

▶ BETWEEN ROUNDS WITH:

JEREMY STEINBERG

U.S. Dressage Is On A Roll

Our columnist only sees the sport in this country continuing to build on the successes of 2016.

The last year seemed to have many more highs than lows for U.S. dressage.

The team's Olympic bronze medal was the result of a hard-fought 12 years of work building up to it. So many people are involved at that level of the sport to bring home those medals, far more than just the riders. It takes a team. The U.S. Equestrian Federation, grooms, farriers, owners, trainers, spouses, veterinarians and more are all part of the process, and this last year everything seemed on course for just the right chain of events to play out to get the United States back on the medal podium.

I see 2017 and 2018 as a continuation of that trend as we head toward the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. With the depth of scoring in the United States at the international level reaching an all-time high, the retirement of the super horse Valegro, the Dutch team not being what they used to be, and other changes happening in the world of dressage, it seems like the U.S. squad is poised for a successful few years if we keep up our current pace. I'm looking forward to what the future holds and am excited to see if we can move up the medal podium and bring U.S. dressage to the forefront of the world.



A Year Of Change

The 2016 Rio Olympics really saw a turning point in dressage culture around the globe. The tide ebbs and flows, and this was a major year of change in the international scene.

I don't think anyone was surprised that Valegro once again won gold and left most of the competition in the dust. What was surprising to me was some of the other quality work we saw during the Games—as well as disappointments.

My friend Julie Brougham competed her horse Vom Feinsten in the one slot allocated for New Zealand, and I couldn't help but scream for joy at the TV when she rode. Seeing her fight for what she wanted, create a plan over the last few years, stick to it and work within her own means, creating and fulfilling her dream was really a special thing to see from the inside out. She was an inspiration, and at 62, she proves that many of us still have time to fulfill ours.

Our own U.S. team members were riding and competing so well, they made not only the country proud, but much of the world. Seeing Allison Brock, who is a close friend, rise from her humble beginning in Hawaii and through nothing but hard work and dedica-

One of the highlights of Jeremy Steinberg's year was seeing his friend Julie Brougham compete for New Zealand at the Olympic Games aboard Vom Feinsten. "She was an inspiration, and at 62, she proves that many of us still have time to fulfill ours," he said.

LINDSAY BERRETH PHOTO

tion make it to her first Olympics with impeccable scores, a humble demeanor and a smile on her face was an absolute pleasure to witness. I told her earlier this year as well as wrote in one of my columns, she is someone I admire and is well on her way to becoming a role model for many.

Kasey Perry-Glass was also delightful to watch, and I love how everyone just kept delivering for the team, improving on the scores and rides they had been having all season. We were really expecting Laura Graves and Steffen Peters to do well and stand up to the reputations they have so well deserved on that stage. Both of them proved to be exactly what we have come to admire and expect.

Not a year seems to go by that I don't make mention of Germany's Isabell Werth, as I am always fascinated with the number of horses she brings up to the international standard for competition. This year with Weihegold she

surpassed all other Olympic equestrians with most medals ever won in a career. I found myself very eager to see this happen, and I only believe that medal count will grow in her future. It's a record we'll probably not see broken in our lifetimes.

Dutch rider Adelinde Cornelissen and Parzival were obvious disappointments, and I really do feel like she has no one to blame but herself. It's hard to witness when a horse is struggling and falling from grace, but she should have known better than to try to ride that last test. She should have backed out with poise, for the good of her horse. I was disappointed with her actions and the horse's overall, very poor performance. On such a world stage, there is more to consider than just the individual.

Who's The Next Star?

In 2016 we saw the retirement of the British wonder horse Valegro at the top of his career with class. This leaves us all wondering who will be the next future star of the sport?

Some of us are old enough remember wonder horses like Corlandus, Ahlerich, Marzog, Gigolo, Matador, Granat, Absent, Bonfire, Rembrandt, as well as more modern ones like Totilas, Rusty, Parzival, Satchmo, Salinero and others.

Out of all these horses we've looked to in amazement over the years only a few have won multiple gold medals at various games, but most all have had their own individual spark we were drawn to like magic.

Valegro stole our hearts because of his demeanor and temperament. The stories of his training and life told by Carl Hester, Charlotte Dujardin and those who knew him made him more special than most, and he will go down in history as one of, if not the, best ever.

We always seem to think the current horses at the top couldn't be beat, but sure enough a few years go by, and the next champion is crowned, the next wonder horse named. I wonder who will be next and from which nation. Who is sitting on the next Valegro at 4 years old, getting bucked off, soaking an abscess, clipping his or her coat in the dead of winter, wondering why they put themselves



With the retirement of superstar Valegro, said Jeremy Steinberg, this leaves us all wondering who will be the next future star of the sport. LISA SLADE PHOTO

through all this work and stress? That horse is out there, and one of us is working with him today.

It's only a matter of time until another horse of a lifetime changes the face of dressage in front of our eyes. My own not-so-secret hope is one of the kids I got to be involved with in the USEF Youth program gets to be that new "it" girl with the new horse of a lifetime.

