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# Mark Todd

## FOURTH TIME'S A CHARM FOR BADMINTON CHAMPION!

In April 2011, New Zealand eventing legend Mark Todd rode himself into the history books at the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton Horse Trials when he notched up his fourth win at the prestigious three-day event. Show Circuit was fortunate enough to catch up with him between events to discuss his latest phenomenal achievement and his hopes for London 2012.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *What can we say...many congratulations on your fourth win at the Badminton Horse Trials! How does it feel?*

**MARK TODD:** It still hasn't sunk in! I came back into professional competition in 2000 wanting to win a big one, especially Badminton. It's a bit like a tennis player winning at Wimbledon, to actually achieve it is quite remarkable. To come back after a lay-off and to do it 31 years after my first Badminton win...it's up there with my back to back Olympic gold medals in 1984 and 1988. I feel honoured to have such a wonderful horse in NZB Land Vision and the opportunity to win this amazing event again.

When we went into the show jumping, there were around 12 riders within a rail of each other, which is incredible. It just shows the quality of horses and riders that are out there at the moment. Funnily enough, I felt relaxed about it all and I don't know why. Perhaps because I knew I

had a really good horse that jumps! At the end of the day it came down to pure horse power.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *You have ridden the course at Badminton a massive ten times. When was your first Badminton win?*

**MARK TODD:** I rode in and won my first Badminton back in 1980 aboard Southern Comfort. After that, it took me 15 years to clinch my second win and another 13-14 years after that to get my third one in 1998. I seem to spread them out a bit! Hopefully, it won't be that long until my next win though. I'd like to come back next year to have another crack at it. I'd love to win Badminton again.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *NZB Land Vision is still relatively inexperienced. Were you pleased with him?*

**MARK TODD:** NZB Land Vision is a young horse at only ten years old and Badminton was his first four-star event. He coped exceptionally well. He is a thrilling horse, very good in the dressage phase, bold in the cross country and a very good jumper. He's learning all the time. One of the most exciting things about him is that he is nowhere near to performing at his best. I'm very lucky that my sponsor NZB Bloodstock has provided me with such an amazing horse. I truly believe that in another 12 months

he will be the best horse in the world.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *You have racked up some fantastic wins since you came out of retirement. But what convinced you to get back into eventing?*

**MARK TODD:** I initially made the decision to retire as I'd simply had enough. I had lost the motivation to do all the work, although I still enjoyed competing. But after an eight-year break from the sport, I got back into it and found I was really enjoying it.

It all ended up as a bit of a dare as to whether I could get a horse in the spring of 2008 and get to the Olympics that year in Hong Kong. I gave myself six months to see if I could get myself and a horse to that level. I wasn't just doing it for the sake of it though. I knew that I wouldn't get an individual medal but felt that if I could get a useful score for the team, then I would have achieved my aim. I did it with Gandalf and then that old drive kicked in again. I decided that 17th place wasn't good enough and decided to set my sights on London 2012.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *Tell us a little bit more about NZB Land Vision. Where did you find him? What is his breeding?*

**MARK TODD:** NZB Land Vision, stable name Ben, was purchased from Oliver Townend in 2008. He's a 16.2hh grey gelding, by Danish Warmblood stallion Broadstone Landmark and out of Stonecraft Holly. With Ollie he had been the Intermediate Champion at Gatcombe in 2008. He had a few niggles that kept him out of competition last spring but ended up having a great season. He won the highly competitive 8-9 year old class at Blenheim and finished 2nd at Beoeklo. I wouldn't swap him for any horse on the circuit.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *What do you look out for when you're searching for a potential top eventer like Land Vision? What qualities do you value?*

**MARK TODD:** It does depend on whether you are looking for an Olympic level horse or not. An Olympic horse must be quite special, with bags of potential. They should have enough quality, to be able to gallop. You need that thoroughbred blood for them to be fast enough for cross country. These days, they must also move well to get the points in the dressage phase. They don't necessarily have to be a flash mover but they must move correctly and be trainable on the flat. Obviously, a good jumper that wants to clear the fences, especially in the show jumping section, is also vital. It's the same old stuff- you need a very good all rounder horse that can excel in all the phases.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *Are you training with anyone at the moment?*

