

Para-Dressage Newsletter

Editor: Wendy Moller

CONGRATULATIONS TEAM SA – YOU DID US PROUD!

WEG 2010 was a huge success, South Africa was 14th out of the 16 Teams, ahead of Israel and, Japan and closely following behind Brazil. SA was top of the scoreboard for countries riding borrowed horses and Anthony Dawson was the youngest rider in competition. Our riders all rode remarkably well on their borrowed horses, with only the odd glitch all riders achieved at least one score of over 60%. Philippa and Verdi made their debut and they performed better and better each day! The judging was extremely strict, the standard of riding really high; all of which made for excellent competition. The world of Para Dressage has made a huge shift since the Paralympics in 2008 and the reality is that the majority of the riders were mounted on past Prix St George or Grand Prix dressage horses. This included the mounts of the grade 1 and 2 riders. It was so inspiring to watch Para Dressage riders riding these incredibly impressive moving horses.

On behalf of all the riders I extend a huge "thank you" to everyone that made the WEG dream possible; our management team comprising Sharon, Tracey, and Bev; as well as our grooms for all their hard work, Teri, Charlotte, Susan, Enoch and Francine; and our forever changed sport psychologist – Jenny. We are also very grateful to the owners of the horses; Mette, Susan, and Laura, for making the horses available to us and putting up with the tedious and often confusing administration that was required in order to comply with the WEG OC requirements.

RESULTS:

World Equestrian Games 2010 (Team test, Indiv Championship & Kur)

Marion Milne: Grade 1B: Santosha: 64.90%, 63.13%, 63.05%
Anthony Dawson: Grade 2: Gitano: 58.38%, 55.04%, 61.85%
Wendy Moller: Grade 2: Samacs Heart of Gold: 63.33%, 59.61%, 64.10%
Cathy Lloyd: Grade 4: United We Stand: 56.37%, 44.71%, 63.00%
Philippa Johnson : Grade 4 : Verdi : 66.18%, 63.03%, 71.00%

SA PARA DRESSAGE CHAMPIONSHIPS 2010

Whilst some of us were busy in the USA, the Para Dressage competition schedule did not stop and the SA Para Dressage Championships were run in conjunction with the Dressage FEI Championship in Bloemfontein at the beginning of October. Unfortunately this event was not attended by all the provinces so the Inter-Provincial competition was not held, and this also meant that the classes were under subscribed. This was a pity as there was great prize money and lovely sashes for the winners. The organizers reported being in a difficult position as many of the Para Dressage riders requested that horses be provided for them to compete on. Whilst it is understood that it is expensive to transport one's own horse around the country it is the responsibility of the rider to source and fund one's own competition mount and not that of the organizing committee. Feedback from the riders who attend the show was very positive and they had a wonderful time. Thanks to the Free State Para Dressage committee in conjunction with the dressage committee for organizing and hosting this competition!

Well done to all the riders!!

South African Championships – Bloemfontein (Team, Individual Championship & Kur)

Sarah Hughes: Grade 2: 64.28%, 61.19%, 63.0%
Sarone du Toit: Grade 3: 66.66%, 63.50%, 67.25%
Joanice Strauss: Grade 3: 60.00%, 57.00%, 61.25%
Gary Allpass: Grade 4: 62.18%, 61.77%, -
Sandi Norris: Grade 4: 55.93%, 56.29%, 64.87%

CONGRATULATIONS TO CAROLINE POTTS:

Caroline Potts attended the CPEDI3* in Hartpury where she participated in a FEI course on Para Dressage judging and completed the assessment. We are very excited to announce that she has been promoted to FEI Para Dressage Candidate Judge. Congratulations on this wonderful achievement and we are very grateful to Caroline for her involvement in Para Dressage judging.



Picture of the month: (Please send me your show pictures)

(Due to the file size I can only include one picture of a rider at a show, therefore I will select a new one every Month). This month we have our WEG team Anthony Dawson, Cathy Lloyd, Philippa Johnson, Marion Milne and Wendy Moller

Letter from Jenny Susser (Sports Psychologist to the SA WEG Team)

They kept telling me, "You will never be the same again!" Everyone on the team said this to me at one point or another and always in a joking manner. The consistency of this comment was uncanny, until that is, I left the horse park to head back home...It started about three months ago when two very tall, kind and soft-spoken women arrived at the barn with a quiet and seemingly overwhelmed girl in a wheelchair. They had funny accents and some words I couldn't quite figure out but had such a nice way that I wanted to go out of my way to help. They rode Majestic and Coriall and looked good on the big horses with their long legs. Coriall wasn't so pleased with the activity, especially the wheelchair, so he bowed out, quite literally, as a possibility. Who knew that Majestic, the black one with the relaxed manner and studly attitude, would fit so perfectly?