Working Toward The WEG

I was beyond thrilled to see Tryon, N.C., selected for the 2018 FEI World Equestrian Games, and I'm looking forward to the buildup to those games. I know that's still well more than a year away, but anyone involved in the sport knows how far out you plan and goal set, so realistically 2018 is just right around the corner.

The 2018 WEG could do for U.S. dressage what the 2012 Olympics did

for Great Britain. Part of what made the rise of Valegro and British dressage so remarkable was the timing in which it happened with the London Olympics.

Hosting an Olympic Games rallies an entire population of riders of all disciplines and gets a national motivation going that can start one down a path of something so positive it becomes infectious.

It didn't really happen for us in 2010 with the WEG at Lexington, whether due to timing or not quite having the right horseflesh at the right time or something greater. Now, however, it seems like the U.S. is not only on course for the 2018 WEG to be a turning point in dressage history, it seems like we are already on that path. Could we in fact be a gold medal winning dressage nation in our own country in 2018?

I listen to the stories of how

Great Britain rose to supremacy in 2012 and think we're not far off that course. Could history repeat itself in our favor in 2018? The power of positive thinking does a lot in this crazy world, so maybe if we all collectively imagine that future, it will happen.

The Olympic Future

As I watched the 2016 Olympic Games and felt connected to them in a way I haven't been in years past, the dream of seeing new faces and up-and-coming riders take that stage began to look more and more like a possibility.

I'm hoping that the FEI finds a way to navigate the ridge line of keeping the International Olympic Committee happy and the sport current, of enabling our riders to be able to produce the desired result, and still keeping the art on which the sport was founded.

My worry for 2017 and beyond is the continual drive of the IOC to modernize a sport that is difficult to modernize without losing the quality of its origins. My fingers are crossed that the FEI can keep coming up with ideas, that we avoid gimmicks of consolation that keep the IOC just happy enough to include dressage for another Olympic cycle.

I understand that's not an easy task, but it's one we need to watch and guide as owners, riders, trainers and enthusiasts so that the sport continues well into the future.

The Challenge Of National Championships

I was on one of the committees that helped structure the U.S. Dressage Finals and was all for the creation of such a championship. The idea at the time was a championship in which the everyday rider, both trainer and amateur alike, who didn't have a world-class FEI-level horse, could have a national competition. I am still on board with this and have loved seeing its growth over the last few years.

But the championships have caused

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a West against East divide. The original idea was to leave them planted at one venue long enough to get it rooted, make it part of our culture, secure sponsors, and create a map on how to navigate a show of its magnitude.

The conversation to rotate such a championship has been grounded for the time being, and I only hope that in 2017 the talk of rotation can resume.

The history and romance of a venue like Gladstone, N.J., isn't one to be taken lightly, but the stress of traveling to compete does sometimes water down the competition, which is always sad to see. There are no easy solutions, but continued conversation and ideas are needed.

Not everyone will always be happy with the location of the championship shows, but without continued support regardless of location, the championships cannot thrive. It's vicious cycle. It was sad to see this year's National Championship slated to be held at Epona Farms in Thousand Oaks, Calif., get canceled, but that was obviously destined for failure. Putting a championship like that directly after an Olympic Games is always tough, let alone moving it to a new venue.

I was happy to see discussion for division of the 2017 Adequan/FEI North American Junior and Young Riders Championships and the removal of it from the Kentucky Horse Park. Don't get me wrong, I believe the Kentucky Horse Park to be something special and an amazing place to ride and show, but the venue is more designed for the likes of a WEG or Olympic Games, and the stadium ends up dwarfing the competition at the NAJYRC level. Though there are spectators, in the size of the Rolex stadium

it always seems the seats are far more empty than full.

The NAJYRC has grown such that it is bigger than it can handle. With junior divisions and young rider divisions as well as the inclusion of other disciplines, it's an amazing show but a bit of a monster.

Combined with the fact that the venue is

so packed with other disciplines working and riding, as well as other shows and competitions going on at the same time, the individual disciplines get little attention, as everyone is on top of one another trying to fight for space and time. I've been saddened to see how little attention some NAJYRC events or medal rounds have received due to the fact that the arena was shared or needed moments afterward for another event or prize giving.

I understand it's not ideal to separate the three-day kids from the jumping kids, from the dressage kids, but it seems necessary for them to get the attention they really have earned. I'm curious to see where that goes in the future and if the championship can become less rushed and less hectic.

The year saw no big scandals or problems, which I loved. The focus was positive and inspiring. Here's to another successful year of dressage in 2017 and continued growth of the sport we love. 🐾



COURTESY FRASER PHOTO

JEREMY STEINBERG

Jeremy Steinberg was the U.S. Equestrian Federation Youth Coach from 2010-2014. He's a well-known rider, trainer and competitor based out of Del Mar, Calif.

He's also a selector for the Developing Horse Program and one of five clinicians who works with the U.S. Dressage Federation in its Platinum Performance/USDF junior and young rider clinic series. He worked with long-time friend and mentor Dietrich von Hopffgarten extensively until his passing in 2004. Jeremy has trained and shown through the Grand Prix level. He now runs a small "boutique"-type training business and travels the country giving clinics. More information can be found at steinbergdressage.com.