

EXCLUSIVE WITH TOKYO OLYMPIC CHAMPION

JULIA KRAJEWSKI

By Nermin Marwan

IN PART OF OUR OLYMPIC COVERAGE OF TOKYO 2021, WE WERE REALLY LUCKY TO MEET WITH GERMANY'S CHAMPION JULIA KRAJEWSKI; THE FIRST WOMAN EVER TO WIN A GOLD MEDAL IN INDIVIDUAL EVENTING.





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First of all, congratulations; tell us about this win? Did you see it coming, especially that you are the first female athlete ever to win the Gold?

Thank you very much!

Obviously, winning the Olympics is the ultimate dream, to be honest, that kind of dream you have but don't think you will actually achieve it. And no, I didn't see it coming a year ago, or even when I knew I will go to the Olympics. I was hoping for a top 5-8 finish. Eventually winning was then the most emotional feeling and still difficult to realize sometimes. It's an achievement that stays forever and I am mostly thankful to my horse Amande, my team around me and all the people that kept believing in all the difficult times I certainly had in the years before.

Being the first female athlete was a bit surprising for me, as we have many very successful female riders in our sport, but I think or hope it sends the signal to all the girls out there, that everything is possible if you have a passion and a dream.

Preparations for the Olympic Games must've been difficult with the Pandemic and all, how did you prepare?

Well yes, there was a lot of uncertainty, and also the delay of one year with many shows being cancelled. The delay certainly helped me, because it only opened up the chance to qualify and prepare my horse Amande, which would not have been possible the year before. When I knew it was scheduled for the summer of 2021, I decided to develop a plan and tried to stick to it as much as possible, and if not, adjust which what was possible.

I decided not to worry too much about what might be, but rather think step by step along the way. It was a close call to make it to the Olympics at all, so that was a huge success already. I focused on trying to be as prepared as possible from fitness and training point of view. I also kept my focus on believing in Amande as well as my abilities. And of course, I wouldn't have done all that without the help of my coaches and my boyfriend, they kept reassuring me a lot

let's talk about the Olympics course of Eventing, how challenging was it? The difficulties you faced?

Everything about the Olympics is somehow special and different from 'normal' shows and even other championships. Starting from the preparations before, the travel, the attention, the competition

itself, the pressure that builds. In this case the fact that it was held during a pandemic, also brought its challenges as daily testing that created worries like, what if someone tests positive.

Luckily it didn't happen. Regarding the competition itself, Amande felt great from the day she arrived. So, I tried to stick to my plans and took it discipline by discipline. She had a very nice dressage, couldn't have been better in her abilities, and I was positively surprised to be that far up the leaderboard.

On the Cross Country I was quite optimistic that the course would suit her, and she made it feel easy eventually, she was so focused, quick and trusting all the way round. It felt amazing to cross the finish line with just 0.4 penalties for time. With that in the bag I felt that the most challenging phase was behind me as she has always been a very

good jumper. After the excitement, she felt very fresh and jumped a superb clear round in the first round for the team. After that round I was in the lead and knew I would jump for gold, but I didn't think about it very much. Of course, there was a lot of pressure and a very electric atmosphere, even without spectators, but for some reason I was not very worried that it could go wrong. Amande is the horse you would like to sit on a day like that. She jumped incredible and I had the feeling she was even another 20% better. She gave me an enormous amount of confidence and it felt as if she knew it really mattered that day!

How do you see the preparations and the organization in Tokyo Olympics? If you had the chance to change something, what would be?

I think they succeeded in making everything run as smooth as possible. At least I as an athlete felt that way. Surely it wasn't easy during such challenging times, but the facilities, arenas and tracks were incredible, I personally loved the decorations in the main stadium in dressage and show jumping. Of course, it would have been even better to compete (and eventually win) in front of spectators, but I'm super grateful anyways.

You won a silver medal in Team Eventing in 2016, when you compare between Julia in 2016 and Julia in 2021, what has changed in you?

Well, so much happened in 5 years!

I have ridden many top events and won quite a few major ones like the CHIO Aachen, CCI5* Luhmühlen, CCI4* Bramham, National Championships twice, just to name a few. I have been to the World Equestrian Games and European Championships, all of that with many ups and downs along the way and on three different horses that I brought up myself.

So, I would say I really developed my own system that I trust in, learned to cope with pressure, gathered people around me that I know I can trust, so in 2021 I was just way more up to the challenge of competing at the Olympic Games. So, I would say I really developed my own system, I also learned to cope with pressure and surrounded myself with people that I know I can trust. In 2021, I was just way more up to the challenge of competing at the Olympic Games. Plus, having participated in the Olympics before really helped in being there for the second time.



Tell us about the most challenging time in your career, and how did you get through it?

Well, there certainly have been a couple of ups and downs. If it was disappointing championships, public criticism, a positive medication case that stayed a mystery until now or private difficulties. In the end, it's down to doing what I love, which is riding and spending time with horses, plus learning to believe in myself with the help of the people around me.

Naturally, after a big blow, there is disappointment and doubt, but with time passing I just always found

the 'spirit' again and just started to look for new goals, made new plans and just like that, the new year had started. Also, I have to say, I always had big successes in between challenging times, so I always had good reasons to believe in myself again.

Tell us about your future plans.

In 2022 there are the World Championships in Pratoni in Italy where I would like to successfully compete with Amande. Before that, maybe a 5* in spring, but that will depend on the winter and the preparations. Also, I have some nice horses coming

up, an 8 yo and two 7 yo that I hope will make their way into top sport in the coming years.

Generally, I want to keep enjoying what I do as well as being able to live in it.

In your opinion, what is the key to being a successful rider?

Hard work, patience and always wanting to improve combined with a good feeling for horses. I also think perseverance in improving yourself counts more than talent. 🐾

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