

Walker, Foster top awardees

By **Dwayne Gibbs**
dwaynegibbs@nationnews.com

Heather Walker, one of Barbados' foremost eventing and show jumping competitors in equestrian, is now world class as she was officially ranked first and seventh in the world in both disciplines, respectively, in Category C.

The announcement was made at the 2024 Barbados Equestrian Association's annual awards show at The Barbados Polo Club, Holder's Hill, St James, last Friday night where Walker received the **Super League 2**, 1.10-metre champion award for the **Blue Sails Challenger Trophy 2024**. She also received trophies for being the Category C 1.10-metre Barbados champion and eventer champion.

Veteran rider Roberta Foster took the lion's share of trophies at the awards.

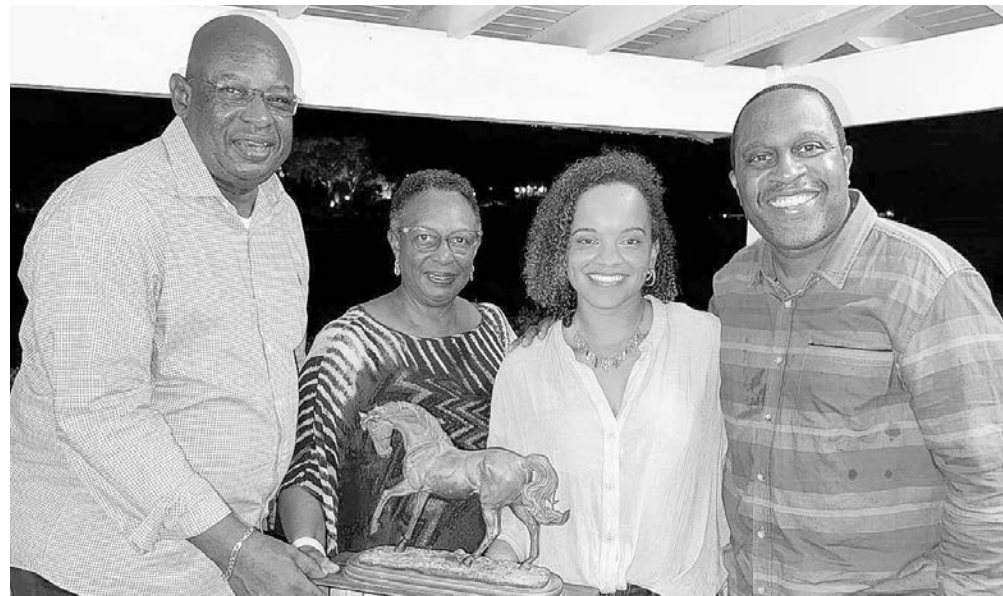
Foster, who competed in the discipline of dressage, won the **Uncle Lee Trophy** for the **Top Elite Dressage Rider**, the **Trophy For Outstanding Achievement** in dressage from the 2023 **CAC Games** where she earned a bronze medal.

She was also the dressage freestyle champion – International 1 Adults category and also earned the title of adults freestyle champion.

Veteran rider and stalwart Laura Smith, who was also the master of ceremonies for the event, made her last year of competing one to be remembered, racking up trophies for the **Super League 1**, 1.0 metre category with her trusty steed **Little Vegas**, and was also adults first level champion and dressage freestyle champion in the first level adults category.

Equestrian Association president Monique Archer, who was unavailable due to overseas commitments, won the **Amazing Grace** award for her outstanding contribution to show jumping as an adult rider, along with the title for the **Super League 3** 1.20 metre champion 2024. She was also the Fédération Equestre Internationale, (FEI) Category B 1.20 metre champion with her horse **Camross Diamond**.

St Luke's Academy Trophy for junior champions went to Emily Dickson astride **Rocco/Corlato**,



BOA secretary general Erskine Simmons (left) and BOA president Sandra Osbourne (second left) presenting Heather Walker (second right) with one of her awards while National Sports Council director Neil Murrell looks on. (Picture by Dwayne Gibbs.)

who competed at .50 metres, and Jonathan Filardo astride **Mr Blue**, who competed at .80 metres, with Alessandra Edwards astride **Caison** at .90 metres.

