

Eventing COVER STORY

Big, bold and brave — Badminton is back

Australia's Sam Griffiths moved up from 25th place to take the title



Sam Griffiths' first four-star win came after one of the most dramatic cross-country days in recent memory. Giuseppe Della Chiesa's new course wreaked havoc with only 32 competitors making it through to showjump. But despite the fall-out rate, competitors, spectators and past winners have hailed the new-look course a success. **Sophia Heath** reports from Badminton

THE most demanding course in years, coupled with wet weather, provided fans with a thrilling Badminton.

Italy's Giuseppe Della Chiesa, FEI eventing committee chairman, was revealed as the new course-designer last July, after a number of high-profile figures complained that the course had become stale and tired (news, 11 July 2013). And Giuseppe didn't disappoint, providing the shake-up that Badminton was looking for.

Out of the chaos emerged self-deprecating Australian Sam Griffiths (see box, right), with the gutsy mare Paulank Brockagh, who managed to climb from 25th after dressage to lift the Mitsubishi Motors Trophy.

Britain's Oliver Townend took advantage of the tough course to score hotheaded Armada's top four-star result. And the nation was captivated by Harry Meade's remarkable recovery from a horrific fall last August to claim

third with Wild Lone (see box right).

Spectators hailed the competition as the "best Badminton in years" and the riders who managed to survive the course were equally enthusiastic about the new feel.

However, the drama came at a price. There were seven horse falls on cross-country day, with 25 combinations eliminated and a further 18 retiring on course.

This produced the lowest completion rate on record, with only 38.6% of the field finishing the event.

The track was also a giant slayer, catapulting multiple Olympic and world medalists into the mud, with William Fox-Pitt, Mary King and even "Mr Stickability" Andrew Nicholson all failing to complete.

The heavy ground and strong winds influenced the attrition and Giuseppe admitted that he would have liked to see more finish.

All about Badminton winner Sam Griffiths

Originally from: Victoria, Australia
Emigrated: to England in 1995 and worked for Matt Ryan

Based: Symphony Farm, Gillingham, Dorset
Family: married to Lucy, who also events, and they have a 16-month-old son called Oliver

Best-known ride: Happy Times

Australian team appearances: World Equestrian Games 2010 and London Olympics 2012

Previous notable results: third Badminton and Burghley 2009 and fourth Badminton 2011 with Happy Times

Memorable moment: Sam gamely posed with a lobster on his top hat for *H&H's* Olympic Spotlight series in May 2012 — he enjoys seafood

Other hobbies: Sam is a keen golfer in his spare time

"There was an expectation that it would be a very strong course," he said afterwards. "I would have expected and liked to see more finishers, but the overall analysis will take some time [before he can say what changes he will make for next year]."

Badminton has confirmed that Giuseppe will "almost certainly" design the 2015 course, a fact that is likely to influence entries, horse selection, preparation and anticipation as Badminton's reputation returns to being the most formidable four-star in the world.