

PERISCOPE ON

KEVIN STAUT

By Lulu Kyriacou, *England*

KEVIN STAUT, THE UNOFFICIAL CAPTAIN OF THE FRENCH SHOW JUMPING TEAM, LED THEM TO A SILVER TEAM MEDAL AT THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN 2010. THIS WAS TO FINISH OFF A YEAR IN WHICH THE FRENCH HAD ALSO WON THE NATIONS CUP SUPER LEAGUE BY SOME CONSIDERABLE DISTANCE FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW. KEVIN CONCLUDED HIS SEASON AS EUROPEAN CHAMPION AND WORLD NUMBER ONE AND FRENCH SHOW JUMPING WAS ONCE AGAIN A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH. SADLY 2011 HAS NOT GONE QUITE SO WELL AS KEVIN LOST THESE PERSONAL ACCOLADES (ALTHOUGH THE TEAM DID WIN ANOTHER SILVER AT THE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS IN MADRID) BUT HE IS STILL RANKED IN THE TOP TEN OF THE WORLD, SO NOT TO BE DISCOUNTED FROM ANY SPECULATION AS TO WHO WILL SUCCEED ERIC LAMAZE AS OLYMPIC CHAMPION IN 2012. KEVIN IS A MAN SO MOTIVATED THAT IN 2009 HE RODE AT THE 5* SHOW IN HAMBURG, GERMANY WITH A HAND SO BROKEN IN A FALL THAT HE COULD ONLY JUST BARELY HOLD THE REIN WITH TWO UNINJURED FINGERS. THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN TOUGH ENOUGH IN A REGULAR SET OF CLASSES BUT KEVIN ALSO RODE IN THE FEARSOME HAMBURG DERBY, WITH ITS ENORMOUS DERBY BANK OBSTACLE!





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As a child, riding had to compete with tennis and judo for time in Kevin's life but he was encouraged by his parents to choose just one game to concentrate on if he wished to become a top class sportsman. "I loved sport, I am very motivated by competition and watching it in any sport at the highest levels. I admire people like Agassi and Zidane. But I had to decide and my performance in judo and tennis was perhaps not so famous" he laughed.

Competing at his first show within six months of starting to ride, by 1996 Kevin was French Junior Champion. He missed out on some of the other Junior and Young Rider tours when he decided, aged 17, to go and base himself with Michel Hecart. Although he did make an appearance representing France at the European Young Rider Championships in 2000, he said of that time; "I was young and had the usual rows with my family as young people do, and I left home, so I could ride some really good horses. Luckily everyone forgave me and we all are perfect

now, it is my grandfather that actually owns Kraque Boom".

That horse became the principle member of Kevin's team, which also includes two other Grand Prix horses, Le Prestige St Lois and Silvana, a 2009 addition from Jos Lansink. Other younger horses like Banda de Hus and Zeta de Hus are coming up the ranks behind them. But although now near the end of his career it was Kraque Boom who carried him to victory in the individual contest of the European Championships two years ago and remains a great favourite. "For me, winning is always good but to win a championship on this horse with my family watching was very special."

Having such a set of horses is very important in top class show jumping, now there are so many demands on the world's best. "The problem is we have to go to all these shows to get points and stay in the top 30 riders of the world. We have to manage our horses well during the season and not run them everywhere. I'm lucky

to have a really great sponsor (Xavier Marie's Haras du Hus) so I can manage the planning of my season as I want and therefore can keep my horses in good form because I have several capable of top level shows."

This is clearly a subject close to the Frenchman's heart as he continued. "Everything in show jumping depends on rankings. For myself, I would like to be in the top ten within the next year, because you know if you reach that level and remain there, that you are finding the best way for yourself and the horses, and you give the greatest reward to owners and sponsors. The show organisers also spend a lot of money and they want to see the best competing for it."

The French superstar, who is just 31, has recently moved his base to a yard near Brussels, become the face of a Gucci advertising campaign, and joined the ranks of officialdom when he was appointed the first rider to sit on the FEI Executive Board as Athlete Representative. He is also an ambassador for the charity Just World. It means that Mr. Motivation also has to be Mr. Organisation to fit everything into his day. He usually begins riding at home at 6.30 and is inevitably the first rider to be seen exercising horses at a show. "Working with the FEI is a lot of hard work but I think it will be of benefit to all the riders." remarked Kevin when discussing his work schedule.

Outside the arena, in his small amount of spare time Kevin does a lot of reading as well as watching movies and any top sporting contest that happens to be on television. He also cooks. "I am such a perfectionist in everything I do, I think it is easier to cook for myself, and then I will not complain about the food! And I enjoy doing it. In Switzerland when you rent an apartment they always have every type of equipment that you might need, so I did even more while I was living there. I think I just like the freedom of doing things myself in my life in general, not just at home. But then one thing I had to learn to succeed in any sort of business is that you need to allow other people to help you sometimes.



Maybe I am still not so easy to live with at home but at the stables, I am not so terrible now that I have learned this!!"

Looking forward to 2012, Kevin has great hopes for Zeta de Hus who potentially could be his mount for the London Olympics which will be the focus for all sportsmen and women in the coming months. However before that there is the matter of trying to regain his Number One ranking. Kevin wore the green armband for some considerable time but has now had to relinquish it to Eric Lamaze. "As I said, everything depends on rankings in this sport, and I am determined to be number one again but with horses nothing is ever that easy," commented Kevin in Verona where he was competing on Zena and two younger promising horses. Only a fool would bet against him achieving his aim! 

Kevin jumping Silvana de Hus to second round clear in Hickstead Nations Cup