

FROM COMA TO GOLD GLORY



Triumphant: From left, Oliver Townend, Laura Collett and Tom McEwen yesterday

From Sam Greenhill
Chief Reporter in Tokyo

HER Olympic dreams had once seemed shattered by a horrific riding accident that left her in a coma. But yesterday Laura Collett overcame adversity to help win a historic equestrian gold medal.

Riding London 52, the 31-year-old joined Oliver Townend and Tom McEwen to become Britain's first eventing team champions for 40 years. McEwen rounded off a sensational night at the Tokyo Equestrian Park by also landing the individual silver following the show jumping section of the competition.

Miss Collett, from Salperton, Gloucestershire, nearly died in 2013 when the horse she was riding fell on her. She had to be resuscitated five times and was placed in an induced coma for six days. She suffered a fractured shoulder, broken ribs, a punctured lung, a lacerated liver and damage to her kidneys. She was left blind in her right eye by a fragment of her shoulder bone which pierced it, damaging the optic nerve.

After yesterday's victory, Miss Collett said: 'Just to be here was more than a dream come true and to be stood here winning a gold medal, it hasn't sunk in.'

'I look back and I think back to where I was eight years ago, I

Horror fall nearly killed her... now Laura helps our eventers end 49-year drought



Born to ride: A young Laura Collett

knew I was lucky to be alive, let alone able to do the job that I love and be lucky enough to have a horse like London 52 to bring me to a place like Tokyo. To top it off with a gold medal, I'm just super grateful to be on a team with these two guys as well.'

All three British riders were making their Olympic debut. McEwen, 30, from Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire, said: 'We've

put in many many hours to get to where we are now. We've come together as a great team this week and we know we're on phenomenal horses. We're super excited to have got the job done.'

38, from Huddersfield, used to ride with Zara Tindall when the Queen's granddaughter competed and we know we're on phenomenal horses. We're super excited to have got the job done.'

alongside Richard Meade, Bridget Parker and Mary Gordon-Watson at the 1972 Munich Games.

In 2018 Townend apologised after he was warned for excessively whipping his horse at the Badminton horse trials. He blamed his 'competitive instincts'.

'Yesterday as the team celebrated their victory, he said: 'We're surrounded by classy horses and very classy people. Let's hope we can inspire the next generation of kids. We are all from pretty normal

'Inspire the next generation of kids'

backgrounds. It shows that hard work and dedication pays off.'

Team GB's most decorated female Olympian, dressage star Charlotte Dujardin, 38, has revealed that her mother delayed surgery to watch her win team and individual bronze.

Now back in the UK, she visited her mother in hospital with her medals and said: 'She was actually due an operation last Monday but she told the surgeon he wasn't allowed to operate until she'd watched me compete.'



Victory lap: (from left) Townend, Collett and McEwen enjoy gold

ANDY HOOPER

HORSE POWER!

MORE JOY FOR GB AS EVENTING TRIO STRIKE GOLD

EQUESTRIAN

JONATHAN McEVOY
in Tokyo



LAURA COLLETT did not imagine she would be here on this humid night under floodlights with a gold medal hanging round her neck.

She wasn't sure she would be alive at all, let alone part of the British eventing team who had just waltzed to a wonderful triumph at the Tokyo Equestrian Park, the country's first title of this sort since 1972.

Collett stood on the podium between her victorious teammates, Oliver Townend and Tom McEwen, who also took the individual silver afterwards.

She smiled throughout the celebration. It could detect that from her sparkling eyes above the dark mask she wore.

'What you could not tell is that she saw nothing through her right eye. She is blind on that side,

TOKYO MEDAL TABLE

	G	S	B	TOTAL
1 CHN	29	17	16	62
2 USA	22	25	17	64
3 JPN	17	6	10	33
4 AUS	14	4	15	33
5 ROC*	12	21	17	50
6 GB	11	12	12	35

* Russian Olympic Committee

a hindrance that makes her story one of the more remarkable of many remarkable comebacks being acted out at these strange but uplifting Olympics.

So much has been packed into Collett's 31 years of hardship and survival and success. The biggest of the blows came eight years ago when she fell during a cross-country in Hampshire and her horse landed directly on top of her. It left her with a lacerated liver, a punctured lung, a fractured shoulder, two broken ribs and that loss of sight.

