

The Road to the Olympics – Four Equestrians Aim Their Sights at Sydney 2000

BY ROBIN STANBACK

Being a part of the Olympics is a lifetime affair of the heart. It starts with a dream that requires dedication and hard work, but perhaps the most important ingredient is good fortune. For Kentucky Equine Research (KER), good fortune played a significant role in providing the opportunity to be involved with some of the greatest equine athletes of the nineties. The company's dedication to providing the highest quality feeds and supplements and its employees' devotion to meeting the needs of the horses and their support teams made KER a very successful official feed supplier to the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia. For the Sydney 2000 Games, the company will continue to play a vital role as a feed consultant, but it is already a partner, through Pennfield Feeds of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in the preparation of four pre-eminent competitors, Phillip Dutton, David and Karen O'Connor, and Beezie Madden.

EQUINEWS will follow the efforts of these four equestrians as they prepare to launch their final Sydney 2000 campaigns. For each contender there is more than one mount to prepare. The horses must have individual programs designed and followed meticulously to provide their riders with the best possible chance of representing their countries at the Olympic Games. Only the very best prepared and qualified horses will be granted the opportunity. In this issue the riders talk about the winter strategies they hope will provide their horses with a sound foundation upon which to build their spring campaigns and hopefully qualify them for their chance at the Olympics.

Phillip Dutton knows what it means to stand on the ultimate platform at the Olympics. In 1996 he and his mount, the Australian-bred Thoroughbred True Blue Girdwood, affectionately known as "Jughead," were members of the three-day event gold medal team. They have competed

in four-star events around the globe with great success since that time, placing third at the first Rolex**** in 1998, followed by eighteenth at the World Equestrian Games in Italy. Mr. Dutton was named the United States Combined Training Association's (USCTA) Leading Rider of



Phillip Dutton and his horse True Blue Girdwood on the cross-country course at the 1998 Rolex Three-Day Event.

the Year in 1998, the first time in the award's history that it was granted to a foreign rider. While he may train in the United States, Mr. Dutton rides for Australia. True Blue Girdwood, owned by Mr. Dutton and Ann L. Jones, was named the High Point Horse for the same year. Mr. Dutton sees the 2000 Summer Games in Sydney as being the last remaining major goal in Jug's career. Other horses in the gold medallist's stable of Olympic hopefuls include House Doctor and Show Of Heart, both American-bred Thoroughbreds owned by Nina Gardner of Chatham, Pennsylvania, and Agent Cooper, a 10-year-old Thoroughbred owned by Karen Burchianti. Mr. Dutton trains these horses from Ms. Gardner's True Prospect Farm in West Grove, Pennsylvania.

He stated, "A good performance is made up of a lot of little things. Little details like a poor shoeing job a week before a performance can take you out of it completely. Each horse is a little different from the next and different programs need to be developed for each of them. They are turned out as much as possible right now. We are just now starting back to work to get them ready to perform early in the spring. What we do at this point, even though it seems a long way away from the Olympics, is very important"

Internal health is a paramount component in Mr. Dutton's program. Along with a careful deworming plan, a balanced nutritional program is a must. He said, "No matter how good a nutritional program you develop, if the horses aren't healthy inside, they will not get the most value from their feed. Deworming is very important."

Mr. Dutton first became aware of KER when he was preparing for the Olympics in 1996. He remembered, "I had read about the company and knew that it was associated with Pennfield Feeds in our area. I believe in feeding a good feed with all the nutrients in it. Pennfield had a few choices that met my requirements. I value the Enduroevent Ener-G feed for my more nervous horses and the Phase III for the laid-back individuals. Additional supplements are not a big part of our program but I do feed them to my horses according to their individual needs."

David and Karen O'Connor, members of the silver medal winning United States Team in Atlanta, lead another stable of world-class three-day event competitors they hope will provide them with Olympic mounts this year. David rode his Atlanta mount Custom Made, a 15-year-old Thoroughbred owned by Joseph Zada, to an impressive victory at Badminton in 1997. David was the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) Equestrian Male Athlete of the year in 1998. In 1999 he took first place at the Fair Hill*** competition and fifth place at the Rolex*** aboard the 9-year-old Thoroughbred, Rattle and Hum owned by David Lenaburg. He was a member of the gold medal team at the Pam American Games where he also took an individual silver medal and he was named the 1999 Rider of the Year for



Photo by Charles Bishop

Olympic veterans David and Karen O'Connor are preparing numerous horses for a shot at the 2000 games.

the USCTA. Karen won the 1998 USCTA Lady Rider of the Year, an award that she has claimed seven times in the past. She won the Rolex**** in 1999 aboard Jacqueline Mars' 15-year-old Thoroughbred Prince Panache. She also placed second at Fair Hill*** riding Regal Scott, a 11-year-old Thoroughbred purchased recently for her by Ms. Mars and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Thompson.

