



# One team

World Class Eventing Performance Manager *Richard Waygood* MBE reflects on a sensational World Equestrian Games performance

W hat an amazing team effort. Everyone pulled in the same direction from beginning to end – grooms, owners, staff, riders and horses. It was a wonderful moment in time and a privilege to be a part of.

From the outset we knew it was going to be a challenging environment and we needed to stay in our own bubble and not be distracted by what became the World Equestrian Games (WEG) circus. In fairness, as far as eventing was concerned, the equestrian facilities in Tryon were very good. The field of play and training arenas were excellent and every team got everything they needed, as long as they were organised. I will not talk around specific results in this article as they were very well documented – this is more about what happened on the ground.

## FACING CHALLENGES

There are always challenges when transporting horses and athletes such a distance to a climate with humidity

and heat that they are not used to. I use the word athlete more often than not nowadays when I'm talking about riders – yes, they are riders by name, but due to the demands of the modern sport and the smallest of margins by which international competitions are won and lost, a rider's fitness to compete is paramount in our mindset. It is all about marginal gains.

Liz Brown, the team vet, travelled with the horses to WEG where they were met by grooms Marcelle Tattersall and Rachel Tolley, who, along with Liz, looked after the horses in the quarantine stables for 48 hours. Their days were spent walking the horses in hand within the confines of the stables dressed in very flattering white overalls.

You will probably have read the negative comments about the grooms' accommodation – tents! The World Class office was very quick to step up to the mark and arrange an RV for three of the grooms, while two others were housed with the dressage grooms in a luxurious lodge a seven-minute buggy ride away. All in all, they had five star accommodation – a far cry from some of the teams.

Team GBR collect their team gold medal at WEG. (l-r) Richard Waygood, Piggy French, Gemma Tattersall, Rosalind Canter and Tom McEwen

## WEG REVIEW

### PREPARING TO COMPETE

The horses landed on Wednesday and by Saturday they were being lightly ridden by the athletes who arrived the evening before. At Wellington Horse Trials the Monday before Land Rover Burghley, William Fox-Pitt gave me one piece of invaluable advice: "Do not work the horses too hard for the first couple of days after quarantine." It paid dividends. The horses were acclimatised and brought steadily into work to peak at the right time.

Training went well in the build-up to competition. At the vet check, the horses looked in amazing shape, which was a credit to the grooms. It was at this point we heard the bad news regarding the cancellation of the endurance race. It did not fill people with confidence, but we stayed in our bubble and carried on going about our business.

We were drawn sixth, which was not an ideal spot behind the USA – this was going to be a challenge when entering the dressage. We expected the arena to come alive and it certainly did in a typical American way! We put a strategy in place that worked well on the day, cutting it to the wire when horses entered the arena and the noise had subdued. According to the timetable, the cross country course opened at 2pm on Tuesday afternoon – this was put back until 8am on Wednesday morning. Again, we stayed in our bubble and soldiered on – no need to worry about the things you cannot control.

### CALM AND CALCULATED

Hurricane Florence – what was all the fuss about? We were 350 miles from the coast and all the talk of Florence went over our heads, until we saw the damage and life-threatening conditions it caused in its wake. Our hearts went out to the thousands it affected.

We never expected to be in the lead after the dressage, but we needed to be in touch to give us a fighting chance. After two days of dressage, battle was about to commence on cross country day. The course looked fantastic – it was beautifully presented and the ground was amazing. While there were some technical questions, the long routes did not complement the questions and we found ourselves looking at two of the long routes on the more technical fence. The risk factor did not seem worth it – especially at fence 10, the water fence, which, in Marks Phillips' own words, was "the joker fence". The water cascade caused enough issues to warrant our decision. At the seven-minute point, before the long climb up the hill, we found most horses were down on the clock. Gemma proved that time could be made up, which gave us valuable information. On the cross country, I felt we were in a zone and weirdly it felt very surreal, calm and calculated.

You couldn't have written the script – a false endurance start, no grooms' accommodation, a hurricane and now the decision to move the show jumping back a day. Once again, we stayed in our own bubble and kept soldiering on! The show jumping day has been well reported, so I won't go into the facts and figures. It is worth pointing out that some horses jumped better than others after the extra day's break – while some tightened up, others got higher and higher; some had too much adrenalin, while others lost theirs.

In the end, Ros and Albie were as cool and calm as a millpond, and produced the round of the day to win team and individual honours. For us, WEG was the ultimate display of teamwork, and everyone involved deserves credit and congratulations for their part in it. In Piggy's words: "Boom! Job done!"

Left: Congratulations all round

Right: Ros Canter also took individual gold at the competition

