

Joe Meyer – our local Olympic rider!



When the 2008 Olympiad starts in China this August there will not be many competitors at the opening ceremony from Lingfield, but Joe Meyer, although representing New Zealand, will be amongst them. Lulu Kyriacou takes up the story...

Photo by Lulu Kyriacou

The Kiwi eventer has been based in England for 15 years and within the last two years bought the Churchill Stud in Lingfield where he now lives with wife, Deborah – who is expecting their first child. “I must admit,” said Joe when we talked “that I wasn’t expecting the baby thing myself, and now we are on the squad it might be bad timing for Deb as she will have to waddle about in all that heat! But I am very excited and looking forward to being a dad.”

A big rugby fan and keen fisherman (when he has time!) I asked Joe whether he would prefer a pony-mad girl or a rugby-playing boy to carry on the family name. Joe’s sense of humour was evident when he answered: “At first I thought a boy would be nicer, because you can do all those guy things and he can do useful stuff such as mowing the lawn when he is older. And then I thought, I would prefer a girl because she could ride and help on the yard, but actually

when you get down to it, I don’t mind as long as Deborah and the baby are both fine.”

The Mamaku Stud

The Meyer family traditions, though, are not to be taken lightly. Back in New Zealand, Joe’s grandparents had a small but high-quality stud – Mamaku – which his parents now run. The name might not mean too much at first glance, but on this year’s Olympic squad Joe will be joined by eventing legend Mark Todd.

His previous exploits are the stuff of legend, as are tales of his tiny but talented partner *Charisma*, bred by none other than the Mamaku Stud. Now Joe gets the pick of the young horses to bring on in England, which include his Olympic partner, *Snip*.

Placed at Badminton and Burghley, *Snip* and Joe also represented their country at the World Equestrian Games in 2006 but had an uncharacteristic fall. But in general, *Snip* is a model of consistency and a horse that several people have admired, including British team member Sharon Hunt. The 14-year-old grey is a fast and careful jumper capable of a good test and may well bring another medal back to his breeders.

England is home

Joe goes back to New Zealand each Christmas to see relatives and friends as well as to see the latest young horses, but considers England to be home: "This is my space now, we own the stables. My life is here and when I talk about home this is where I mean." He is a keen reader and enjoys anything from *Harry Potter* to horror, although he has to be careful which books he chooses to take to three-day events. "I prefer lightweight easy reading because if I get into a really good book I can't put it down, which does interfere with my riding plans a bit." Joe also likes to take his guitar along with him, and loves playing but not singing.

As for the Olympics, Joe competed at the

test event there last year and knows exactly what he has let himself in for: "The conditions will be hard but we are prepared and I think we (the team) have a good chance. But I don't know if everyone realises that a typhoon could mean long delays

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between the phases, so experience might count a great deal. The weather is going to be a big factor in all the equestrian disciplines." As his team mates include the already-mentioned Mark Todd, as well as Andrew Nicholson, experience is not something they are short of and the Kiwis are among the favourites for Gold. "Obviously the Brits have a chance, but they have already lost one of their first choices (Zara Phillips) which might make a difference. The Germans

will lead after dressage, but if I had to pick the biggest rivals I would name the French. Their horses will suit the conditions."

Lessons with Richard Barrett

Joe's own chances have probably improved since he discovered a liking for dressage.

"Initially I evented because I liked jumping and going fast, but then I realised that it wasn't enough and I would have to improve my flat work, which I really wasn't keen on. But the funny thing was that once I had done a few decent tests, I got quite into it and I enjoy my lessons with Richard Barrett."

Joe has three other advanced horses and several youngsters to bring on, but would like to find one or two more horses. "We have a couple of spare stables and I have to remember that this is a business and soon I will have another person to feed. But I don't want to have so many that I can't have a good individual relationship with each horse."

Win or lose in Hong Kong, investing your money in the local Olympic rider might be the best way to enjoy the build-up to London 2012. "Deborah and I decided that after the games we will have to spend more time bringing on horses to sell, so we can make a living. But if I got another good horse I would keep it. I would love to go to London as well."

And on current form you would not bet against seeing him there either!

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