Training from Ms. Mars' farm in The Plains, Virginia, the O'Connors are each preparing a number of horses for a run at the 2000 Summer Games. Mr. O'Connor has four: Custom Made, Rattle and Hum, the 14-year-old Thoroughbred Giltedge owned by Ms. Mars, and the 11-year-old Thoroughbred The Native which he owns with his wife and Ms. Mars. Karen is readying Prince Panache, Regal Scott, and Grand Slam, a 10-year-old Thoroughbred owned by Lourdes Peralta.

Mr. O'Connor explained, "Quite a bit depends upon luck and upon how they run in the spring. We have a program for all our horses that enables them to have six weeks off after their last three-day event. They get turned out during the day and brought up at night. We like to take them off all their supplements, cut down on their feed and eliminate the high fat content in their competition diets, and let them relax during this time. Then, when they are ready to go back to work, we start with hacking: walking, going up hills, no jumping and no pressure. This helps them to

get their muscles back in shape. When they have been at this for about three weeks we draw blood for analysis to enable us to get a baseline of each individual's specific needs without any of the supplements to mask them so



Photos Submitted by Bezie Madden

Bezie Madden hopes to qualify to be a member of the United States Olympic Team in show jumping.

that we can determine the proper course for each horse. The older horses know the drill pretty well and they don't need as much practice as they need work to strengthen their muscles. The younger horses may need some refresher courses in the dressage ring."

Mr. O'Connor also values a careful feeding program. He stated, "We try to dovetail a program to meet the individual horse's needs.

Pennfield produces our feed and we are very happy with the outstanding quality and freshness of its feeds. We use the Enduroevent Ener-G feed for some of our horses and the Phase III for others and feel that it does a tremendous job of providing our horses with what they need. As for supplements, I think Summer Games Electrolyte that was developed by KER is the very best on the market."

Ms. O'Connor seconded his opinion of an excellent nutritional program. Her brilliant competitor Biko, currently recovering from injuries sustained in an accident at the Burghley**** in 1999, has been fed Pennfield feeds and KER supplements his entire competitive life. She added, "I think the combination of Pennfield Feeds and Kentucky Equine Research's products provides us with a very complete nutritional package for our horses. In the 25 years I have been competing I have never found a better overall package than what they provide."

Ms. O'Connor also mentioned two products that Team O'Connor value for their horses in heavy competition. "We have found Myo-Guard and Metaboleeze to be two excellent supplements that help those horses that have muscle problems or certainly any that have a history of myositis."

Working toward competing in a different Olympic venue is Bezie Madden of Cazenovia, New York. She hopes to qualify two horses for a chance to compete in the 2000 Olympics: Cockney II, an 11-year-old Holsteiner owned by the Cockney II Group, and Innocence, an 11-year-old Dutch-bred gelding owned by Allen Shore, Jr. Ms. Madden has been a steady competitor in the show jumping arena for many years. She won the Budweiser/AGA Rider of the Year title in 1997 and she rode Mr. Shore's Dynamite to the

1997 Horse of the Year title. She captured the coveted Arthur Anderson Derby in Monterrey, Mexico in October of last year aboard the seven-year-old Cloud Nine, an up and coming youngster. With Innocence, a horse she and her husband John have brought along from an early age, she captured the President's Cup at the Washington International Horse Show, won the Grand Prix of Rotterdam and chalked up an impressive victory at the Grand Prix in Spruce Meadows, all in 1999.

Show jumpers operate on a different schedule than do three-day event competitors. Ms. Madden explained, "Right now we are showing a lot more heavily than we would normally show at this time of year. We have been at the Nation's Cup in Toronto. The horses will have a week between that and flying to Europe where we will compete in Holland and Switzerland. When we get home those horses will have a few months of rest before we get them ready for the spring shows. I probably won't start showing them again until late spring. We like to turn them out for at least half a day. If the horses will tolerate it, we will pull their shoes and turn them out full time. We are very careful about our paddocks and rotate them well so there is always plenty of grass available. I think it is much better for a horse that is not in training to be outdoors as much as possible. They move about more when they are outside and they keep their muscles more in tone than if they are locked up in a stall."

When it is time for the horses to go back to work, Ms. Madden stated, "They may be shipped to Florida in the early winter if we don't get our walker machine ready in time. We are installing a walker machine at our farm in Cazenovia, New York. If it is finished in time, we will keep the horses in New York to rest. They can be exercised and then put in the walker for an hour or two every day to help them leg up."

Whether at work or in turnout, Ms. Madden said she likes to keep her horses on the same feeding program. She explained, "We try to keep our feeding program very similar. Of course, if they start to gain a lot of weight, we will cut back a bit but we are quite satisfied with their feeding programs the way they are and try to keep them that way. It can be difficult to keep them on the same feed when we travel overseas because some countries have restrictions on what you can bring along with you. In that case we try to bring enough to wean them onto the feed that will be available to them. It is usually for only a few weeks so it doesn't seem to bother them too much. We are very happy with the feeds provided for us by Pennfield, and Summer Games Electrolyte and Myo-Guard are two products that we use."

All four competitors will be busy in the next three months getting their horses ready for their first competitions of this year. Look for the April issue of EQUINEWS to see where they will make their 2000 debuts. ∞