

Young Guns!

Emily George Tastes Team Victory in Buenos Aires

By Karen Robinson

It's nearly every aspiring young rider's dream: to don the red jacket, perform well for your team, and stand on a podium watching your nation's flag flutter in the breeze while the national anthem fills your ears. Some people wait a long time for that moment while others never know it at all despite long, successful show careers. Emily George is one of the fortunate; at just 26 years old and the youngest member of the Canadian Show Jumping Team in the Nations' Cup in Buenos Aires last November, she experienced what she hopes was only her first taste of being on a winning team.

"This was my first team experience, and it was such a cool feeling," she says. "It's actually a bit hard to put into words, but the atmosphere of competing on a team is something you just can't beat."

Emily can be proud of the fact that she contributed to the team's result, jumping clear in the first round riding Quidam's Ramiro, a 15-year-old Holsteiner gelding owned by her parents, Julie and Rick George. In the second round, the combined results of team members Emily, Tiffany Foster and Angela Covert-Lawrence, meant anchor rider Jonathan Asselin wasn't required to jump at all as Canada took the victory over its closest rivals, Brazil and Argentina.

For Emily, who has known this was what she wanted to strive for almost from her first riding lesson, the success in Argentina was an important career milestone. Emily was first introduced to riding by way of a lesson given to her as an eighth birthday present in Toronto, where her family lived before moving west to Calgary. A self-confessed 'type A' personality, Emily has always thrown herself completely into her passions. The only significant amount of time she has ever spent out of the saddle was in her last year of university, when she took half a year off from riding to complete a geology degree. But Emily knew that was just a temporary situation; the degree is more of a back-up strategy than a career goal. Riding and teaching are what Emily has in her plans for the future.

"As I was graduating I knew I had no interest in working in that field," she says. "I love the horses and I believe I have much to give back to the community by teaching."

With her first Grand Prix horse, Smart Thinking, Emily led the Western Division of the Kubota Cup Canadian Championship Series through two of the three Western Canadian series competitions despite being only 21 years of age. When she bought Quidam's Ramiro, who had been the 2006 Canadian Show Jumping Champion under Laurie Bucci, Emily was also riding the mare Ramila at the grand prix level.

"She was an unorthodox jumper and very hot," says Emily of the mare, who is now beginning a new career as a brood mare. By comparison, Quidam's Ramiro has "always been very solid. He's such a good teacher."

After winning the Canadian Show Jumping Championships at the age of nine, Eric Lamaze showed Quidam's Ramiro before he arrived at Jonathan Asselin's stable for six months in 2007. Emily was training with Asselin at the time, and was looking for a second Grand Prix horse. Asselin suggested she try him and the pairing was a success.

"Our first class was a 1.45m class," she remembers. "I jumped around in a snaffle, and he was great. That first summer we did both 1.60m derbies held at Spruce Meadows."



Cealy Tetley

Emily George and Quidam's Ramiro



Hipismodigital.com.ar

Emily George, left, was part of Canada's winning team with Tiffany Foster, chef d'equipe Mark Laskin, Angela Covert-Lawrence and Jonathan Asselin in the Buenos Aires Nations' Cup in November.



When Emily bought Quidam's Ramiro, she knew he would be an important stepping stone in her team aspirations, but she didn't realize he would actually become her first team horse.

"I didn't know if he would last and I didn't think he would become as careful as he has," she says.

Quidam's Ramiro proved himself with consistent clear rounds in 2011, culminating with his team performance in Argentina. His clear first round in the Nations' Cup was one of only two in that first round. Now that the 2012 season in Florida, where Emily has been wintering for the past several years, is under way, she will choose her competitions carefully in order to give herself the best possible chance at making the team for London. She is, however, realistic about her chances, saying, "I'm young and I don't have a lot of experience, but my horse has all the scope in the world."

Breaking that big goal into smaller pieces, Emily is focused on making the Nations' Cup team in week eight of the Winter Equestrian Festival circuit. She has also been actively looking for another Grand Prix horse or a talented young horse, traveling to Europe nearly monthly throughout the fall. While she didn't find another potential Olympic horse before the December 31 deadline, she did come home from one trip with a seven-year-old mare named Zavira. Having gone to England to look at a Grand Prix horse, she instead she fell in love with the mare, who had been bred just outside London.

"She's big, tall, beautiful and black, but she's green," Emily says. "She was in the field until she was five."

Emily will start out the Florida season slowly with Zavira so that the pair can form a strong partnership. Emily is based for the winter with Quidam's Ramiro and Zavira at Marley Goodman's Turtle Lane Farm, which conveniently backs on to the WEF show grounds. Her home training base is at Brenda Riddell's Silver Star Farms in Calgary, but she hopes to start her own business next year, which will mean skipping the annual trip to Florida.

"The clientele you start out with are not likely to be the kind you bring to Florida," she explains. "I will take a break from Florida next year to start teaching."

Emily went out on her own as a rider a couple of years ago, but realizing that an eye on the ground is essential, she has been getting help over the past year from American Grand Prix rider and trainer Eric Hasbrouck. He traveled with her to Argentina, and is usually on hand at the bigger shows to offer his guidance. One party Emily doesn't like to have at the shows is her family.

"I'm at the point where I ask that my parents and my husband not come and watch me compete," she explains. "I like to focus on the task at hand. They visit on my days off, but I like to keep business separate from family."

Although Emily's engineer husband Liam Dinning is not involved with horses at all, she says, "He's incredibly supportive. We gave the girl who works for me Christmas off, so he and I mucked stalls."

Whatever happens during this Olympic year for Emily, she has the same clear sense of purpose that has brought her to where she is now. And given the determination and commitment that landed her on the Nations' Cup team last fall, Emily is not likely to disappear from the international show ring any time soon.

2011/2012 North American World Cup League

As of December 21, 2011

Western Division

Brian Morton 36

John Pearce 33

Chris Pratt 25

Samantha Buirs 24

Jenna Thompson 22

Eastern Division

Ian Millar 34

Eric Lamaze 21

Beth Underhill 19

Yann Candele 19

Hugh Graham 18