



OLYMPIC EQUESTRIAN

A CENTURY OF INTERNATIONAL HORSE SPORT

JENNIFER O. BRYANT



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PREFACE

Two Olympiads — Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 — have gone by since the first edition of this book was published, a few months before the Sydney Olympic Games got under way. In those years so much has changed.

The events of September 11, 2001, thrust the 2004 Olympics into an even bigger international spotlight: Would there be an attack? Would competitors and spectators be safe? Even some media representatives were nervous about going to Athens.

Thankfully, the 2004 Games came off without incident. But the Olympic Games have been touched by terrorism before, most notably in Munich 1972 and in Atlanta 1996. Perhaps vigilance and scrutiny will always be watchwords of the modern Olympics.

If these sobering truths are part of our world today, then so too are some happier facts. The Internet explosion has made the world a much smaller place. We can

travel, converse, and observe in a virtual environment, and the result can be a greater understanding of others. Events, including the Olympic Games, can be followed and reported on — and often watched — in “real time,” with fans worldwide joining to cheer for their favorites and to lament their losses.

The Games themselves, like the Tour de France and other major sporting events, have been tainted by scandal. Past winners have been exposed in doping convictions, which are both disheartening and unsportsmanlike. Sports federations struggle to reclaim tarnished images. Yet the Olympic creed of “sport for all” can still be found in those who find in the Olympic ideal something worth striving for.

I still do. I hope you do too.

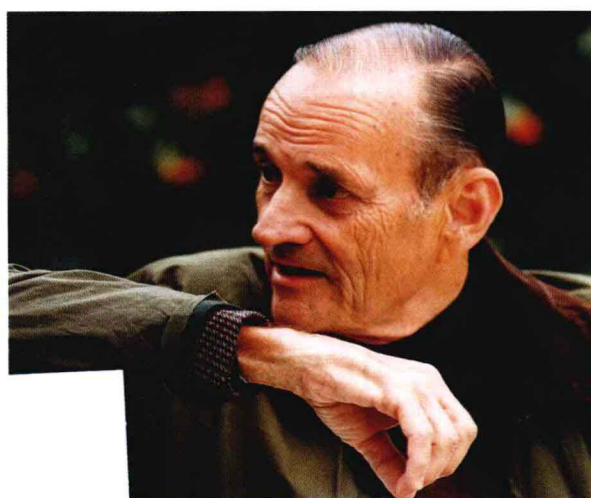
*Jennifer O. Bryant
November 2007*

FOREWORD

Equestrian Olympics — what magical memories these words evoke for me! I first became aware of their meaning in 1935, a year before the Berlin Olympic Games. At that point I was ten and already totally addicted to horses. I thought about horses non-stop when I was awake, dreamed about them when I was asleep, and never passed up even a remote chance of riding. I knew that horses would play a major role in my life but hadn't yet decided if I would be a cowboy, a steeplechase rider, or a Master of Foxhounds. (I didn't aspire to being an Olympic rider since I was aware, quite early on, that only serving officers could compete internationally.)

In those days the primary outlet for my passion for horses was reading, and I devoured everything horsey I could lay my hands on, periodicals as well as books. My favorite horse magazine was *Horse & Horseman*, edited by Peter Vischer, a brilliant and very internationally minded former journalist, and it was the pages of *H&H* that gave me my first introduction to the equestrian Olympics. Vischer's coverage of the Berlin Olympics was marvelous, from the run-ups through the actual event and to the post-mortems the following year, and they inspired in me an interest in Olympic equestrianism that I have never lost. (In the 1930s there were no books in print in English about the equestrian Olympics, but I'm sure that if the present volume had existed then, I would have consumed it in one sitting and then tried to memorize all the winners!)

