

Olympic glory is final jump for eventing ace

Sportswomen of the Year: Trailblazers of 2023

Oli Gent

As she glided over the final hurdle in Normandy, Rosalind Canter already knew that she was to become the European eventing champion, and that she had done so with an almost unassailable lead, something extremely rare in the eventing world.

Going into the final discipline at Haras du Pin, the showjumping, Canter led the field by 9.5 penalty points after her excellent performances in the dressage and cross-country, and it was down to her and her young horse, Lordships Graffalo, to bring home the individual gold medal.

She did so in elegant fashion, after an initial scare on the triple hurdle, but the Briton had such a lead that she could have afforded another. She also won the team event, earning her

the second golden double of her career, after her World Championship triumph at Trycon, North Carolina in 2018.

"It was fantastic to win," Canter says. "To do it on a horse that we've had from such a young age. Lordships Graffalo is owned by Michelle Saul, a big supporter of mine for many years. Lordships Graffalo has been the first of her horses to hit those kinds of heights. She lives and breathes it like I do, so it's special to do something like that for someone that's supported my career for such a long time."

Canter grew up on a family farm in Lincolnshire and began riding early with her two sisters but she "never dared to dream" about one day becoming an eventing champion, not least at the five-star Badminton Horse Trials in May, where she won gold by a dominant 15 points.

"Every Christmas, I got a Badminton video in my stocking," Canter recalls. "Every time I hear those words it sends tingles down me to think that it actually happened."

"I hope now that I can be a positive role model for the other little girls that dream it and love it like I did."

Shortly after becoming world champion in 2018, Canter fell pregnant with her daughter, Ziggy, who was born in July 2019. The pandemic followed soon after.

"While I was pregnant and away from the sport, I still felt that I had only just got to that [top] level. I was anxious to get back as fast as I could with the Olympics around the corner, and that was a big aim for me. It felt like I was out for two years, not one. I definitely felt the pressure to get back

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Canter has reached new heights on her young horse, Lordships Graffalo

as quickly as I could. It's a tough thing to do to step away from the sport, but it's the best thing I've ever done. It's been very healthy because I'm now stricter about when I start and stop. I have a healthier relationship with the sport than before.

"Being away a lot pulls on the heartstrings, because there is definitely a feeling of guilt, but I'm now more determined when I compete to be focused and good at what I do."

Canter returned just a month after giving birth to gain her qualification for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics, where she was named as a reserve rider, and with Paris 2024 on the

horizon, the Briton feels that she has some unfinished Olympic business.

"Tokyo was one of the hardest experiences of my life. I didn't realise how mentally tough it was going to be. It was the first time they ran it with three per team and the reserve had to be available for every single discipline, in case something went wrong with another rider."

"Normally, once the competition starts, that's it, and you, the reserve rider, can sit back and relax, but in Tokyo, you had to be constantly mentally prepared to ride, knowing that you probably wouldn't, and that was quite a hard thing to do. It was an amazing experience, and I would do it again because my dream is to go to the Olympics, and the dream is alive, until it's not, when you're in a situation like that. It's a huge box not ticked for me at the moment, and a dream that I'm going to work extremely hard to fulfil next year."

SPORTSWOMEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

● Canter is shortlisted for the headline award at the Sunday Times Sportswomen of the Year awards, in association with Citi. Also shortlisted are: Tammy Beaumont (cricket), Chantelle Cameron (boxing), Hannah Cockcroft (para-athletics), Mary Earps (football), Helen Housby (netball) and

Katarina Johnson-Thompson (athletics). ● The other awards are: Team of the year; Young Sportswoman (nominees must have been 21 years old or

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younger on January 1, 2023); Citi Disability Sportswoman; Grassroots Sportswoman; Changemaker (celebrating those who have used their platforms to create change); and the Helen Rollason award for inspiration

● To vote, go to: sportswomenoftheyear.co.uk

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