

History of equestrian events at the Games of the XXIII Olympiad



Games of the XXIII Olympiad Los Angeles (USA), 28 July – 12 August 1984

NEW FINANCIAL MODEL FOR THE OLYMPIC GAMES

After the terrorist attack in 1972 and the financial disaster of 1976, only Los Angeles, host of the 1932 Olympics, bid for the right to host the 1984 Olympic Games. As the Los Angeles Games were the first since 1896 to be staged without government financing, the organisers depended heavily on existing facilities and corporate sponsors. Although criticised at the time, the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games became the model for future Games, particularly after it was revealed that they had produced a profit of USD 223 million.

THIRD BOYCOTT IN A ROW

With the Olympics being held in the United States only four years after the US-led boycott of the Moscow Games, it was not surprising that the Soviet Union organised a revenge boycott in 1984. This time only 14 nations stayed away - but those nations accounted for 58% of the gold medals at the 1976 Olympics.

Despite the boycott, a record 140 nations took part. Good feelings prevailed to such an extent that at the Opening Ceremony the athletes broke ranks to join in spontaneous dancing, such celebration usually being reserved for the Closing Ceremony.

EXPERIENCED ORGANISER

The celebrated Santa Anita racetrack, spreading over 320 acres and offering stabling for as many as 2,100 horses, was chosen as the competition site for the equestrian events. It was the first time an Olympic equestrian event was organised by a management team of proven competence and long experience. The track, near the city of Arcadia, north-east of Los Angeles, had been opened in 1934. Its grandstand had 15,500 seats in addition to the 4,000 seats in the various clubs and the parking lot could accommodate 22,000 cars.

The only complaint raised at Santa Anita was the press service. There were not enough telexes (the main means of transmission at that time) and practically no access to the riders.

The equestrian programme lasted nine days and each National Federation could enter 14 riders and 22 horses (the minimum age for the horses to compete was six years old).

Games fact & figures

- **140** nations
- **6,829** athletes (1,566 women; 5,263 men)
- **23** sports
- **28,742** volunteers
- **9,190** media (4,327 written press; 4,863 broadcasters)
- Archer Neroli Fairhall of New Zealand was the first paraplegic athlete to take part in a medal event, competing in a wheelchair.
- Diplomas of Honour are awarded to the top eight finishers in each event for the first time.

Equestrian facts & figures

- **30** nations (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Great Britain, Guatemala, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherland, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, USA, Virgin Islands, Yugoslavia)
- **157** entries (66 in Jumping; 43 in Dressage; 48 in Eventing)
- A tradition in place since 1924 according to which the Jumping final was held in the

Olympic stadium prior to the closing ceremony had to be dropped, due to organisational constraints, and the whole equestrian programme was held at Santa Anita racetrack.

JUMPING (66 riders from 21 nations)

The US led the way in the equestrian medal count and while they had, from 1980 to 1983, won all FEI World Cup™ Jumping Finals and were clearly among the favourites, they won the gold medals with a superiority rarely experienced before or since.

Joe Fargis (USA) and Touch of Class were the first to achieve a double clear in the Olympic team competition.

Fifty-one riders competed in the individual competition on the closing day. Fifteen countries used the full quota of three entries. In addition there were six individuals from as many countries. Only two of the 51 starters were women, but they did extremely well. Heidi Robbiani on Jessica won the bronze medal and Melanie Smith with Calypso tied for seventh. Of the 51 horses only three were mares. Again they did very well: Touch of Class carried Joe Fargis to Olympic gold, Jessica and Heidi Robbiani were third and Overton Amanda with Michael Whitaker had a brilliant first clear round before hitting seven fences the second time around.

Medallists – Individual

1. Gold	Joe Fargis (USA)	Touch of Class
2. Silver	Conrad Homfeld (USA)	Abdullah
3. Bronze	Heidi Robbiani (SUI)	Jessica

Medallists – Team

1. Gold	USA	Joe FARGIS (Touch of Class), Leslie BURR (Albany), Conrad HOMFELD (Abdullah), Melanie SMITH (Calypso)
2. Silver	GBR	Michael WHITAKER (Overton Amanda), Steven SMITH (Shining Example), Tim GRUBB (Linky), John WHITAKER (Ryans Son)
3. Bronze	FRG	Fritz LIGGES (Ramzes), Franke SLOOTHAAK (Farmer), Peter LUTHER (Livius), Paul SCHOCKEMÖHLE (Deister)

DRESSAGE (43 riders from 18 nations)

The stadium at Santa Anita seating 22,000 was sold out on the three days of the Dressage competitions. Forty-three riders from 18 nations took part in the Grand Prix, 12 with full teams of three. The Federal Republic of Germany again won team gold, but only after a heroic ride by Reiner Klimke on Ahlerich.