Emails, skype, emails, faxes, emails, and then a few more emails and many of the details finally began to take shape. The excitement was visible in Mette; her horse was going to the WEG! And she was bursting with pride. And Majestic just knew and the change in him was astounding. He walked around the barn with palpable pride and his work ethic seemed to double. Then a woman (Cathy Lloyd) with a leg and a half arrived with heavy luggage, immeasurable energy, and I couldn't understand a word of her "English" for three days. Her spirit was amazing. There is only one word to capture her and it is "happy". After a day and a half of travel, the first thing she must do upon arrival is meet Majestic. He sniffed her up and down, as he always does, and waited for a carrot. Upon receipt, he decided she was okay and then he waited for a few more, which she wisely gave him. She fit right in, immediately. It was the most seamless entry I have ever witnessed. With all of the things to "overcome", she simply ignored them and went right to work. Majestic's face was incredible during that first ride. His ears were more active than ever, flicking towards each communication she delivered. It was a wonderful start. For almost two weeks, the two of them were inseparable. Coffee first; of course, followed by thumping around upstairs on the exercise ball every morning. Then, weird words screamed into the skype as she chatted with the other continent. Rides and long grazes everyday; the spoiling of this animal brought to a new level. Her easy-going joking manner filled with love, generosity, and a childlike excitement of this ever so serious event. She is intoxicating and inspiring to be around, be involved with, and to watch. I feel complete even before they ever leave me behind for Kentucky. While in New York, two visitors arrive to check in on her on the way to Pennsylvania for their preparations. It is a tall, quiet one again(Bev Franklin), this time accompanying a beautiful young man (Anthony Dawson), half in control of his body, and with a personality big enough (and loud enough) for an entire town. Eventually, he will mock my "accent" as the staple to our relationship. He is yummy and fun and I know I will enjoy my time with him. Their visit confirms that her ass has in deed, landed in butter. Off they go on the bus, to the train, to the barn (yard) where his little horse awaits him. It takes an entire day to pack Majestic's little trunk, how is that possible? Did I forget something? What else might he need? Will he be okay...I'm like a mother sending a kid off to college. Off she goes with her heavy luggage and squeaking peg-leg. Off he goes with two giant sacks of individually bagged food, too many buckets, and a trunk that weighs more than her suitcase! I didn't sleep at all that night. Somehow, and without sleep, it all comes together and we are packed and driving to the airport, Mette for one week, me for two. The World Equestrian Games are in the USA, in Kentucky, and we are a part of it...incredible! Two days of cold,

wet weather to start but the Dressage is spectacular and the Kentucky Horse Park is a gorgeous palace decked out for every country...and the horses, oh the horses. Everywhere I look; there is one more gorgeous horse than the next. Bay, chestnut, gray, black, and big, draft, little, cowboy, but each one spectacular. The Dressage lasts a week but not nearly long enough. We watch every moment of every ride and drink it in as deeply as possible. Mette cannot wait to go home and ride and practice for the next one... And then they left, Mette, Kandy & Rochelle. They got into the limo and onto the private plane and headed back to New York. I sat on the front steps of the hotel waiting for my taxi and wondered what the next week would be like. I must admit I was a bit worried...a team I did not know at an event that couldn't be bigger or more important. I sort of wished I were religious in that moment because I might have prayed. But instead, I took a nap and went for a run and sort of felt normal for a moment. Then, I went to find the team that would be my "home" for the next nine days. Our first meeting was great, what a generous group. Looking back you always wonder why things ever felt awkward given how comfortable they ended up being. They were set up well for me and for what I had to offer; the chef, one of the tall ones had obviously said the right things because they were all so attentive. *Support* emerged as the theme of the Games. I'm not sure I would have

expected that but it didn't surprise me either. Each one said it differently but each one felt that was what they could give and what they needed in turn. I was blown away by the connection of this team after only being together a week or so. That is the wonder of being on a team; something magical happens when a group of individuals get together like that, all with a long history of hard work, high highs and low lows, tremendous sacrifice, tremendous support, and a common commitment that is greater than anything that could possibly get in the way. Now add a physical disability. Man, I hate that word, disability. Now that I know them, it does not begin to capture what this group deals with. I guess from a purely Latin standpoint, it's appropriate, but from a human one, it is entirely incomplete. The remarkable thing about it is that I never felt any different from them, or anyone there. I never heard a complaint or whining (except from Ant but that seems to be as normal as his eyebrows...just

a part of his lovely charm). I heard less excuses from this team than any other I've ever worked with. It was really beautiful. The staff consisted of three but operated as one. The two tall (Bev & Sharon) ones and a third bundle of energy (Tracey) and love that cared for and protected the riders as her "babies." Not that they needed a mother, but being a half a world away, the comfort of that was evident. What a dance this operation had to perform; sometimes with music and sometimes without, and mostly without choreography. How to navigate the American waters, prepare and propel the riders, and find a piece for the self was the feat they happily fought for throughout. Interestingly and quite expectedly, you