**MARK TODD:** I do work with specialist British dressage rider, Charlotte Dujardin. It's easy to slip into bad habits when you're training on your own all the time. It's good to have Charlotte there keeping an eye on things and telling me if I'm doing anything wrong. It's all about fine tuning. Charlotte is great with the horses and puts forward fresh ideas. It's definitely beneficial to have another pair of eyes...what you're feeling in the saddle doesn't always match up with what things look like from the ground.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *Do you still produce your own mounts or are you content riding horses that have already been taken up a few levels?*

**MARK TODD:** I initially came out of retirement with my eye on the Beijing Olympics and London after that. I didn't have time to bring on a young horse. I had to buy ones that were already competing at a certain level with the aim of having 3-4 top horses going into London. Most of the horses that are now at four-star level were competing at two-star level before we got them.

I do have a few young horses now. This year I have three five year olds, and a couple of six and seven year olds that I'm bringing up through the grades. I enjoy producing the youngsters, it's always a lot of fun seeing them progress and improve. There is a commercial aspect as well. All of them will be for sale at some point which helps pay the bills. That goes for the more advanced horses as well. They will all be for sale after

the Olympics.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *Are there any other horses on your yard that you're particularly excited about?*

**MARK TODD:** I really like NZB Grass Valley - who is vaguely on the market at the moment. He seems to have matured into a much better horse this year. Dressage has never been his most natural phase but we have worked really hard to get him able to do everything. This year he has come back finding it all much easier and moving better.

I have one that I took over the ride on last year, called Major Milestone (stable name Milo). He's a 16.3hh 1999 chestnut gelding by thoroughbred stallion Young Convinced and out of Milestone Clover. He completed his first four-star at Burghley, ending up in 11th place. He's a very good jumper and reliable cross country, albeit a little wild! He's another one that keeps on improving. Dressage is his weakest phase... he gets quite tense. However, he seems to be settling more and more.

Another of my yard favourites is the little grey gelding NZB Regent Lad, who I started competing last year. He's a totally different type to the other horses; he's a bit Charisma-like actually. He's only 16hh but has tonnes of character and attitude. He's very smart on the flat and a very good jumper. We have some superb horses to work with, there's a lot to look forward to.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *Along with your recent win, you were on the bronze medal winning team at WEG last year. Were you pleased with that result?*

**MARK TODD:** Competing at Kentucky was something I really wanted to do as it was the first world championships I took part in back in 1978. For me, I thought it was a huge personal achievement to find myself, 32 years or so later, right back at the same position. I didn't finish in 1978 though so 2010 was an improvement!

I wasn't expecting an individual medal but I felt that as a team we had the talent and depth to be in with a chance, and so it proved. The New Zealand WEG team was a good bunch, we gelled really well. It was a great team to be involved in; we all helped each other out. We came away with the first medal of any kind that New Zealand has won since my bronze in Sydney. That was incredibly special. On top of the team medal, Andrew's individual bronze was huge for him and very well deserved. It has given the Kiwi team the lift they needed to push on.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *So, looking forward to London 2012. Do you think you could be in with the chance of taking a medal with NZB Land Vision?*

**MARK TODD:** It is my job to plan his campaign so he's at his best for London 2012. At this stage, he is still just getting mileage and experience under his belt. He's getting better and better on the flat all the time. By the time London comes around, he will be that much more secure in his dressage, cross country and show jumping. He will be fit and at his peak. We have 2-3 other possibilities as well; Land Vision isn't the only option on the yard which is a great position to be in.

**SHOW/CIRCUIT:** *How is the New Zealand eventing team looking?*

**MARK TODD:** We are seeing some very good young riders coming through. Many of them are heading to the UK to base themselves here in the lead up to the games.

I think we have the basis of a really strong team. I'm pleased that New Zealand now has the structure to nurture young talent. There are systems that were set in place a few years ago and now we have 3-4 promising young riders riding at the top levels. For a country our size, that is a huge achievement.

It's a cyclical thing as well. When Blyth Tait and I left the sport in 2000, everyone thought that things would just carry on but New Zealand eventing went into the doldrums a bit. We're out of that now, in a new cycle. We have: Blyth, Caroline, Andrew, me and some young guys as well. There's a real energy about it all. I'm really excited about the team's prospects in London. I think New Zealand will be one to watch.