AN OLYMPIC PERSPECTIVE

EQUESTRIAN FACTS AND UPDATES

By Sallie Pisch

WITH THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE TOKYO OLYMPIC GAMES 2020, WE HEREBY GIVE YOU SOME INSIGHT INTO THE HISTORY OF THE GAMES. UNTIL WE MEET NEXT YEAR IN TOKYO 2021.

© Shutterstock

TOKYO 2020

Brief history of the Equestrian events in the Olympics

Equestrian events have been part of the Olympic Games since Jumping was featured in the Paris games in 1900, although there were no Equestrian events in the following two games. It wasn't until 1912, in Stockholm, that Equestrian events became regular at the games, and the six events featured now – individual and mixed Eventing, Jumping, and Dressage – have been regular since 1964.

The equestrian events at the Olympics in some ways harken back to the original Olympic Games in ancient Greece, where the events were based on military preparedness. Each of the equestrian events now part of the modern Olympics also have their base in military training: dressage was invented in ancient Greece to develop coordination between horse and rider, necessary in battle, and eventing was developed to test the preparedness of cavalry horses and to provide a means of comparing the training methods of different countries. Indeed, until 1951 only military personnel could take part in Equestrian events. Per a 1951 decision by the Olympic committee, civilians and women were first allowed to participate in Equestrian events in the 1952 games in Helsinki.

The Equestrian events as we know them now have remained more or less the same since 1964.

Riders of note

Reiner Klimke (1936-1999) of West Germany is the most decorated dressage rider in Olympic history, with six gold medals. He also won two bronze, making him one of only three riders to have won at least eight medals. He participated in six Olympic Games and came home with medals from five of them: '64, '68, '76, '84, and '88.

Anky Van Grunsven of the Netherlands has earned the most medals of any Olympic rider: she holds 3 gold, 5 silver, and 1 bronze for a total of nine medals. What's more, at the Beijing 2008 games she became the first rider to win three consecutive Olympic titles in individual Dressage.

Hans Gunter Winkler has the finest record of any German Show Jumper, and holds a number of records in the Equestrian Olympic Games: he is the only Jumper to earn five gold medals, has earned more medals than any other Show Jumper with 7 total, and is the only rider in any discipline to earn medals at six different Olympic Games.

Lis Hartel of Denmark was the first woman to win an Olympic Equestrian medal, at the 1952 Helsinki games – the first in which women were allowed to participate. What is more remarkable, though, is the story of how she got there: after suffering a polio attack in 1944, at the age of 23, she began a gruelling programme to regain the use of her limbs. When she took home the silver medal in Helsinki in individual Dressage eight years later, she was still paralyzed below the

knees and walked with a crutch. Gold medallist Henri Saint Cyr of Sweden helped her onto the medal stand, perhaps one of the most touching scenes at the games.

The most remarkable horse

Halla, ridden by German Hans Gunter Winkler, is the only horse to win three gold medals. Halla stood at 16.2 hands. She was sired by Oberst, a Standard bred, out of a French trotter mare of unknown parentage named Helene. She and Winkler won 125 competitions together, and she lived to the ripe old age of 34.

Interesting facts

Photos by International Olympic committee

- Equestrian is the only Olympic sport in which men and women compete against each other on a level playing field.

- Only three riders have earned 8 or more medals: Anky van Grunsven, Netherlands (3 gold, 5 silver), Isabel Werth, Germany (5 gold, 3 silver), Reiner Klimke, Germany (6 gold, 2 bronze).

- The discipline of Jumping was developed after an English decree saw fences put up around farmland, and for the first time foxhunters needed horses that could jump.

- At the Rome 1960 games, Italian brothers Raimondo and Piero D'Inzeo won the gold and silver medals in jumping respectively, delighting the home crowd.

- The US and Canada are the only non-European countries to win Dressage medals. The US has taken home one silver and seven bronze, Canada one bronze. Germany holds the most Dressage medals, with 19 gold, 11 silver, and 9 bronze.

- Canadian Show Jumper Ian Millar made a record-breaking 10th Olympic appearance in London 2012. He competed in the equestrian competition at every Olympics from 1972 to 2012 except for the 1980 Moscow Games that Canada boycotted.

- The horse made its first appearance at the Ancient Olympic Games in Greece in 680 B.C., when chariot racing was introduced.