Only a dozen years intervened between the Berlin Games and the London revival in 1948, but the



William Steinkraus has had a role in thirteen Olympics, six times as a competitor.

fact that these years witnessed the second World War made them seem like an eternity. By the time the 1948 Olympics came along, I was back from the war (having succeeded in getting my basic training mounted, even though we finally went into combat on foot), and was halfway through my senior year in college. I spent that last summer vacation on a trip to Europe, the high points of which were a visit to England to see the Games and a side trip to Dublin for the horse show, in which our military show-jumping team took part. The whole thing dazzled me, and I returned home drunk with excitement and enthusiasm for Europe, the Olympics, and our team.

I was somewhat surprised, in London's Games, to find an occasional scarlet coat among all the uniforms. Indeed, the French show-jumping team included one

FOREWORD

of the civilians, Chevalier Jean d'Orgeix, who distinguished himself by edging out our own Col. F.F. Wing Jr. and Democrat for the individual bronze medal. However, since our Olympic representation was then and had always been exclusively military, it was not in my wildest dreams that four years later I would be riding in the Helsinki Olympics myself and then later riding the same Democrat on the North American circuit, competing against both the 1948 and 1952 Olympic champions!

London and Helsinki were to be the first two of a string of thirteen Olympics that I would either witness or participate in, in one role or another. Six times I was a competitor (though a training injury to Sinjon relegated me to the sidelines in Tokyo); four times a television commentator, once a judge, and twice just a plain spectator. (Perhaps I shouldn't include Rotterdam's 1980 "Alternate Olympics," though all the strong teams were actually there instead of at the "real" Olympics in Moscow, which President Carter's boycott had obliged us to ignore.)

I've often been asked to pick a favorite from all these different Games, and usually have demurred. For in truth, each of the Games was so entirely extraordinary in its own way, by reflecting so richly and so variously the culture of the city and the country that staged it, that comparisons are truly invidious. I can't deny, however, how satisfying it was for me to break the long US jinx of never having won an individual Olympic equestrian gold medal; or to have been present at Atlanta in 1984 when Joe Fargis did it again, as well as helping to break our jinx of never having won the team gold in show jumping, after so many near misses. (On top of that, in Los Angeles we also won the team three-day gold and an individual silver. Just think of it: superb

setting, huge audiences and marvelous weather in our own country, and five medals, three of them gold!)

What happens next?

I am one of those who has expressed some concern about the future of the Olympic movement unless truly meaningful reforms are introduced. The Games have surely grown bigger and more successful financially, but perhaps at a price; somehow, much of the idealism that characterized de Coubertin's original concept seems to have eroded. But even if the Olympic leadership should suggest, by its actions, that it has lost its way, and become more interested in competing head-to-head with the professional sports establishment for "big bucks," then we shall simply have to reinvent the Games once again. We have to look no further than to de Coubertin's original emphasis on the pursuit of excellence for its own sake and the value of participation in the furtherance of peace and the brotherhood of man. For surely, these lofty aims have never been more valid or more meaningful.

The story of the modern equestrian Olympics is not only absorbingly interesting but also very complicated to present, and Jennifer Bryant has done the English-speaking equestrian community a great service by researching it so thoroughly and telling it so well in *Olympic Equestrian*. Yet since the equestrian Olympics are still very much a "work in progress," to use the current catch phrase, let us hope that the very finest Olympic revivals still lie ahead of us and that the future achievements of the world's best horses and riders will surpass even the marvelous accomplishments that are recorded in the following pages!

William C. Steinkraus
Chairman Emeritus of the U.S. Equestrian Team

INTRODUCTION

Let the Games Begin

When Eclipse Press approached me about writing a history of the Olympic equestrian events, I was both thrilled and terrified. Thrilled, because the subject matter is fascinating and often the stuff of horse-world legend; terrified, because I didn't know if I could do justice to the enormity and significance of the subject.

I decided to give it my best shot, and you hold the results in your hands. What I've tried to do is to give you a sense of the evolution of Olympic equestrian competition, from its formal introduction at the 1912 Stockholm Games to the fast-approaching 2008 Games, and beyond. In a way, Olympic equestrian history is the evolution of the sports of eventing, jumping, and dressage in a nutshell: They're not the entire picture, but they're a darn good snapshot.

