

HorseLife Magazine: Unicef Team Canada Triumphs at the 2008 International Tent Pegging Championships

"Having snatched victory from the jaws of rationality, our sense of dazed disbelief is unlikely ever to leave any of us," said team captain, Akaash Maharaj. UNICEF Team Canada triumphed at the 2008 International Tent Pegging Championships held in India, winning an unprecedented three gold medals and one bronze medal out of the four team disciplines.

"It was only in 2007 that our captain, Akaash Maharaj, became the first Canadian to compete at the world championships of this most ancient of equestrian sports. Less than a year later, UNICEF Team Canada has become a giant killer of international equestrianism, displacing the sport's Old World superpowers for dominance of team tent pegging," said Hon Hal Jackman, team equerry.

Tent pegging has been practiced for 2500 years and is one of only ten recognized disciplines of the Fédération Equestre Internationale. Galloping riders use sword and lance to spear targets. The term "tent pegging" descends from the historical use of tent stakes as targets during exercises held in cavalry encampments.

"No one is more astonished by the results than we are," said Akaash Maharaj. "My hope for the International Championships had been to represent Canada with honour, and to serve the cause of the world's most vulnerable children." As the sole Canadian invited to compete at the 2008 International Championships, Maharaj assembled a multinational composite team to compete as part of UNICEF Team Canada: Akaash Maharaj, Bimol Singh, Jeetender Singh and Talwinder Singh.

Maharaj has donated three of his four medals to UNICEF Canada, which plans to auction them in support of UNICEF Canada's campaign to fight AIDS in India to provide HIV and AIDS treatment and fund prevention projects for children, youth, and mothers.

There are 2.5 million people living with HIV and AIDS in India. Fifty per cent of new infections are in young people between 15 and 24 years old. Women account for 38 per cent of new infections, a trend with serious implications as more HIV-positive mothers may unknowingly pass the virus on to their children.

"We are thrilled that UNICEF Team Canada has been so successful in competition," said Campaign Chair Aditya Jha. "Through supporters

such as UNICEF Team Canada, we will be able to make a real difference in the fight against HIV and AIDS."