

Making history

Three horses of a lifetime, three superb riders and a raft of back-room supporters make dreams come true in Tokyo as Britain wins its first Olympic eventing team gold for 49 years



Pictures by PA Wire/PA Images and Peter Nixon

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Tokyo Olympics, Japan

By PIPPA ROOME

The story

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TOKYO OLYMPICS



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Final team medals



Final individual medals



36

places risen by Austin O'Connor, from 49th after dressage to finish 13th

The victorious trio of Oliver Townend (left), Laura Collett and Tom McEwen - all Olympic debutants - claim Britain's first eventing Olympic team gold medal for 49 years



world - horses of a lifetime - and that's why we're sat here with a gold medal."

But to describe this as a dream would be to underestimate the sheer determination, talent and resilience under pressure that was needed to deliver this result. In the new three-to-a-team format no one could afford a slip-up, and the Brits came into this Games as clear favourites and led throughout.

On cross-country day in particular, the trio excelled - three clears inside the time with never a dicey moment made them worthy successors to those legends of yesteryear, Mark Phillips, Richard Meade, Mary Gordon-Watson and Bridget Parker.

"I LOVE THE PRESSURE"

TOM MCEWEN spearheaded the British charge, taking the individual silver with Fred and Penny Barker, Jane Inns and his mother Ail's 14-year-old Toledo De Kerser. He added just 0.4 of a time-penalty in the final showjumping round to his 12th-placed dressage score.

Tom is one of those rare athletes who not only withstands pressure, but genuinely enjoys it.

"It's why I get up every morning," he said. "I've loved the pressure this week, being in the team."

Julia Krajewski celebrates her winning individual round on Amande De B'Neville



The Horse & Hound Podcast
Hear more about the Olympic eventing on this week's Horse & Hound Podcast: horseandhound.co.uk

Right: British pathfinder Oliver Townend shows the rest of the field how it's done, finishing clear inside the time across country with the 14-year-old Courage II son Ballaghmor Class



Dickie described Tom's final showjumping round as "unbelievable" and paid tribute to Tom's superb temperament for the big time: "It's crazy because Tom sleeps right the way through every night. He copes with the pressure really, really well. And when you can do that, it keeps you in good nick and we saw that today on the field of play. He was cool, calm and collected."

There were questions when Toledo De Kerser, who is jumping-bred by Diamant De Semilly out

of a Papillon Rouge mare, first stepped up to five-star about whether he might be too careful for the rough and tumble of cross-country, whether he would have enough stamina. A slow first Badminton round in 2017 didn't encourage the doubters - but that was due to Tom misjudging his minute markers, a fact that passed largely under the radar.

Since then, he has proved himself an absolutely top-class horse, winning a five-star and finishing in the top 12 at five

others, as well as contributing to Britain's world team gold in 2018.

"He's been a special partner and I messed up in many places where I probably shouldn't have in the past few years, so to give it back to him in some way is great," said Tom.

Toledo is talented but he is also a sharp, tricky horse and Tom has had to find the key to him. He is never jumped at home - Tom told H&H earlier this year that "if you try he'll bolt blind, or refuse to come in a second time, or he'll be like a crouching tiger and press himself to the floor, then go flat out" - but loves to give his best in competition.

"THIS IS FOR THEM"

OLIVER TOWNEND finished fifth on Karyn Shuter, Angela Hislop and Val Ryan's grey Courage II son Ballaghmor Class, another who is 14 - not too old for Paris 2024.

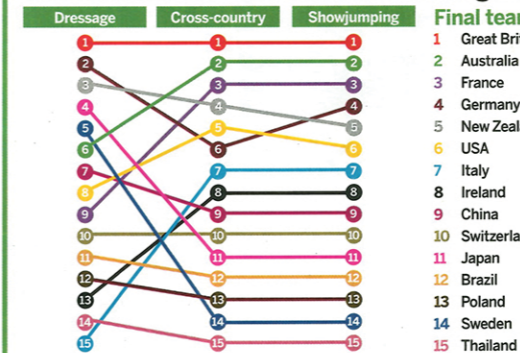
He said: "I'm relieved, more than anything, and just very proud of the whole team - including the team at home, who get up at 5am every morning to make sure that they're on time for work and the people who have worked for me for 11 or 10 or eight years. They put in the hard graft every single day, so this is for them as well."

Oliver led overnight going into the showjumping day but handled losing individual honours with grace after a single fence fell in each round.

"Today wasn't my day but I'm fortunate I have a lot of good days, probably more than my fair share, and it gives me hunger to keep going," he said.

Of the team experience, Oliver said: "It almost feels like a new

The teams: how the leaderboard changed



TOKYO OL

generation of a British squad, we're all at a similar age and stage in life so it's been fun."

Oliver is 38, Laura 31 and Tom 30 - relatively young in eventing terms, but all of them have been grafting at the sport professionally for well over a decade (or two in Oliver's case) and know the ups and downs.

Asked what advice he would give to a child wanting to follow in his footsteps, Oliver said: "Hard work - it's as simple as that. There's no room for a 'poor me' attitude, you get up early every morning and work hard and the opportunities are there to take."

"Although it's an expensive sport it doesn't boil down to money, it comes down to work ethic and attitude. If you have that plus a bit of talent, there's no roof, no end to where you can get to and what you can achieve. You have to be forward-thinking, dig deep and there will be times you have to scrape yourself off the floor and get back on."