Before I go further, a confession: I hated history in school and found it deadly dull. Recitations of facts, dates, and names do not intrigue me, nor do they give me any sense of what the events of the day were really like. With that in mind, and in the hopes that I'm not the only non-history-scholar out there, I've tried to bring Olympic equestrian history to life by — as much as possible — letting the people who lived it talk about it in their own words.

I had three main goals for this book. First, I wanted to set down in one place some of the important stories and happenings that have shaped the horse world and

equestrian competition as we know it today. I've been riding, writing, and editing for a long time, and I was amazed at how much equestrian history I didn't know. (I also found that equestrian history, by virtue of its subject matter, is automatically much more interesting than the stuff taught in school.)

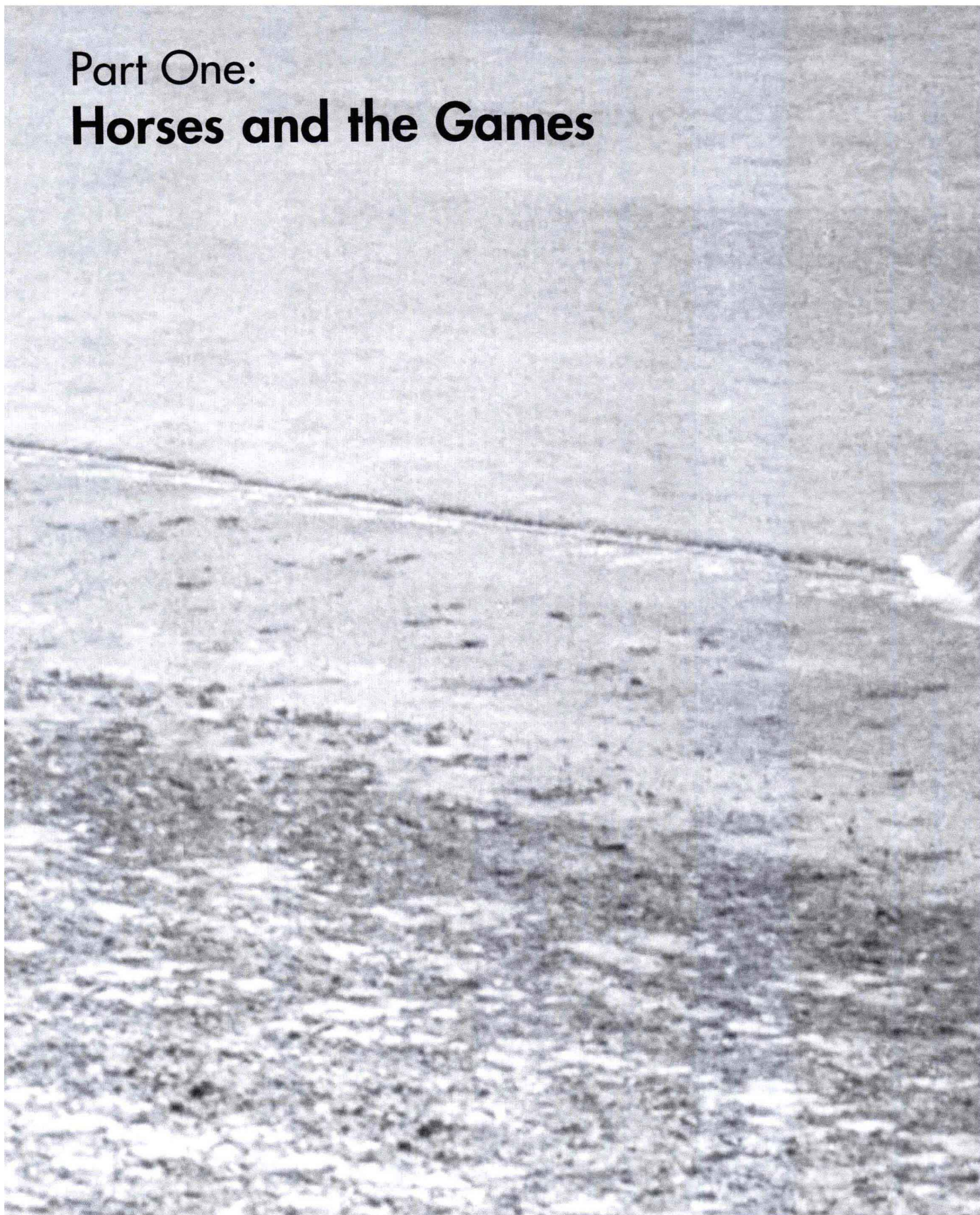
Second, I wanted to learn and share how the Olympic equestrian events work — who's responsible for what, and how teams of riders and horses from all over the globe are screened, selected, and transported to a patch of land in some far-flung place to vie for the honor and the glory of an Olympic championship. At the same time, the exact same thing is happening in twenty-seven other sports, and this mega-sporting extravaganza known as the Olympic Games gets underway yet again.