'When I closed my left eye I couldn't see anything out of my right, but originally they weren't concerned about my sight coming back,' recalled Collett, of Salperton, Gloucestershire. 'Then they

I'M LUCKY TO BE ALIVE... NOW I'VE GOT A GOLD MEDAL ROUND MY NECK!

She's blind in her right eye but Laura helps golden GB trio to glorious triumph

realised a fragment of my shoulder had penetrated the optic nerve and the sight was never going to return. That was the hardest thing to deal with.'

'But I adapted relatively quickly — in this game you have to learn to deal with what you get dealt. So just to be here was more than a dream come true, and to be stood here, with a gold medal, I look back where I was and think I was lucky to be alive, let alone do the job I love.'

'I am fortunate enough to have a horse like London 52 to bring me to a place like Tokyo. To top it off with a gold medal, well, And I'm just super grateful to be on a team with these two guys as well. It's been an unbelievable week. Roll on the celebrations.'

Grit runs deep in Collett. Her father left when she was young so she and her brother were brought up by a single working mother. Money was tight and her mum, Tracey, rented houses with stables so her daughter could be near horses, so smitten was she with them. This gold was a reward for them all.

Showjumping is a hold-your-breath watching experience as you wait for a stray hoof feathering a fence and listen for the rattle that spells doom. But here the Brits carried such an advantage — 17.9 penalties — from Sunday's cross-country into the final day that they could have taken off tail-end first and still come out with Britain's fourth team eventing gold.

In fading light, McEwen went clear on Toledo De Kerster before Collett registered four faults. The upshot was that Townend, last man out, could have clattered four fences on his run and Britain would still be champions. He hit one and Britain won by 13.9 penalties. Smiles all round and kisses blown. Australia finished second and France third.



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Townend's origins are just as noteworthy in their own way as Collett's. For his family's love affair with horses began when his grandfather used them to pull a milk float through the outskirts of his native Huddersfield. His mother rides and his father, Alan, also a milkman, competed as an amateur at Burghley and so the equine

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TEAM EVENTING

- GREAT BRITAIN
- AUSTRALIA
- FRANCE

Laura Collett on London 52
Tom McEwen on Toledo de Kerster
Oliver Townend on Ballaghmor Class

INDIVIDUAL EVENTING

- JULIA KRAJEWSKI (Germany)
- TOM McEWEEN (Great Britain)
- ANDREW HOY (Australia)

Jumping for joy: Collett in action on London 52 and celebrating gold with McEwen (left) and Townend

ANDY HOOPER

tradition continued. Townend began work with just £1,400 in savings, buying and selling horses, and now he has converted that slender beginning into his Gadias Farm, a red-bricked, slate-roofed establishment, approximately where Shropshire meets the Welsh Marches.

Townend, 38, said in his deep Yorkshire drawl: 'Let's hope we can inspire the next generation of kids. We are all from pretty normal backgrounds. It shows that hard work and dedication pays off. I

didn't know how much we had in hand, so I put myself under a bit of pressure, but these guys made it very easy for me.'

'It has not sunk in. We know we are fortunate that all three of us have found horses of a lifetime at the same time. We can go on to Paris 2024 with great hope.'

'There will be a big celebration and I don't think it will be with a cup of tea and a biscuit. This team have never struggled to find somewhere to celebrate.'

As for McEwen, 30, he has been steeped in the horsey world all his life, from pony club days. His mother, All, competed and his father Bobby was clinical director at the Valley Equine Hospital in Lambourn.

He is based at the Princess Royal's Gatcombe estate in Gloucestershire and asked Zara Tindall for pre-event advice. 'They (the royals) have more pressure than I ever do and I try to match that calmness,' he said.

All three were Olympic debutants but it did not show in the quality of their performances. The night was not done, however. Our heroes were gunning for the individual title. It was not to be, alas, with the brilliant German Julia Krajewski holding her nerve exquisitely on Amande De B'Neville for a clear round to pip McEwen to gold, with Townend fifth and Collett ninth.

For Krajewski, the honour of becoming the first woman to win that singular title. But for Britain, a gold and a silver was reward enough.