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EQUINE SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL

BE AS GOOD AS A DUTCH OLYMPIC RIDER: PART 1

By Lynn de Rest

YOU BOUGHT A HORSE WITH A LOT OF POTENTIAL AND YOU WOULD LIKE TO RIDE AT THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE LEVEL. WHERE TO BEGIN? IT ALL STARTS WITH GOOD TRAINING AND A TRAINER WHO UNDERSTANDS YOUR GOALS AND SEES THE POTENTIAL IN YOU AND YOUR HORSE AS A COMBINATION. THE DUTCH TRAINING SYSTEM IS A COMBINATION OF PATIENCE, SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHALLENGING THE RIDER AND THE HORSE. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT'S THE WHOLE MANAGEMENT AROUND THE HORSE THAT MAKES THE DUTCH TRAINING SYSTEM A SUCCESS. BECAUSE OF THIS, THE NETHERLANDS HAS BEEN ONE OF WORLD'S BEST DRESSAGE COUNTRIES FOR MANY YEARS. THIS ARTICLE WILL HELP YOU MASTER THE KEY ELEMENTS OF HORSE MANAGEMENT AND WILL GIVE YOU A SNEAK PREVIEW OF THE DUTCH TRAINING SYSTEM BECAUSE HORSE MANAGEMENT IS THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF HAVING HORSES.

FACTS & FIGURES

-Unlike other European horse countries, such as Germany and the UK, the Netherlands has almost as many horses as people.

-Horse riding is **the second economic sport** in The Netherlands, after football. A Dutch company has determined that **1,5 billion** euros are spent in the Dutch equine world.

-**The Dutch KWPN horse** is one of the best-bred horses in the world. This is due to good training with the best trainers.

-Anky van Grunsven, a Dutch dressage rider, is still **the best Olympic rider of all time**.

-The Dutch dressage team has been present at the Olympics since 1972 and since 1992 they have been competing in the highest league. The Netherlands has won a total of **26 Olympic medals**, including 9 gold medals.

-During the last **World Championship**, the Netherlands ranked as one of the best countries with a total of **18 medals**.

What has made the Dutch training system so successful?

The Dutch training system has improved greatly over the last decades. The Netherlands is not disengaged from the classical training system. But the Dutch modified that system, by involving scientific research and experts from different sports. **By thinking outside the box and using innovative techniques they are continuously challenging themselves and creating awareness.**

In the eyes of the Dutch, a horse is a true athlete. In order to perform at his best, **the rider needs to fulfil the horse's needs**. Compare it to a top athlete such as Usain Bolt who has a whole team of professionals supporting him to achieve the best performance possible.

It is up to the rider to increase the skills of the horse. This calls for outstanding horse management, which includes: a perfectly designed training schedule, a well-created stable climate, a nutritious diet, being mentally fit, the best tack and much more.

THE DUTCH TRAINING SYSTEM

The Dutch pay a great deal of attention to new developments involving external experts, such as **veterinarians, sports psychologists, zoologists,**

physiotherapists and fitness trainers. By looking for innovations without forgetting the many good things of the past, the Dutch are evolving.

The horse's head position has been the point of interest in so many discussions and has drawn much negative attention, but there is so much more that could harm or do good to your horse. Improving gymnastic developments and eliminating blocks is the goal of the training method; this is discussed far less in the horse world but will add so much more value to your training. **The Dutch generally have a lot of variety between relaxation and more collection work in their daily training sessions.** It all starts with a proper warming up; walking on a long contact rein, in a forward downwards position. Generally, those exercises are repeated in trot and canter. Then, depending on the level of the horse, lateral work and more collection is asked. A good example of exercises is shoulder-in or quarters-in. Intensive exercises such as a pirouette will be repeated for a short period of time and then the horse gets stretched down again. With this, you give the horse a moment to relax his muscles. Generally, those short sessions with intensive exercises will be repeated for 2 or 3 times and after that the cooling down starts.

The cooling down is essential to prevent injuries or muscle aches the next day. A cooling down starts with simple lateral work in a forward downwards position to stretch the body sideways. Like the warming-up, the cooling down ends with a trot and walk on a long contact rein, also in a forward downwards neck position. For about five minutes the horse needs to be walked on a loose rein. When the training session was highly intensive you should extend the walking duration to at least ten minutes. In case the horse is really sweaty you can put on a rug.

If the horse is young or not well educated, light work on a contact rein and simple lateral work such as a leg yield is desirable. The length of a training session also depends on the level of the horse. **The Dutch believe in short effective training sessions instead of long, less effective training sessions.** In general the Dutch use a simple snaffle to exercise the horse.

All the things mentioned above are best practiced together with a trainer. A trainer is one of the main aspects to create a perfect learning environment.

HOW TO FIND THE PERFECT TRAINER?

We all know they come in different shapes and sizes; the firm aunty tells you straight and strong what to

do, or the sympathetic and empathic lady with tons of patience. But how to find your perfect match in this jungle of trainers?

There are a lot of trainers over the world but which one is the best fitted to you? We will give you some tips for finding a good trainer.

- **Find someone who understands your goals and sees potential in you and your horse.**

- **The trainer has to motivate you and encourage you to do better.**

- **You can learn from your trainer by seeing him/her ride your horse or another horse.**

- **You understand what the trainer told you and can explain why you do it.**

- **The feedback a trainer gives you is positive but can also be critical so you become a better rider.**

In the next issue we will discuss how to manage your horse in the best way.

EQUINE SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL

ESI educates equestrian people all over the world to increase the level of equestrian knowledge. This helps horse owners, stables, educational institutions and federations to take a step forward in horse wellbeing and sport. ESI provides unique custom-made solutions such as national talent programs, training programs for children and adults, train-the-trainer courses and aftercare programs.

To make sure that you get the most optimal solution to your question we work together with only the best specialists of the Netherlands. 🇳🇱



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