Third, and most important, I wanted to capture a little of that Olympic magic: the power of this sporting competition, equaled by no other athletic event, to enthrall and move us.

Time and space constraints prevented me from including all the horses and riders who have reached for Olympic glory. Please realize the selections herein are just some of the many deserving competitors and contributors; I wish I could have told all of their stories.

For those of you who told me your stories, I hope I have done your achievements justice. I feel honored and privileged to have had this opportunity.

Part One:
Horses and the Games





The Olympic Equestrian Disciplines

The Olympic Games — so named for their original location in Olympia, Greece — initiated around 884 BC and were held every four years (or “Olympiad”) for more than 1,000 years until the Roman emperor Theodosius ordered them abolished two years after the Games of 393 AD. But modern horse sports are actually quite recent additions to Olympic competition.

The ancient Games featured forms of athletic competition that did not include horses: Foot races were the sole events through the eighteenth Olympiad; wrestling and the pentathlon (running, jumping, wrestling, and discus and javelin throws) later were added. Chariot racing became an Olympic sport as of the twenty-fifth Olympiad, in 680 BC, and continued in various incarnations — first with four adult horses and later also with four mules, two adult horses, four colts, and two colts — until the ancient Games ended.¹

Horse Sports Join the Modern Games

Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France founded the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894 with the goal of reviving the Olympic Games as a modern international sporting competition, and the first modern Olympiad took place in — appropriately enough — Athens, Greece, in 1896. The summer Olympic Games have been held every four years to this day, with a few notable exceptions: The 1916 Berlin Games were canceled because of World War I; the second World War forced the cancellation of the 1940 Games, originally scheduled for Tokyo and then rescheduled for Helsinki;

and World War II raged on in 1944, forcing the cancellation of that year’s London Games.² (The 1980 Moscow Games went on as scheduled, despite a boycott by sixty-two countries — the United States included — in protest against the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan.)

The three modern equestrian disciplines made their debut at the 1912 Stockholm Games, thanks to the efforts of Count Clarence von Rosen, Master of the Horse to the king of Sweden. (The 1900 Olympics in Paris included a smattering of one-time equestrian competitions, as would the 1920 Antwerp Games. For details, see “Little-Known Olympic Equestrian Sports” later in this chapter.) Wishing to stimulate interest in horse sports among the non-cavalry-member general public, von Rosen made a pitch at the 1906 IOC Congress in Athens for the inclusion of jumping, eventing, and dressage competitions. De Coubertin, the IOC’s president, asked von Rosen for a detailed proposal, which the Count’s newly formed International Horse Show Committee submitted the following year.

Janne Lundblad and Uno of Sweden, the 1920 individual dressage gold medalists.



The Olympic Equestrian Disciplines



Swedish organizers for the 1912 Games included Count Clarence von Rosen, second from left, who spearheaded efforts to add the equestrian disciplines.

