


Fruits and Vegetables

One of the unexpected issues was the demand for fruits and vegetables such as carrots, apples and bananas. Nearly 20 tons of carrots were supplied to horses during their stay at Horsley Park. This equates to an average consumption of nearly 2 kg of carrots per day. Reasons for feeding carrots included their high palatability and the wish of competitors to introduce some variety into the diet. What about their nutritional value? Carrots are only 11% dry matter, so 90% of the carrot is water. Therefore, carrots did contribute to some water intake, but apart from vitamin A carrots supplied only small amounts of other nutrients. At the average intake level for a horse in moderate work, carrots would supply about 75% of the vitamin A needs but less than 2% of other nutrient needs such as energy or other vitamins. Perhaps there is a market for a commercial horse feed with plenty of carrots in it! The other popular fruit was apples with an average consumption of over three apples per horse per day. The French and Spanish team horses were the largest consumers of apples. Again, apples are high in water and the major value is to introduce variety into the feed and give the horses something they like to eat. A more surprising fruit fed to the horses was bananas. Bananas were fed to horses from seven countries and were a large part of the diet of the lone horse from the Philippines and an Australian dressage horse as well as some Russian dressage horses. Bananas are a high energy feed and they also contain high levels of phospholipids that can assist in lining the horse's stomach and preventing acid damage to the stomach and thus ulcers. To realize there were more pounds of fruits and vegetables consumed at this event than straight grains is amazing and perhaps the organizers of equestrian events should be approaching the carrot grower's federation for sponsorship from now on!

Summary

All the visiting teams were very complimentary about the wide range and quality of feeds supplied to their horses at the 2000 Olympics. After being involved with the 1996 and the 2000 Olympic Games, KER hopes to be instrumental in feeding the equine athletes competing in Athens in 2004. 

The 2000 Paralympic Games Provide Opportunities for Athletes Challenged by Disabilities

BY MARITA HIRD

Editor's Note: The Paralympic Games began when Sir Ludwig Guttman organized a sporting competition for World War II veterans who had sustained spinal cord injuries. The program he devised was so popular that four years later similarly injured veterans from Holland joined the competition and the Paralympic Games were born. The Games weren't officially organized until 1960 when they immediately followed the Rome Summer Olympic Games. Since that time, the Paralympic Games have been a popular sporting competition for many people challenged by a wide variety of disabilities. The Games closely follow the quadrennial Olympic competitions and are held in the same venues. The first organized competition in Rome saw 400 competitors from 23 countries taking the field. In Sydney last fall over 4000 athletes from 125 countries came to compete in 18 sports from equestrian competition to wheelchair rugby. Kentucky Equine Research is very proud to have been a sponsor of Marita Hird, a Paralympic equestrian who epitomizes all of the most courageous qualities necessary in an Olympic athlete. The following is her story.

I have found the secret to world peace - twenty-four hour free food, laundry service, masseur on call and thousands of athletes from all over the world living their dreams!

I had a wonderful time at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games. It was like living in another world, one with a very friendly environment. We were not judged by the way we looked or how we walked. Everyone there had to overcome great odds just to have the honor of competing at an elite level for their country. We were there to show the world our abilities, not our disabilities.

I competed in the equestrian field. This can be a difficult task for many of us, but it is made more so as we were unable to bring our own horses and had to ride those provided for us. Athletes are classified into four categories. Grade 1 athletes are the most severely disabled and are mainly mobile via wheelchair. Their disabilities usually affect all four limbs. The dressage test required of them is mostly done at a walk with a bit of a trot thrown in. Grade 2 riders walk and trot but may canter in their freestyle tests. These riders have severe loss of use in two or more limbs. Grade 3 is the section in which I strut my stuff.

Riders have limited use of two limbs or are totally blind. We walk, trot and canter. Grade 4 riders are usually single limb amputees or have a visual impairment. They are required to walk, trot, canter and do lateral movements.

My story began on December 10, 1993. I was an apprentice jockey. I had just won the major race of the day at the Albury Turf Club in NSW. I was over the moon. I won on a horse named Auntie Mary. The owner/trainer had booked me to ride this mare at Flemington in her next start. It finally looked as if I was getting one step closer to my ultimate goal of becoming the first female jockey to win the Melbourne Cup. Two rides later my world came crashing down around me. Life would never be the same. I fell from my mount Body Thoughts during a race. I was taken to the Albury Base Hospital where it was discovered that I had broken three vertebrae in my neck. I was flown to the Austin Hospital where I would spend the next three months. Initially it was not known if I would ever walk again. I was told I would certainly never ride again. The doctors explained that I was "an incomplete quadriplegic."

I did learn to walk again and nine months after that fateful fall I was back on a horse. My left side did not work very well but the movement of the horse helped my muscles move again. It was also just what I needed to return to mental stability.

Eventually I began to compete, first at state and then at national levels. I advanced to the international level where I competed in New Zealand and then at the World Games in Denmark. To top it off, I was selected to represent Australia at the Sydney 2000 Paralympics with six other riders. I would never have made it this far without the guidance, friendship and knowledge of Manolo Mendez. Manolo was the head rider at the Vienna Riding School where thousands of people flock each year to witness the



Paralympian Marita Hird

magnificent dancing horses. Manolo moved to Australia to be the head rider at Elcabalo Blanco before he ventured out on his own and now resides in Sunbury, Victoria.

After the most amazing experience of marching out with the Australian team into a packed stadium of 110,000 cheering people, I was wondering if things could possibly ever get any better. The very first thing we did after the ceremony was to discover which horse we would be assigned to ride. All of the horses were paraded in the indoor arena and put through their basic paces. The horse's name and then a rider's name are pulled out of a hat. The athletes were then allowed to ride their respective horses and have the choice of putting their horse back in the hat if it proved to be unsuitable. I drew a little chestnut mare by the name of Oberne Park Fleur. I had managed to avoid riding chestnut mares because Body Thoughts, the mare I fell from, was chestnut. I was devastated. I described my mount as a "pumpkin on legs." I was very lucky though that the pumpkin's owner was fantastic with a wonderful sense of humor. There was no legitimate reason for me to reject this horse so I chose to continue on with her.

For six days I continued to train with my little mare and work with all of her little quirks. The first day of competition was a warm-up event. Fleur was quite tense and didn't like the pouring rain. We came in a respectable 7th. Unfortunately, we were not picked to be on the Australian team of four as the judges decided my horse had too much potential for "playing up." The second day of competition was the championship test. Fleur decided that the judges were extremely scary and she did "play up." She was extremely tense throughout the whole test. We finished 13th out of 20. The final day of competition I decided I was going out to have fun. It was a freestyle to music - my favorite event. With a smile on my face, I rode the test of my life and pulled it off. The judges loved my music and the choreography (supplied by Gill Rickard and Carolyn Luetenant). We were firmly placed in gold medal position with only five riders to go. I stayed in this position right up to the last two riders. I was beaten by my fellow Australian rider Julie Higgins for the gold and by the last rider from Norway for the silver. I was far from being disappointed as Julie is a great friend and she rode sensationally. I had a Paralympic medal and had ridden as well as I could. I far exceeded all my own expectations. The "pumpkin on legs" had turned into a bronze carriage!

I had the time of my life and learned many lessons - the main one being never to judge a book by its cover. I have come away with so many memories and, along with the knowledge that I had done my best, I know for certain now that if I believe in myself, anything is possible.

I want to thank the people at KER for their support. It is a pleasure to be associated with such a fantastic company and to be part of such a super team. ■

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