

Team GBR General News 2008

Lee Pearson to appear in the BBC's next series of Olympic Dreams

2008-07-14

BBC One's longitudinal documentary series Olympic Dreams will once again feature Para-Equestrian Dressage rider Lee Pearson. His episode will be screened on 22nd July 2008 at 10.35pm on BBC1.

With the 2012 London Olympic Games drawing ever closer, many British athletes have embarked on the long journey towards fulfilling their ultimate goal of securing a place on Team GB and winning gold in front of a home crowd. Revealing just what it takes for these Olympic hopefuls to make the grade, the four-part documentary series, Olympic Dreams, co-produced with The Open University, begins on 15th July 2008 at 10.35pm on BBC 1.

Building on the success of the first series aired in December 2007, Olympic Dreams offers an insight into the world of elite sport and intimate access to British athletes' lives - their gruelling training schedules, daily sacrifices, highs of victory, lows of defeat & injury, and the pressure of coping under the weight of growing expectation.

The athletes featuring in the series include diver Tom Daley; BMX world champion Shanaze Reade; Team GB Paralympic Wheelchair Rugby team; heptathlete Jessica Ennis; table tennis players Paul Drinkhall and Darius Knight; young Welsh Gymnast Venus Romaeo; GB Junior Judo hope Ashley McKenzie; Paralympic dressage champion Lee Pearson; Team GB Women's Rowing team and the elite Team GB men's rowing Coxless Four. In this Olympic year, some of the British hopefuls are also hoping to qualify and make an impact at the Beijing Games.

During the series the unique relationship between coach and athlete is explored, as well as the role family and friends play in supporting the athletes through their preparation and training. It also offers insight into the nerve-wracking rounds of selection and competition and the sacrifices and opportunities the athletes experience in order to earn their place on the British Olympic Team.

Senior Lecturer in Sports Studies at The Open University, Ben Oakley, is the academic consultant to the programme, and said: "It takes about 10 years for an Olympic champion to develop – someone who is just the best in their field on the planet. They are very special people. Someone who is going to win gold in 2012 will probably be going to Beijing in 2008, or at least knocking on the door. Olympic Dreams shows how the athletes, and the people around them, sacrifice themselves for this unique opportunity."

You can follow the journey of many of these athletes on the build up to Beijing and throughout the games via BBC Sport's Olympics website - bbc.co.uk/olympicdreams through a combination of news, reports, video clips and regular diary entries. The associated Open University website at open2.net provides further video diaries from the competitors, extracts from The Open University's sports courses and articles from those in the field.

Spotlight On: Vikki Underwood

2008-08-01

Nurturing success

Show jumper Ben Maher and Para-Equestrian Dressage Rider Felicity Coultard are busy making their final preparations before leaving for the Olympic and Paralympic Games

respectively, and although this occasion is full of anticipation and excitement, for some their departure marks the end of an era.

Ben and Felicity have both been members of the World Class Development Squad for the last four years, gaining invaluable support both emotionally and physically. And now, with their skills honed and their motivation heightened, both have been selected to represent their country at this year's Games. This selection has automatically put the two riders onto the top rung of the ladder in terms of the World Class programme; both are now members of the Performance Squad. For Victoria Underwood, World Class Development Manager, although this move is positive it is also tinged with sadness, as she says 'goodbye' to two riders she has helped develop and nurture over the last few years.

World Class Development Squad

The World Class Development Programme provides an established training pathway that helps riders progress from Development through to Performance squads and ultimately to podium success at the Olympic or Paralympic Games. Riders on the pathway usually take eight years to move through the two squads before taking up an Olympic or Paralympic team position.

Vikki has overall responsibility for three Olympic and one Paralympic World Class Development programmes, from identification and selection through to developing the programmes and ultimately to helping ensure Olympic and Paralympic success. Getting to know the riders, and understanding their individual needs are, therefore, critical to ensuring the programme's success, and these bonds are what makes it a little hard for Vikki to say goodbye.

