "motivating," and simply used it to spur herself on to better things with the help of team coach and manager, Monica Theodorescu. "Like I said yesterday, I was not really disappointed or sad,

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I was just thinking about how I had to prepare for today and how I had to make it better and analyze what went wrong. So Monica and me, we decided to go in the big warm-up arena today, to bring her (Weihegold) forward and to make her free again, and that worked, and today she was the horse I wanted to show yesterday.”



“This is life, a lot of people think it’s easy, you win and you win again, but it’s not like that,” Werth said. “You have to think about it all the time and keep listening to your horse. Yesterday was not our day, but today we could solve it. And this is what I really like to do, and that’s the reason why I love to compete!”

The result was another reminder of the continuing resurgence of the German dressage powerhouse, with Werth’s compatriots Jessica von Bredow-Werndl (Unee BB) and Dorothee Schneider (Sammy Davis Jr) slotting into third and fifth places. Von Bredow-Werndl’s success was at the expense of Sweden’s Patrik Kittel who, as always, had the crowd right behind him when producing another one of his toe-tapping performances with Deja, but who just missed a place on the podium when having to settle for fourth.

Graves threw down something of a challenge at post-podium press conference. “I never practice my Freestyle as much as my other tests, so I think now I have a bit of homework to do and I think there are many more points to be earned in the future,” she said, clearly marking Werth’s card for the next time they meet.

The lady taking center stage was one of the great role models whose accomplishments are so many they may never be matched. Werth is taking great satisfaction from her fourth FEI World Cup™ Dressage title, not just because it’s another success but because of the way she achieved it.

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“To have experience is an advantage if you use it in the right way, and I think we did that from yesterday to today,” she said. “After a lot of years in the sport you know how many things can happen, how things can change very quickly. It gives you the confidence to go in the ring and to try your best - you know what your horse can do and you know what you can do. This was just a great day today!” said the happy German star.

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*Article and photos provided by the FEI.*