

## FEI World Equestrian Games Rome (ITA), 1998



The 1998 World Equestrian Games were allocated to Dublin even before the 1994 edition had taken place and unfortunately, despite the very good initial plans, there were various problems which had become apparent from the very beginning. Finally, the Dublin Organising Committee was forced to give up.

For a second time, the originally successful bidder failed to live up to their promises and the saga of the Dublin allocation makes for painful recollection. During Gothenburg Show in 1996, two years after Dublin celebrated its successful bid campaign, it was announced that the Irish Government had withdrawn its support from the event. When Nissan stepped in with a £2 million rescue package it seemed that all might not be lost but in the summer of 1997 the Royal Dublin Society in Ballsbridge, long-time venue for the world-famous Dublin Horse Show and designated centre for much of the WEG activity, declared that its facilities would not be available and despite plans to use Punchestown Racecourse in Kildare as the chosen alternative venue Nissan withdrew and it was all over.

The abandonment of the project was dramatic as Ireland is a country with a very thoroughly developed horse tradition. In this difficult situation the FEI Executive Board was very happy that several countries showed interest to organise the 1998 WEG in spite of the short notice. In a desperate effort to pick up the pieces the FEI examined the alternatives of Aachen and Rome and, opting for the latter, were rewarded with nothing short of a miracle. Some four months after the withdrawal of Dublin, Rome was chosen as the official venue for the 1998 Games. Particular credit goes to the Italian NF President Cesare Croce, who showed much courage in taking the project over.

If, as FEI President Prince Philip suggested in 1991, three years does not allow a sufficient preparation period to organise a colossal event such as the World Equestrian Games then how on earth did the Italians manage to do it in a year? Sheer determination and the will to give it their best shot was the key, and against all the odds the WEG in Rome in 1998 was nothing short of a triumph.

Similarly to Stockholm and The Hague, the sport in Rome was excellent. Financial aspects were skilfully handled mainly by Andrea Riffeser of Monrif Group, an important Italian publishing company, and as far as can be ascertained, all WEG expenses were covered.

### **Statistics**

<b>Dressage</b>	84 Participants started (29 countries)
<b>Jumping</b>	86 Participants started (28 countries)
<b>Eventing</b>	91 participants started – 75 completed (23 countries)
<b>Driving</b>	46 participants started – 38 completed (15 countries)
<b>Endurance</b>	Conducted in Abu Dhabi
<b>Vaulting</b>	75 participants (19 countries)

A Total of **42** Countries participated in the 1998 World Equestrian Games.

**The countries participating for the first time were:** Bulgaria, Greece, Israel, Jamaica, Saudi Arabia, Lithuania and Venezuela.

### **Interesting Facts**

For several years equestrian sport had had problems with TV coverage due to an unsatisfactory contract between the FEI and the German TV channel DSF which had replaced the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). In 1997 it finally became possible for the FEI to contract out. Following this decision, the FEI succeeded to restore cooperation with the EBU, thus resulting in an improved TV-situation for the 1998 WEG.

A total of 42 nations competed in all disciplines and 86 riders took part in the show jumping championships which were staged in the slightly jaded, but nevertheless practical, Flaminio football stadium in the city. The weather gods were not helpful and torrential rain left the arena under water on the show jumping championship warm-up day, but the excellent footing recovered superbly.

The Germans took team gold for the second time in succession but were denied a second double of victories when Brazil's Rodrigo Pessoa became the youngest-ever winner of the individual title at the age of 25. With a narrow lead after the first three competitions, Pessoa was joined in the change-horse final by defending team and individual champion Franke Sloothaak from Germany, Willi Melliger from Switzerland whose big, graceful grey Calvaro was the revelation of the show jumping event and Frenchman Thierry Pomel.

Another sensation of Rome 1998 was Nelson Pessoa, father of Rodrigo, who had finished fourth in Buenos Aires way back in 1966 and fifth individually at The Hague just four years earlier and who showed that, at the age of 62, he had lost none of his sparkle when slotting into third in the opening speed leg, eventually finishing in 11th place with Baloubet du Rouet.

John Whitaker came out on top here with Heyman, helping the British to hold the edge after this first competition, but that much-wanted gold began to slip from Britain's grasp when Geoff Billington's It's Otto stopped at the first fence on Nations Cup day before also faulting at the water and the following double. Meanwhile the Germans began to improve from fourth place after successful clears from all four riders in round one. This gave Lars Nieberg (Esprit FRH), Markus Beerbaum (Lady Weingard), Ludger Beerbaum (PS Priamos) and Franke Sloothaak (Joli Coeur) a small advantage over the French whose first rider, Alexandra Ledermann, was the focus of some controversy after apparently rectifying her course with Rochet M after a warning call from the ringside.

Ten of the 19 participating teams returned for the second round, and when Sloothaak collected just a quarter time fault and the Beerbaum brothers each recorded a score of 4.25, then Germany was assured of the team gold despite the eight faults made by Nieberg. The French lost ground when Rochet M picked up 20 faults in round two while Roger-Yves Bost's Airborne Montecillo had three fences down, Eric Navet and Atout d'Isigny lowered two and Thierry Pomel added just a half time penalty but they held on for silver medal position ahead of the British side that also included Nick Skelton (Hopes are High) and Di Lampard (Abbervail) and who rallied strongly to finish a very close third, just one point behind the French. Switzerland slotted into fourth ahead of Brazil, greatly assisted by a double-clear from Melliger and Calvaro, while Rodrigo Pessoa was in the driving seat going into the individual final.

This was a close-fought affair and course-designer Marcello Mastronardi produced the perfect track over which all four riders jumped clear in the first round with their own horses. Only Pomel, riding Melliger's big grey, remained fault-free in round two however with all three others making single errors at different fences, it was Calvaro that proved to be the most difficult to handle - Pomel having to keep a cool head as the horse misbehaved during the three-minute "ride-in" period.

Sloothaak and Melliger collected four faults each in round three when Pomel had just a half time fault with Pessoa's Lianos and Pessoa jumped clear with Pomel's Thor des Chaines, and the fourth and final round came down to a head-to-head between the Frenchman and the Brazilian with Pessoa piling on the pressure when clear with Calvaro who gave him a lovely ride. At this point, Pomel could not afford the slightest mistake, but the 12 year old Joli Coeur clipped the middle of the combination so the former three-day event rider had to settle for silver while Sloothaak surrendered his gold for a bronze medal this time around.