"It's not really surprising, after working closely with the riders for such a length of time, that we feel sad to see them move on," explains Vikki. "We're obviously delighted they've succeeded and it's a great testament to the Programme that Ben and Felicity have progressed through the ranks to selection so quickly."

Selection

The selection process for the Development Squad involves a good deal more than looking at competition results or examining rider style, as Vikki points out. "Potentials are interviewed to assess their commitment, ambition, dedication and natural strengths. The riding trials include swapping horses (for show jumping and eventing) to ensure it's the riders and not the horses that have the talent."

The selectors for the World Class Development Programme include international experts who are less likely to know the riders and can, therefore, judge their performances more objectively.

What does it offer?

The World Class Development programme is not a salary for the riders; it does not pay for their careers.

"What it does provide is something over and above what the riders do, for example extra training, different equipment, mentors, offering international competition opportunities," says Vikki. "It's a series of educational tools that will ensure everything is in place for them to excel. Essentially, all they need to help them get to an Olympic or Paralympic level faster, more effectively and more sustainably."

Riders receive individual programmes (tailored to their own needs) together with Squad Programmes, which include centralised training days which cover riding, health and nutrition (for both the horse and rider).

Ben

"Ben was quickly picked out at his selection trials, partly due to his classical style of riding and good international exposure," comments Vikki. "Ben is an intelligent rider who understands the benefit of quality training, quality horse power and a good competition planning. Through the programme Ben has sourced flatwork help from Richard Davison and jump training with Bert Romp (Dutch Team coach) as well as long term support from Stephen Smith."

Training with Stephen also provided Ben with an insight into the running of a successful yard, while helping to develop his own skills in the saddle under Stephen's expert tuition. The Programme also helped Ben to be able to attend additional international competitions including an amazing opportunity to compete in Florida for five weeks earlier this year in four and five star competitions, thanks to extra funding.

Felicity

Felicity had been on the World Class Performance radar for a few years, but had not met the necessary criteria, due to a lack of suitable horse power.

Her family invested practically everything they had into buying a new horse, Roffelar, and Felicity soon began to become more competitive. Shortly after she was selected onto the Development Squad and made a rapid transition from competing at local shows to ones on the international FEI circuit.

"Felicity is mentally very tough and a very focussed individual, so we've worked with her to help her to achieve her goal. The Programme part funds her coach Adam Murdin who trains and looks after Roffelar, as well as coaching Felicity - helping to develop this special partnership."

The Programme runs regular two-day training camps for the Para riders which cover riding, human and equine science, plus general horse care - although they may not be able to manage all of the activities due to their disabilities, it is still critical they control what is going on with their horses. The riders are then encouraged to put these learning or experiences into practice at home.

Beijing / Hong Kong

With the Show Jumping competition just a matter of days away and the Para-Equestrian Dressage quickly to follow, Vikki is ensuring she's got the TV and video recorder ready to watch Ben and Felicity compete on the World stage.

"I'll be glued to the TV to see how they get on," she says. "We've helped them as much as we can, so now it's time for them to stand on their own two feet and to put in their performance of a lifetime."

2012

But Vikki's work is not done. She is now looking beyond this year's Games to 2012, ensuring that the riders on the Development Squad are receiving all the support they need to provide Team GBR with a winning pool of riders and horses to choose the teams from.

"It's unlikely that we haven't already identified riders that could make the grade for the teams for 2012," she says. "The blueprint we have put in place in terms of identification and selection is so robust, it's doubtful any potential superstar could pass us by."

"Also, as it's a home Games, many of our top riders will still be in contention - many will put off retirement for the chance to compete in London so with any luck we will have a large pool of excellent horse / rider combinations to choose from."

