

The secrets to Eventing Team GB's success at the 2012 Games

Written by Kathy Carter



Yogi Breisner, World Class Performance Manager and Chef d'Equipe to the British Eventing team, joined the recent two-day Horses Inside Out 2013 Conference in the UK to speak to the attended crowd of riders, therapists, saddle fitters, riding instructors and students about his experiences at the 2012 Olympic Games. Yogi has led medal winning teams at both the 2004 Athens and 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, in addition to enjoying many successes at both European and World Championships.

Yogi Breisner with Gillian Higgins at the Horses Inside Out Conference 2013 Photo courtesy of www.HelenRichmond.co.uk

Here is an extract from Yogi's informal presentation:

It was always going to be a big challenge for us [equestrian Team GB] being in London – there's so much pressure to win when you are the hosts. But we tried to build a formula to deal with the 'home disadvantage'. We gave our riders a pay-as-you-go phone each, and kept the phone numbers within the teams, so they could turn their phones off and not focus on all the messages from well wishers. Also, each rider had someone at their home base who dealt with home issues – we shielded the riders from outside distractions. The army guys [who manned security at the Games] or the Games-makers would come to the team managers with queries, and we got thousands of signed photos prepared ahead of competition of the riders, so as not to disturb our riders when people requested pictures or autographs.

In terms of preparation for the eventing element of the Games [as Chef d'Equipe to the British Eventing team] I had done lots of 'recce's', [reconnaissance] – I knew every blade of grass and every tree there. You could even Google the park [Greenwich Park, London] once the plans for the CX course had been submitted, and see it online via satellite.

BAE Systems, a company that supplies defense and aerospace systems, put this information on a computer system, so that our riders all had access to a virtual park – of course there were no jumps laid out, as that information was not available ahead of the Games, but we made sure our riders knew the terrain and minute markers.

Preparation is Key

As Team Manager, you should always be thinking outside of the box. We did lots of work to get the British horses used to the Games atmosphere, e.g. flags, noise and crowds – we did our final preparations at Addington Equestrian Centre in the UK and used all sorts of decorations in the arenas – we looked at the Games course builders' recent courses, for ideas of the types of fences they may use – and brought in lots of children with flags to come and cheer as we practiced. Some of the other Chef d'Equipes said the British crowds on XC day were unbelievably and unexpectedly noisy!

Once the XC element was underway, I could see that the Swedes and Germans were our biggest threat – they had strong teams. We knew that the XC course time was achievable, if you galloped where you could, even downhill – we'd practiced going at speed down hill and around tight turns ahead of the Games, and knew our minute marker locations.

Some fences were one star fences – but the designers got the course right – you can't afford for it to go wrong at the Games! Nine riders went inside the time which was just right. An easier course didn't produce the wrong result – the right people were placed.

We knew that manicured turf would be slippery – and watched the riders that warmed up and went first, to see what studs they used; we knew we had to heavily stud our horses.

Deserving Winners

The dressage element went without a hitch and there were three points between the leading teams ahead of the showjumping. The Germans deserved that Team Gold – they had fewer mistakes in the jumping than the other teams. The three top-placed individual riders had the best three horses in the world, on the day. We got the right result. But you go out not wanting to be beaten, so we were disappointed [with silver]. But our team did so well and has never come back without a medal in their last 14 championships – I was, and am, very proud of them.



After the Games and the fabulous Paralympics, it felt as if Team GB had arrived on the sporting map – equestrianism is now a sport that wins medals in the UK.

Visit <http://www.horsesinsideout.com> for information on equine locomotion, training and management from an anatomical perspective.

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