

# Jonathan Agnew



Every now and then, if you are very lucky, you witness a sporting feat that renders you speechless. On my very first day of archery duty at London

2012, I watched an Italian called Michele Frangilli prepare to shoot the last arrow of the men's final. As the large digital clock clicked down towards zero Frangilli knew he had to score a perfect 10 – a bull's eye in darts – to win the gold medal. Anything less would not do. Bang! Perfect! My jaw hit the floor.

Last week I watched another astonishing victory performed under the most intense pressure. This time it was my first foray into equestrianism proper, when I found myself in Caen for the World Equestrian Games. Charlotte Dujardin, who with her horse Valegro stole our hearts in the dressage arena in London, trotted in knowing that only a top display in the freestyle would beat the German who had gone before her. Not only did Charlotte and Valegro rise to the challenge and take gold, they set a new world record in the process.

Reporting on an entirely foreign sport is a nerve-wracking business. You have so many questions, yet worry about asking them for fear of sounding stupid. Well-meaning people present you to individuals you have never heard of, who turn out to be legends

of their particular discipline. All the time it is a battle to establish enough understanding in order to broadcast confidently on the radio.

Happily, equestrianism is a most welcoming sport. I walked the cross country course with Ian Stark and Mike Tucker, who explained every nuance of every jump. We bumped into gold medalist Richard Meade and his son Harry who, tragically, introduced me to the harsh reality of working with horses. After wishing Harry good luck and then celebrating his clear round came the news that his horse, Wild Lone, had collapsed and died. Such is the bond, I do not know how a rider ever gets over that.

Back to the dressage and my favourite moment came not from the competition itself, but as Charlotte and Valegro completed their lap of honour. Waving happily to the crowd, Charlotte suddenly let him go. It was like a Ferrari roaring away from a standing start, yet fluid, effortless and joyful. So blown away was I by that spectacular exit that my first riding lesson is booked for next week.

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