Riders Keep Diaries on Horse Heroe

2008-08-08

The new website for horse lovers, Horse Heroe is providing regular interviews with Laura Bechtolseimer and Simon Laurens, sharing their experiences of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Dressage rider Laura Bechtolseimer is being interviewed regularly about her first Olympic experiences – read all about she has been up to and how her horse, Alf is going here.#

Para-Equestrian Dressage rider Simon Laurens is busy preparing for the Paralympic Games in September – you can find out more about his preparations here.

There is also lots of other great stuff on the site for anyone interested in horses so take a look – www.horsehero.com

FEI European Dressage and Jumping Championships 2009 now on sale

2008-09-12The ticket box office for the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) European Jumping and Dressage Championships 2009 has opened. The event will take place in the magnificent private grounds of Windsor Castle, UK on the dates of 25th - 30th August 2009.

32 Nations will be invited to take part in the competition, which is the first senior combined equestrian continental championships ever to be held at the same venue. Competition starts the morning of Tuesday 25 August with individual and team Dressage, with the Dressage final (Grand Prix freestyle to music) being held on the evening of Saturday 29 August. The team Jumping final will be held on Friday 28 August, with the Championships culminating on Sunday 30 August with the individual Jumping final.

With the FEI Championships being held three years before the Olympic Games in London 2012, it is expected that the world's top names will appear in both disciplines and the event will be a major celebration of horse sport. Already major backing has been found for the event, with a commitment by UK Sport to provide the Championships with substantial financial support. The Championships have the full support of the British Equestrian Federation (BEF) and their member bodies (BSJA and BD).

The box office telephone numbers are 0871 230 1087 (UK) and + 44 115 993 4409 (International) and will open for sales on 8th September. For online ticket bookings and further information of the confirmed programme of events please visit www.windsoreuropeans09.com

Subaru Riding High with Equestrian Team GBR

2008-12-03

Subaru (UK) Limited is set to become an official sponsor of Equestrian Team GBR. This exciting new partnership is another major step forward right in the heart of the rural community and offers support to the senior equestrian teams in the sports of dressage, eventing, show jumping and para-equestrian dressage.

Subaru will supply two of their widely-acclaimed Forester Boxer Diesel models as well as a Boxer Diesel Legacy and Outback.

The vehicles, which will be utilised as fleet cars for staff working across these equestrian sports in the Equestrian World Class Programme, will be used at every opportunity to promote the Subaru brand within the equestrian market.

This sponsorship is in addition to the commitment Subaru has already established to the sport of eventing at the Burnham Market and Subaru Houghton International Events.

John Fossey, Subaru (UK) Limited Brand Director, said: "We are delighted that we can support Team GBR as it ties in perfectly with our principal brand sponsorship of Horse and Country TV and is an integral key target market."

Clive Hetherington, Marketing Director at the British Equestrian Federation said: "We are very much looking forward to working with Subaru over the coming months and are very grateful for their support. The benefit we will gain from the cars will allow us to redirect funds to other areas of supporting all our senior equestrian teams."

Great Britain's Olympic equestrian heroes will take centre stage at Olympia, The London International Horse Show.

2008-12-17

Following the success of our equestrian sportsmen and women in Hong Kong and throughout Europe this summer, Olympia, The London International Horse Show has announced a medal parade in their honour.

Equestrian medallists from the senior, young rider, junior and pony equestrian teams in all disciplines will take part in a special medal parade at the show on Saturday evening (20th December.)

The parade will take place at 8:15pm after the fast and furious Osborne Refrigerators Shetland Pony Grand National and before the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery's Musical Drive. Spectators will be able to show their support for all medal-winning teams and individual riders including Olympic eventing double bronze medallist Kristina Cook, young rider eventing gold medallist Emily Llewellyn and the Paralympic gold medal winning para equestrian dressage team.

Will Connell, Team GB's Equestrian Leader will be choreographing the parade. "It's a great honour for our medallists to have the opportunity to parade at Olympia, in front of an audience that is traditionally so supportive" he said. "The whole of our equestrian team should be proud of their achievements and there's no better way to thank the public for their support."