

# Teamwork makes the dream work!



The success of Ireland's WEG medal-winners was down to the whole team of backroom experts, writes **Emer Bermingham**

**T**HE success of the senior Irish eventing team who captured silver at the World Equestrian Games at Tryon, North Carolina, USA, will stand out for many years to come and for those involved, they know that the path to success didn't just happen overnight. There have been changes in their methods and without a doubt, the high-performance programmes which are now being implemented in equestrian sports have been in use in other sports for many years.

What we are witnessing is a transformation in the way experts are being utilised to help teams progress.

It's clear that winning medals is not just down to horse power and good riding, but it's also down to the backroom support that teams have in place. By all accounts, team manager Sally Corscadden has recognised this and has got the mix right and as a result, has brought Irish eventing right back into the spotlight.

At WEG, the high-performance coaching team of Ian Fearon, Ian Woodhead and Yogi Breisner all played a vital role in preparing riders for the challenges ahead, as did the team veterinary surgeon Marcus Swail, horse physiotherapist Davide Focardi, rider physiotherapist Clare-Maria of CMC Physio, and farrier Nigel Perrott. Their work began long before the games and continued at the competition.

For Corscadden, the goal was to put an expert team in place that would work together and with the riders. She created expert teams within teams, that worked together from the onset. What she didn't realise that in doing this, that winning a medal became as important to the support team as it was to the riders.

Sally explains how the process began: "We sat down in November to analyse what we needed to work on as a team. We noticed, that while we had good individual cross-country results, as a team we needed to do more. I brought Yogi (Breisner) in, to help with the team aspect and because of his expertise in this area. We know that the cross-country is going to be very important in Tokyo, so we knew we needed to work on this. We found that riders would spend 5% of their time training on the cross-country course.

"This needed to change and eventually riders trained once a week on this discipline. Both Ian Fearon and Ian Woodhead have proven coaching levels at the highest levels, but the key was to get all the coaches working together. It wasn't up to me to tell them how to do their job, as they know their jobs well. I need them to communicate, to get the whole picture and put a plan



The silver medal-winning team of Sally Corscadden, Sam Watson, Cathal Daniels, Sarah Ennis and Padraig McCarthy

## THE TEAM



together. Each coach watched riders in each discipline and we all travelled to Badminton and Luhmühlen, so that we could put into practice what we had put together. When we got to WEG, we all knew each other and knew the goals and how to achieve them.

"At that time, we also looked at the riders' diets and we brought in the Institute of Sport to look at things like time management."

### EXPERTISE

Corscadden continues: "Our vet, Marcus Swail, knew the horses inside out and the riders respected him. Our farrier, Nigel Perrott from Somerset, went to the final training day, examined each horse and had spare shoes for all of them. He was an invaluable team member as he helped everywhere and didn't confine himself to his role. Our physios – Clare-Maria of CMC Physio and our horse physio Davide Focardi – looked at riders in all training session to address any weaknesses together. They didn't just turn up on the day. They all gave it 100% because they wanted Ireland to win a medal."

The riders also felt the benefits. Padraig McCarthy, who also won Individual Silver at WEG, said: "I was first introduced to Ian Woodhead in 2015 and he has really helped me. While I was warming up to go into the dressage test in WEG, he was in my earpiece, so I had

his support right until I went in, and his voice was fresh in my head while I was doing my test. Ian Fearon was a huge help, not just for his coaching skills. Ian got to know about each rider and horse and the most importantly, he knew what to say at the right time. Yogi has great experience, and this was invaluable. He listened to our plans, gave us alternatives, but didn't dictate. Most importantly, he didn't want anyone to second-guess themselves. The combination of coaches worked. They all believed in us and as a result, we were full of confidence going into each discipline."

### PRAISE

Also full of praise for the team dynamics was Carlow's Sam Watson, now ranked 10th in the world. "Sally created a great team that worked with each other and with the riders. The high-performance support team and coaches was not big in terms of quantity, but in terms of quality, it was a full house. All the coaches, the vet, the physio and farrier are world-class and the fact that they all worked together gave us a better chance of being prepared as they shared their knowledge. Having this expertise creates a culture of excellence, something that we need to maintain. What Sally did was surround herself with successful people to get the job done and results are clear to see. The coaches were behind us from the

start and the fact that they supported our fundraising demonstrations gave us confidence, as we felt that they believed in us and that a medal was possible."

Youngest team member Cathal Daniels (22), also spoke about the unity of the team and their common goal.

"The training we got up to the Championships helped the team gel. Because we had been in Badminton and Luhmühlen, once we got to WEG, we all knew each other well and we knew what we needed to do. The regular training with the high-performance coaches meant that we were putting in to practice what we had already planned. The coaches knew the horses and so there was no surprises on the big day. They knew what to expect from us and they moulded their plan on this."

Sarah Ennis, who has been part of many Irish squads, echoed her team mates' words. "We won the medal because of the team that Sally put in place around the team. In the years that I have been part of teams, this has never happened. There just weren't the people in place. It was the most amazing team effort from all those involved. Normally a major championship is a struggle, but we were so prepared, and it just seemed to happen naturally. We basically stimulated what we did in training. Sally, the coaches and the support team, believed that we could do it and with the help of the whole team, we did it."