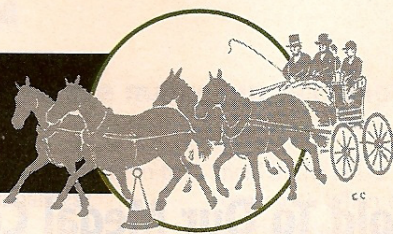


DRIVING
HORSEMAN OF THE YEAR

CHESTER



WEBER



Sara Lieser

CHESTER WEBER is a man who knows what he wants, and he knows how to go after it with focus and determination. Two years ago he suffered a humiliating incident when he went off course in the cones at the 2006 FEI World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany, after winning the dressage.

But like any good sportsman, Weber turned a negative experience into a positive learning opportunity, and this year he went to the FEI World Driving Four-In-Hand Championship in Beesd, the Netherlands, hungrier than ever. He was rewarded with an individual silver medal, a feat no U.S. driver has accomplished since the 1970s.

"[The 2006 WEG] left me with a bit of a sour taste in my mouth," said Weber. "It allowed me to be very objective in my evaluation of horses I had, my training program, what we were doing right, and what we were doing wrong. I really took a fresh look at things."

Weber examined every element of his program, starting with his horses. "I think every great horse program has one thing in common. They can cull horses and be really critical," he said. "When I was making a plan, I didn't make a plan for good horses, I made a plan for great horses."

"He's his own biggest critic," said Ed Walker, chef d'equipe to the U.S. four-in-hand team. "When he identifies a weakness, he pursues the resources that are needed to correct that weakness."

Although Weber hasn't placed lower than first in dressage since the WEG, he knew that winning the dressage wasn't enough. So as he put together the best possible team of horses, he started working with Koos de Ronde, a marathon specialist from the Netherlands and long-time friend.

"We built a better marathon on fundamentals and some different training philosophies," said Weber. "I still think my marathon has some ground to cover. We've gone from being 20 points behind the leader in the marathon to 10. If I can get within 5 or 6, that's my goal at the next World Championships."

Weber also worked on his physical and mental fitness. "I don't like to leave stones unturned. If I want to get good in the marathon, I have to be as fit as anybody out there," he said. "I don't want that to be a reason that someone beats me."

He started seeing a sports psychologist, Eva Pfaff, this summer after a third-placed finish at the CHIO in Aachen. "I don't think I'm getting out horsepowered," he said. "I think there's some mental aspect of the sport that I need to dig a little deeper and find some new ground."

And when all of that hard work paid off at the World Championships, Weber didn't allow himself much time to celebrate.

"There's some vindication of half a lifetime's work. But it's clearly the journey that's the prize, not the medal hanging around your neck," he said. "The medal is really great. It hangs in my office, and it's got some dust on it today. It's not going to win another medal sitting there. We had a big party on Sunday night after the World Championships were over. Come Monday morning, we

started working on our plan, what horses we needed and what needed to be done for 2010. I'm a really goal-oriented person."

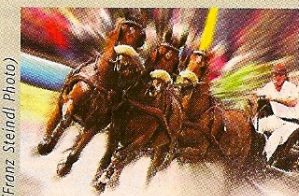
Weber's goals for 2010 are two-fold.

His personal goal is to drive a team that goes clear in the cones at every show.

"This summer we got really close to a gold medal, but I wasn't able to keep the pressure on

Ijsbrand [Chardon] on Sunday with a clear round. If I'd done that, who knows what he would have done," said Weber.

Germany's Michael Freund, who has trained Weber for the past 10 years, emphasized the importance of the cones. "You need a clear round in the cones. I drove at 11 or 12 world championships, and I hit one cone in this time. In the cones, you need a feeling for the



(Franz Steindl Photo)

PERSONAL PROFILE

Age: 33

Hometown: Ocala, Fla.

Farm: Live Oak Stud

Wife: My Elisabeth Weber

Horses: Jamaica (18, Dutch Warmblood), Grumus (12, International Heavy Warmblood), Parava (12, Dutch Warmblood), Rolex W (12, Dutch

Warmblood), Senate (9, Dutch Warmblood) and Boy W (9, Dutch Warmblood).

Support Team: Assistant trainer Olof Larsson, head groom Taren Lester, and assistant grooms Malin Zimmerman and Caroline Karlsson.

On Jamaica being named USEF Farnam/Platform Horse Of The Year: "Within the sport people do know the horses, but it's always been hard to get recognition outside the sport," said Chester Weber. "Our horses work as hard as any dressage horse or jumping horse or Saddlebred, or whatever discipline they do. I feel like Jamaica's win was finally giving a driving horse his just honor."

2008 COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Individual silver—FEI World Driving Four-In-Hand Championship (the Netherlands).

1st—CAI-A Riesenbeck (Germany) four-in-hand horse.

3rd—CHIO Aachen (Germany) four-in-hand horse.

1st—USEF National Championship (Fla.) four-in-hand horse.

1st—Sunshine State CAI (Fla.) four-in-hand horse.

1st—Garden State CDE (N.J.) advanced four-in-hand horse.

time and distance. It's important that the horses are light in the hand and nice to drive, but for the distance and speed, this is a thing where you must get this feeling. I think this moment will come soon for Chester."

As Weber has become a leader in the sport, he's also broadened his outlook, and now he wants more than an individual medal.

"He's really become our primary promoter of the sport in the U.S. at this point," said Young. "In anticipation of WEG 2010 he felt very strongly that we needed a program for developing four-in-hand drivers, not only for the team but also to have at least three individuals compete. He's been the promoter of the developing drivers program. In his maturation process, he's looking at a larger picture of the sport in general."

"He's committed to the sport," agreed Heather Walker, a combined driving event organizer and U.S. Equestrian Federation Driving Committee member. "He does more than drive. I had him judge at my show just after he got his license in 2006, and he was one of the best officials to work with that I've ever had."

"I hope Chester continues in our sport. He's a leader," said Freund. "He's not only a competitor, but he organizes a big event, the Live Oak competition. He works on the driving committee. He tries to make our sport more transparent and interesting. He works to get more spectators. Our sport is so small, and we need people to lead so the sport can get more attention." ▀