

FEI World Equestrian Games The Hague (NED), 1994



THE HAGUE 1994

While reflecting on the tremendous success in the aftermath of the first World Equestrian Games in Stockholm, then FEI President, HRH Prince Philip warned that "three years is insufficient for any Federation to put together the very large and sophisticated organisation that is needed to manage such an event", words which proved to be very prophetic...

Indeed, the 1994 World Equestrian Games were, unfortunately, unable to sustain the momentum gathered during the first ever WEG. The second WEG, at The Hague in The Netherlands in 1994, was dogged by organisational and administrative chaos and ended in financial bankruptcy. Initially, the event was allocated in March 1991 to Paris but the French project fell apart and a few months later the second-placed bidders from Holland eagerly took on the task. Despite their enormous enthusiasm and Holland's excellent reputation for show management and sponsorship acquisition, the event was seriously marred by a number of issues including site management. The already space-limited Zuiderpark becoming dangerously overcrowded and volunteers stretched beyond their limits while the absence of rehearsals in advance of the fixture led to many serious problems that might otherwise have been rectified in advance.

To date, the 1994 edition is mainly remembered for the financial disaster it turned out to be and the enormous organisational problems inherent throughout the preparation stages and the event. These circumstances were all the more regrettable as they overshadowed the sports performances which were very impressive. The sport in all its disciplines was of the highest level with many outstanding moments. The Games were generally followed by a large number of spectators; however, the numbers could have been even greater had the ticketing process worked properly. Nonetheless, the Games did attract satisfactory sponsorship.

Statistics

Dressage	61 Participants (23 countries)
Jumping	83 Participants started, 76 completed (27 countries)
Eventing	93 Participants started – 65 completed (countries N.A.)
Driving	44 Participants – 42 completed (15 Countries)
Endurance	99 Participants – 53 completed (23 countries)
Vaulting	76 Participants (18 countries)

A Total of **37** Countries participated in the 1994 World Equestrian Games.

The countries participating for the first time were: Liechtenstein, Romania, South Africa and San Marino.

The major political changes that had taken part in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s were well noticeable. The USSR had ceased to exist and so riders from new countries such as Belarus, Russia and Ukraine participated. Croatia, having achieved independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, was also so to speak a new country; in 1993 Czechoslovakia had dissolved into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, both of which were represented. And of course, FRG and GDR were united in one country, Germany.

Interesting Facts

Despite the poor organization and management of the Event, the sport was excellent and the show jumping championships were no exception. This time it was to be Germany that scored the double when taking the individual and team gold medals and German horse-breeding got a tremendous boost when four fabulous German- bred mares battled it out in the change-horse finale.

Franke Sloothaak took the individual title and the drug rehabilitation centre at San Patrignano in Italy gained world attention as two of the finalists were competing with mares carrying the SP label - the blue-eyed Weihaiwej ridden by the eventual champion and Miss ridden by Frenchman Michel Robert who slotted into runner-up spot in the final analysis.

After the Speed leg the French team had the upper hand, but the Germans stamped their authority on the Nations Cup in which Sloothaak and Weihaiwej produced the only double-clear. Ludger Beerbaum's Ratina Z had just one fence down in the second round and when Soren Von Ronne and Taggi faulted only once in the early stages then Dirk Hafemeister's 16 faults with Priamos could be discounted and Germany claimed the team honours by a considerable margin. The French side of Robert (Miss), Roger-Yves Bost (Souviens Toi 111), Philippe Rozier (Baiko Rocco V) and defending World Champion Eric Navet with Quito de Baussy had to settle for team silver. From the outset Navet's stallion failed to show the same kind of brilliance he had exhibited in Stockholm four years earlier, and the rider later suggested that his 12 year old horse might not have been as fit as he would have liked after a long breeding season.

The Swiss team of Markus Fuchs (Goldlights Interpane), Thomas Fuchs (Major AC Folien), Stefan Lauber (Lugana) and Lesley McNaught-Mandli (Pirol) took team bronze when holding the Brazilian team at bay by just over two points while the USA finished a very close fifth, their chances considerably diminished perhaps by the loss of Gem Twist who was allowed to compete in the warm-up competition but failed the third veterinary inspection leaving rider Leslie Lenehan to partner Charisma instead.

Markus Fuchs won the Speed leg with Goldlights and earned his way into the penultimate Top-20 clash along with all four members of the German squad. Sloothaak was already at the head of affairs as this competition began with Von Ronne lying second, Nelson Pessoa in third and Beerbaum in fourth but Pessoa's chances of qualifying for the change-horse final four disappeared when Chouman put in a refusal leaving the 58 year old Brazilian ace in eventual fifth place.

Whatever about the problems elsewhere, the footing in the arena was much-complimented by the riders and once again the intensity of five challenging courses over four days of competition tested preparation of horse and rider. The German squad had been named well in advance and it was widely commented afterwards that their horses were extremely fit - a vital ingredient in the light of the heavy demands of the World Equestrian Games challenge.

On the final afternoon Sloothaak jumped clear with all four horses to secure a victory that proved popular with the home supporters as Franke was born in Holland, but Michel Robert was only denied by the deceptively slow stride of Weihaiwej with which he picked up a half time fault that cost him dearly. Von Ronne, relatively unknown at the time, faulted only with his own horse Taggi who also dropped a pole for Beerbaum but it was a refusal in the warm-up with Michel Robert's Miss that probably resulted in eight faults on the course for the reigning Olympic Champion whose mare, Ratina Z, was the star performer in the closing stages when jumping clear with all four riders.

Exactly mirroring the result from Stockholm, three women finished in the top twenty at The Hague and again the best-placed female rider slotted into 10th place - this time it was Ireland's Jessica Chesney (now Kuerten) riding Diamond Exchange.