Klimke's 1797 points (71.88%) also saw him heading the individual standings of the Grand Prix, 96 points ahead of Anne-Grethe Jensen on Marzog, winners of the European title the previous year, and 184 ahead of Otto Hofer.

Medallists – Individual

1. Gold	Reiner Klimke (FRG)	Ahlerich
2. Silver	Anne-Grethe Jensen (DEN)	Marzog
3. Bronze	Otto J. Hofer (SUI)	Limandus

Medallists – Team

1. Gold	FRG	Herbert KRUG (Muscadeur), Uwe SAUER (Montevideo), Reiner KLIMKE (Ahlerich)
2. Silver	Switzerland	Otto HOFER (Limandus), Christine STÜCKELBERGER (Tansanit), Amy-C. DE BARY (Aintree)
3. Bronze	Sweden	Louise NATHHORST (Inferno), Ingamay BYLUND (Aleks), Ulla HAKANSON (Flamingo)

EVENTING (48 riders from 15 nations)

Despite the space at Santa Anita it was not possible to hold the endurance there. After the rejection of other sites, Fairbanks Ranch, a 1,240 acre property located 30km north of San Diego, was chosen.

The Pacific Ocean is only 10km away and it was a stroke of luck that a breeze from the sea materialised just as the first horse started the cross country. The soil at Fairbanks Ranch is fine river sand, with practically no rocks. 50,000 tickets at USD 20 each were sold. The competition began at Santa Anita with two days of Dressage. The United States took an early lead, ahead of Sweden, France, and Great Britain. Individually the Swiss Hansueli Schmutz on Oran, the European champions of 1981 were in the lead, followed by the Americans Bruce Davidson and Karen Stives, and the ultimate winner, Mark Todd on Charisma.

The endurance test at Fairbanks Ranch had the following demands:

A	Roads and tracks	4,180 m	19 min
B	Steeplechase	3,105 m	4 ½ min, 9 obstacles
C	Roads and tracks	11,779 m	53 ½ min
D	Cross-country	7,410 m	13 min, 33 obstacles

The seventh obstacle of Neil Ayer's cross-country course proved the most challenging. Some luck was needed to jump properly from the water on to a walkway and to have the space to jump over a rick into the water again. Hansueli Schmutz, the Dressage leader, lost all hope for gold following a refusal.

After another rest day used to transport the horses back to Santa Anita the Jumping competition saw only one major change to the placings: Karen Stives and Ben Arthur had one knock-down and lost gold to Mark Todd on the 11-year-old Charisma. Virginia Holgate was third on Princess. The USA narrowly won team gold, with 186.00 points against 189.20 for Great Britain. In third place was the Federal Republic of Germany, with four riders all under 30 years of age. Among them was Bettina Overesch, who went on, under her married name of Bettina Hoy, to win many more honours.

Medallists – Individual

1. Gold	Mark Todd (NZL)	Charisma
2. Silver	Karen Stives (USA)	Ben Arthur
3. Bronze	Virginia Holgate (GBR)	Priceless

Medallists – Team

1. Gold	USA	John Michael PLUMB (Blue Stone), Karen STIVES (Ben Arthur), Torrance WATKINS-FLEISCHMANN (Finvarra), Bruce DAVIDSON (J.J. Babu)
2. Silver	Great Britain	Virginia HOLTGATE (Priceless), Ian STARK (Oxford Blue), Diana CLAPHAM (Windjammer), Lucinda GREEN (Regal Realm)
3. Bronze	FRG	Dietmar HOGREFE (Foliant), Bettina OVERESCH (Peacetime), Burkhard TESDORPF (Freedom), Claus ERHORN (Fair Lady)