The **RT's Paint Contracting Award** for the Little League adult champion went to Zach Pitcher riding **Halo Girl**, while the adult champion was Caia Hoyos, aboard **Lucky Luke**, and the champion adult was Abi Haloute, riding **Jack Sparrow**.

Vivienne Kissoon won the Children Intro Test B and C titles and Josiah Straughn took the Children Training Level Test 1 award. The Children Training Level Test 3 champion was Rylee Pinheiro on **Supa** while the Adults Training Level Test 3 champion was Paula Galbraith on **Soca Kid** with **Pinhiero** doubling as Children First Level champion.

Children Second Level champion

was Isla Domenge on **Vanity** while Adults Third Level champion was Gina Hunte on **Vivaldi** and Adults Fourth Level champion was Tammy Pinto on **Valentino**.

The **Outstanding Contribution/Sponsorship Award** to show jumping went to Archers Hall Designs, with the **Most Improved Junior Jumper 2024** going to Erin Skinner and **Most Outstanding Junior Jumper 2024** going to Alessandra Edwards. Laura Smith was given the **Horsing Around Trophy** for excellence in both dressage and show jumping in 2024.

Josiah Straughn took the **Roberts Manufacturing Award** for **Outstanding Sportsmanship** in 2024 and the **Windsor Travel Award** for **Outstanding Contribution** to the BEA in 2024 went to the Barbados Olympic Association.

Heavy hitters Sabalenka, Keys set up title clash

MELBOURNE – Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka and Madison Keys made sluggish starts yesterday but sealed contrasting victories to set up an **Australian Open** tennis final showdown that will pit two of the game's heavy hitters against each other.

Belarusian top seed Sabalenka overwhelmed her best friend Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-2 in an impressive display of raw power to storm into her third straight title clash at the year's opening Grand Slam, where she will bid for her fourth major title.

American Keys rallied from a set down to stun Swiatek 5-7, 6-1, 7-6(8) in a thriller and reach her first final at the **Australian Open** and second at the majors after her run to the 2017 **US Open** title clash where she lost to Sloane Stephens.

"I'm still trying to catch up to everything that's happening. I'm in the finals," 19th-seeded Keys said after the biggest win of her career.

"That match was just such a high level . . . I felt like I was fighting to stay in it . . . To be able to be standing here in the finals is absolutely amazing."

Five-times Grand Slam champion Swiatek came into her semi-final clash having not lost a game on serve in her last four at **Melbourne Park**, but was under immediate pressure when Keys took the opener.

Roared on by an army of Polish fans in the **Rod Laver Arena** stands, Swiatek switched into battle mode and pulled it back and the pair swapped breaks again before Swiatek took the opening set after rain prompted the closure of the roof.

But the experienced Keys, competing in her third semi-final at the **Australian Open**, continued to heap the pressure on with heavy ball-striking and impeccable serving to race ahead 5-0 in the next set before Swiatek avoided the embarrassment of a bagel.



AMERICAN MADISON KEYS celebrating after winning her semi-final match against Poland's Iga Swiatek to reach the Australian Open final. (Reuters Picture)

Keys drew level at one set apiece with her seventh break in the match and made a solid start to the deciding set, hitting a backhand rocket to hold for 4-3 before saving four break points to go 5-4 up.

Swiatek responded and squandered a match point at 6-5 before taking the lead in the tiebreak. Keys battled back and sealed victory when the Pole sent a shot long.

Meanwhile, world No. 1 Sabalenka was also not perfect and trailed Badosa 2-0 in the opening set with a flurry of unforced errors, but she soon found her mark and put her dependable forehand to work to end the 11th seed's run in the Spaniard's first



ARYNA SABALENKA powers her way into another Australian Open final. (GP)

major semi-final.

"I have goosebumps. I'm so proud of myself and my team to put ourselves in this situation," said Sabalenka as she set up the prospect of a 'three-peat' in Melbourne for the first time since Martina Hingis in 1997-1999. (Reuters)

St Catherine's AGM

The annual general meeting of St Catherine's Sports and Social Club will be held on Thursday, January 30, at the clubhouse, Bayfield, St Philip, from 6:30 p.m.

Among the agenda items are the presentation of the annual report and financial statement and election of a new committee of management. (EVS)