would never find one of them without a smile. Before arriving in Kentucky, I would have sworn that I couldn't love, admire, respect, adore, and/or marvel more at the animal the horse is. I watched the Grand Prix Dressage and saw athletes perform the most difficult movements with grace, power, and perfection. I was in full appreciation of the physical effort and the obvious relationship with the rider they carried. What I was unprepared for were the horses that carried the Para riders. I cannot even capture with words the feeling I had

watching the grade 1a horse and rider tests. I watched a young girl with such spasticity; I wasn't sure how she stayed on. I could see the seriousness with which this horse took his job and took care of her. And the rider was brilliant in her performance, jostling with full effort yet complete control, turning her head in the direction of each new turn with more intention than I've ever seen. As the crowd erupted at the end, the horse began to trot in his excitement. She never lost her cool and methodically slowed him back to walk, reached down and caressed his neck with her crinkled and uneven hand, and walked gently out of the ring. I was overcome by the connection between the two, by the seriousness and completely professional ride by this completely "disabled" girl, and by the spirit of this animal that just knew what to do. I left the arena to go outside and sob, not wanting to disturb the next ride with my weeping. Upon my return, peg-leg joined me to watch. As we looked at each other with tears streaming down our faces, she said these riders humbled her. That just about

said it all. I was constantly humbled all week, and I am not an overly proud personality. And the team was delicious. I heard each story as the days went on, each one with a bit of devastation. Making lemonade was all I could think of. Life had thrown some serious lemons at this motley crew, but you would never know it now. The "leader" (Philippa) and most experienced of the bunch was a marvel to watch. Completely comfortable with the weight of a continent on her slanted shoulders, she was a machine—focused and relaxed and never missed a beat. On her horse twice a day, everyday, working hard and exposing the even harder work that lay behind her. Her support was devoted yet relaxed, completely part of the bigger process that was the Games for the team. So new was her horse to her that the dating phase of the relationship was clearly still in process. It's obvious that marriage will be the result, and the proposal was apparent when she "brought it" in the Kur and did what she came here to do. Hard work was also a theme represented by the one with the leg and a half (Cathy). Without the experience, she would have to work twice as hard and that she did. With two tough rides down and one hopeful one to go, she re-vamped, re-focused, and re-invented herself in three short days, pulling out a big one on the last day. Relief covered both their faces...as well as the entire teams. Support was certainly abundant that morning.

The young man (Anthony) in control of half his body operated the other half like a puppeteer, carefully sometimes and carefree at others. Once on the horse, all comedy was left to the ground and the seriousness of competing and winning were all that were visible. Reading any face is a hopeless art; human beings are masters at feeling or thinking one thing and showing another to the world. Horses have no "poker face" and neither did he...win was

all it seemed to say. The free walk was my favorite to watch him perform. There was a purity and delicacy that was indescribable as he sat up in the saddle, surrendered his reins to the horse, and quietly glided across the diagonal in an extended movement. Symbiotic, that might begin to capture it. And there was an old soul (Wendy) in a not-so-old body on a horse with a rhyming name that was just a pleasure to watch and be around. Having been to the world stage in much less clothing, the old pro competed with a mastery and finesse that are rare...no matter what level or ability you have. Her matter-of-fact style seemed to calm not only the others, but the horse, too. I have never seen a free walk quite like these two...plenty of Grand Prix riders would wish for that relaxation and effort from their mount! Then there was the seemingly overwhelmed girl in a wheelchair (Marion) who was not at all overwhelmed. Her quiet and even suspicious manner might lead one to think that she was not up to the task at hand, yet every time she got on her horse, the job was done and quite beautifully. Her legs are there but not there, now just something to be tended to. Sitting on a horse, she looked elegant and "normal", one might not know what is missing watching her ride. As I fumbled to help her from here to there, she patiently laughed at me so as not to let me feel so useless. Wasn't I there to help her feel better? One day, somehow I ended up on the top of the ramp with her next to the horse, which stood like a soldier waiting for her to mount. As I lifted her onto him and helped secure her legs, I looked down onto the horse and the ground from over her shoulder. She was so high up. I was stunned in the moment just trying to get my head around the incredible courage this must take, from each and every one of them. She has to control the whole catastrophe—her legs without life, her body, her arms, the horse, his movement, gaits, and direction, the confusion in the ring, and not to mention the test. It was I who was overwhelmed. An athlete is an athlete. Having been one all my life, I never expected to experience sport and competition like I did at the WEG. I had a professor tell me once that everything is relative and not just mocking Einstein's theory. Each body that graces my presence and "couch" as a shrink has distinct ability and disability, and I fully understand that now. When I returned home and climbed easily aboard my horse for the first time, I felt several new sensations. One was the lack of complaint—about my ability and especially about his. His heart and soul were what I sought to feel and expose as I tried to be worthy of his efforts. Another was the much bigger picture of gratitude for what I have been blessed with and those who have touched me so deeply. It might have looked like the same ride we had two weeks ago but I promise you it was not. Because as you see, I will never be the same again.

Until next time happy riding!!

Wendy

PS. Feel free to contact me if you have any tips, funny horsy stories or anything you would like to add.