The IOC approved von Rosen's proposed events, rules, and regulations, and eight countries entered the inaugural equestrian Olympic competition, which was scheduled to be held as part of the 1908 London Games. But the International Horse Show Committee backed out at the last minute, forcing horse sports into a hiatus that lasted until the 1912 Stockholm Games. A three-day event for military personnel, an individual dressage test, and individual and team (Prix des Nations) jumping competitions took place at Stockholm, and these three core equestrian "disciplines" have remained part of Olympic competition to this day, with relatively few changes.³

The Olympic Equestrian Trio

The scope of equestrian sport has broadened considerably since the time of the 1912 Stockholm Games. Formed in 1921, the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) or International Equestrian Federation now functions as the international horse-sports governing body. More recent forms of competition, such as endurance riding and vaulting, have become formalized and FEI-recognized in recent years; and that all-American creation, Western riding, encompasses many distinct sports and enjoys continued growth and expanded popularity worldwide. But, given the modern Games' European roots and military connections, it's no sur-

prise that the equestrian events chosen for inclusion were English-riding disciplines with roots in classical horsemanship, fox hunting, and tests of cavalry skills. Some horse enthusiasts would like to see additional sports achieve Olympic status. Reining, for example, became an FEI discipline in 2000 — a move that enthusiasts hope is a step toward the Olympic nod.

Eventing

The equestrian equivalent of the triathlon, eventing is a direct descendant of the challenges faced by cavalry mounts. Military horses had to be all-around performers: swift, agile, “cat-like” (high praise for an event horse) over obstacles and all kinds of terrain, highly trained, sensitive, and obedient. It’s easy to im-

agine how a cavalry mount that was lacking in any of these attributes would be a liability to his rider, who depended on his horse for escape and survival as well as for attack. Small wonder, then, that this equestrian test originally was known as the “Military” and included a non-jumping endurance test (“roads and tracks”), a speed test (the individual steeplechase), a cross-country jumping course, a stadium-jumping course, and a dressage test. The Military originally was open only to active-duty military officers, and their mounts had to belong to the competitors themselves or to their respective branch of the service. Military-owned school horses were ineligible for competition.⁴ In the first equestrian Olympics in 1912, the Military was held over four days: endurance and cross-country on day



Sweden dominated early Olympic Games. Axel Nordlander and Lady Artist won team and individual gold medals in eventing in 1912.



Earl "Tommy" Thomson, the US Army's most successful Olympian, and Reno Rhythm, on course in 1948.

one, the speed test on day two, stadium jumping on day three, and dressage on day four.⁵

Today, the "phases" or elements of the FEI-level event competition are held in the following order: a dressage test, a cross-country test, and a jumping test. Olympic events are at the four-star (****) level, the highest level of difficulty in modern eventing competition. Here are the traditional requirements of the Olympic-level event horse and rider:

Day 1: Dressage. Dressage is the ultimate obedience test for marathon-fit equine athletes, which are carefully conditioned to "peak" for the competition and which may be practically bursting out of their skins in

anticipation of cross-country day. They have to try to keep their enthusiasm in check long enough to put in an expressive yet obedient and correct dressage test.

Most Olympic dressage horses are warmbloods or other hybrid sport-horse types, which tend to be stocky in stature with great muscle mass. In contrast, the Thoroughbred or part-Thoroughbred dominates the event scene, and his training regimen of running and jumping hones his naturally leaner, more sinewy muscles to give him the look of the long-distance runner. His musculature is generally less suited to producing such Grand Prix-level movements as the piaffe and the passage, and so the "eventing dressage" tests are appropriately scaled back in their demands. The FEI eventing four-star dressage tests equate to about third level dressage and include the follow-

ing movements: shoulder-in, half-pass in trot, rein back, extended gaits, and single flying changes. Top-hatted and tail-coated riders and their elegantly braided horses perform the dressage test in a standard (twenty meters x sixty meters) arena, which is enclosed by low fencing. A panel of judges scores each movement on a scale of zero (not performed) to ten (excellent). The judges want to see a test that bespeaks the horse's balance, lateral and longitudinal suppleness, gymnastic development, obedience, harmony with his rider, and enjoyment of his work.

Australia's Andrew Hoy and Darien Powers on their way to gold in the 2000 Olympics.