



World Class Eventing Performance Manager Richard Waygood (front) celebrates with the team (l to r: Oliver Townend, Nicola Wilson, Ros Canter and Tina Cook)

The senior British eventing team returned triumphant from the European Championships in Strzegom, Poland, with team gold medals and an individual bronze for Nicola Wilson. Performance Manager Richard Waygood takes us behind the scenes of the Strzegom success story

Success in Strzegom

Wow! What a fantastic result. I don't intend to go through the European Championships blow by blow as this has been well documented and covered by the media. Let me instead take you back a number of weeks to the final build-up to the Europeans and a little of what goes on behind the scenes.

THE FINAL CUT

The selectors had their work cut out – the long list had both breadth and depth, but the hard work was just about to begin selecting the final squad of six. We like to think of the long list rather like a football or rugby team – 18 players named of which six will play on the day, 'One Team'. Driving home after the long list selection meeting I felt a warm glow – it was a quality group.

A frantic few weeks followed with Barbury, Aachen and Aston le Walls – the final runs for most combinations before the final six were selected. I for one am glad I am not a selector; it is an extremely hard

job and you put your neck on the line, leaving yourself open for criticism while never keeping everyone happy. Being a reserve is not an enviable position – in fact it is the worst position to be in. I thank both Sarah (Cutty) Cohen, who gave up a family holiday, and Alexander Bragg for staying committed until we travelled.

GETTING THERE

The final squad training and kitting out took place just before the horses departed on Saturday 10 August. They had a stopover at Dortmund on the Sunday evening and the 11-hour leg to Strzegom the following day. Liz Brown (Team Vet) arranged for short stops every five hours to allow the horses a leg stretch and to get their heads to the floor.

The team staff arrived at lunchtime on Monday and prepared the stables for the arrival of the horses that afternoon. Union flags flying, horses and grooms settled in and the day's work was complete. Tuesday was a long day for the riders as they were meant to fly early that morning only to find the flight was delayed. Eventually they



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Richard Waygood, World Class Eventing Performance Manager

arrived and gave their horses a light training session and arena familiarisation, followed by a mad dash to the hotel, a quick change and off to the Opening Ceremony in Wrocław.

READY TO GO!

Wednesday commenced with a leg stretch and training. The horses all looked in good nick, both physically and mentally, and there was a very positive feeling around the camp. Everyone has a role to play in creating this positive atmosphere; riders, owners, grooms and staff. I always like to remind everyone the impact they can have on the team and those around them, so everyone was 'cup half full' and turned pressure into pleasure. The grooms did a fantastic job and turned the horses out immaculately for the horse inspections – so much so that our high standard of turnout was mentioned at the draw by the other Chef d'Equipes. Well done and thank you to the grooms Marcelle Tattersall, Rachel Tolley, Ruth Asquith, Sarah Charnley, Stuart Ward and Jess McKie – we could not have done it without you.

The dressage days went according to plan, and Chris Bartle and I were quietly confident there were going to be some good dressage marks from Team GBR. It was a great couple of days, with four personal best scores and some outstanding performances. It will be interesting to see how much closer scores are going to be after the dressage if the FEI scrap the 1.5 coefficient as mooted. There are always going to be hard luck stories on cross country day. Oliver was our pathfinder and, although he had his upsets, the intel he brought back was invaluable and he proved the time was achievable. Piggy had an exceptional round up until the last water where a green mistake caught Quarrycrest Echo out.

We then had some amazing rounds from Ros, Gemma, Tina and Nicola. It is hard to pick the round of the day on a track that challenged every quality of a championship partnership – they were all outstanding. Gemma showed real grit and determination and made it happen, Ros was so cool under pressure, while Tina was a joy to watch and Nicola delivered under immense pressure at the end of the day. Well done all.

The final day was going to test both technical skills and championship character. Unfortunately Cooley SRS (Oliver Townend) had to be withdrawn with an annoying niggles before the final horse inspection, but the remainder were fit, healthy and ready to go. It was a great performance, which is so well documented I will not repeat it here, except to say every rider, whether team or individual, played their part, and owners, staff and grooms created an environment which enabled the riders to compete with confidence and competitively. We are the luckiest people on the planet – we make a livelihood out of what we enjoy. I would like to say a huge thank you to the owners for providing your horses; it demonstrates a huge amount of trust and confidence in the riders.

Please savour the moment and enjoy the recent successes, but remember the hard work has just begun and the future is what we are about. ✨



Nicola Wilson and James and Jo Lambert's Bulana on their way to individual bronze



Richard Waygood and Tina Cook discuss the course



Ros Canter and Alistair B. (owned by Ros with her trainer Caroline Moore) staying cool under pressure