

History of equestrian events at the
Games of the XIV Olympiad



Games of the XIV Olympiad London (GBR), 29 July – 14 August 1948

TWO SHILLINGS SIXPENCE FOR A MEDIA GUIDE

The 1948 Olympic Games were pleasant, low key Games compared to the over-organised event experienced in 1936. They were the first to be shown on national television, although very few people in Great Britain actually owned sets. The Daily Telegraph sold a "Guide to the Olympic Games" for two shillings sixpence and the British Horse Society published an eight-page brochure, "Notes on the equestrian events at the Olympic Games 1948", which can be considered an early version of a media guide.

THE SHADOW OF SCANDAL

After the Games, the equestrian events were overshadowed by the most bizarre incident. A sergeant in the Swedish Army, Gehnäll Persson, was with his horse Knaust a top contender for the Swedish Dressage team, except for the fact that non-commissioned officers were not allowed to compete in the Olympics. Thus Sgt Persson was, on 20 July 1948 (barely three weeks before the Olympic Grand Prix de Dressage) promoted to Lieutenant. A perfectly reasonable decision, after all, people have been promoted for worse reasons. As expected, Sweden won the Dressage gold medal, with Persson proudly standing at the top of the podium.

Then the inexplicable happened. Two and half weeks after this memorable event, Persson was demoted. In retrospect it seems unbelievable that the Swedish military authorities could believe that such a drastic decision would not become known internationally. When it was discovered, the FEI, with the approval of the IOC, disqualified Persson on 27 April 1949. This meant that Sweden was also disqualified from the team event and lost its gold medal.

This shameful incident was a clear demonstration that times had changed. Non-commissioned officers were no more professionals than professional officers. The FEI acted quickly and as from 1952, allowed non-commissioned officers in the Olympics.

THE PROGRAMME

The equestrian programme of 1948 lasted six days. The first five days were held in the command central stadium of the military complex at Aldershot, approximately 60km from London. Endurance day was on the army grounds of Aldershot, at a site called Tweseldown where Queen Victoria had her racecourse; it still holds competitions for British Eventing. The Jumping was held in the Olympic stadium, the Empire Stadium at Wembley.

Games facts & figures

- **59** nations
- **4,104** athletes (390 women; 3,714 men)
- **17** sports

Equestrian facts & figures

- **17** nations (Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Netherland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, USA)
- The after-effects of World War II were still very much alive: there was no German team and all the Eastern European countries stayed away. Brazil was the newcomer.
- **108** entries (44 in Jumping; 19 in Dressage; 45 in Eventing)

JUMPING (44 riders from 15 nations)

The Jumping competition, one round counting for both team and individual honours, was held in the Empire Stadium at Wembley. There were 16 obstacles, necessitating 19 jumping efforts. The course was 870m in length and the fences up to 1.60m in height. Because of heavy rain during the whole week, the course was slippery. Mexico was the undisputed dominator of this Olympic Jumping competition.

Medallists – Individual

1. Gold	Humberto Mariles (MEX)	Arete
2. Silver	Ruben Uriza-Castro (MEX)	Hatvey
3. Bronze	Jean F. d'Orgeix (FRA)	Sucre-de Pomme

Medallists – Team

1. Gold	Mexico	Humberto MARILES-CORTES (Parral), Ruben URIZA-CASTRO (Hatvey), Alberto VALDES-RAMOS (Chihuahua)
2. Silver	Spain	Jaime GARCIA CRUZ (Bizarro), José NAVARRO MORENES (Quorum), M. Jose GAVILAN Y PONCE DE LEON (Foratido)
3. Bronze	Great Britain	Henry M. V. NICOLL (Kilgeddin), Harry M. LLEWELLYN (Foxhunter), Arthur CARR (Monty)

DRESSAGE (19 riders from 9 nations)

Considering the difficulties in training Dressage horses during the long war years, the FEI had decided to reduce the programme to 13 minutes and did not ask for passage and piaffe. The number of judges was also reduced from five to three.

It is interesting to note the rules for saddlery. Allowed were: English saddle, bridle with snaffle, bridoon with curb chain and padding if needed. Forbidden were: martingales, bearing reins, bandages, gaiters and blinkers of any kind.

Medallists – Individual

1. Gold	Hans Moser (SUI)	Hummer
2. Silver	André Jousseume (FRA)	Harpagon
3. Bronze	Gustaf A. Boltenstern (SWE)	Trumpf

Medallists – Team

1. Gold	France	André JOUSSEAUME (Harpagon), Jean ST-FORT PAILLARD (Sous-les-Ceps), Maurice BURET (Saint Queen)
2. Silver	USA	Robert J. BORG (Klingsor), Earl F. THOMSON (Pancraft), Frank S. HENRY (Reno Overdo)
3. Bronze	Portugal	Fernando PAES (Matamas), Francisco VALADAS (Feitico), Luis MENA E SILVA (Fascinante)

EVENTING (45 riders from 16 countries)

The demands on endurance day were reduced: the steeplechase measured only 3,500 meters and the speed on the roads and tracks was reduced from 240 m/min to 220 m/min. The total distance was 33.5km as compared to 36km in Berlin 12 year earlier. The height of the fences in both the Cross-Country and Jumping was raised from 1.15m to 1.20m. The difficulties were therefore the hard ground covered with loose stones over hilly country rather than the obstacles.

Medallists – Individual

1. Gold	Bernard Chevallier (FRA)	Aiglonne
2. Silver	Frank S. Henry (USA)	Swing Low
3. Bronze	J. Robert Selfelt (SWE)	Claque

Medallists – Team

1. Gold	USA	Frank S. HENRY (Swing Low), Charles H. ANDERSEN (Reno Palisades), Earl F. THOMSON (Reno Rhythm)
2. Silver	Sweden	J. Robert SELFELT (Claque), Nils Olof STAHLRE (Komet), Sigurd SVENSSON (Dust)
3. Bronze	Mexico	Humberto MARILES-CORTES (Parral), Raul CAMPERO (Tarahumara), Joaquin SOLANO-ZAGOYA (Malinche)