

King's Colourful History

'Shoot that horse!'

A story is told about young township equestrians who developed riding skills in their teens eventing at local fairs. Equestrian sport was not just for the wealthy, although prominent names figured in its development.



Encouraged by the Toronto North York Hunt and Toronto Eglinton Hunt, members who enjoyed the open meadows and gentle hills for traditional riding to the hounds, both human and equine athletes gained stamina and confidence needed in the more formal disciplines of Olympic trials.

In 1956, after Australia, host to the summer Olympics, banned unquarantined horses, Sweden stepped in to offer its hospitality. Chef de mission, Charles Baker, riders John Rumble, Jim Elder and Brian Herbinson boarded a DC3 cargo plane with 3 horses, Cilroy, Colleen and Tara, for the 18-hour flight to Britain. They planned to train at the Duke of Beaufort's Badminton estate several weeks before going on to Stockholm.

Turbulence over the Atlantic caused one horse to panic, kicking its temporary stall to splinters and frightening the other horses. The pilot beckoned to Baker and handed him a revolver: "Shoot that horse unless it calms down." What to do? A horse ready for the Olympics was an irreplaceable champion! Then someone said, "If you hold up the tail, a horse will be so annoyed, it won't notice the bumps."

The men took turns holding the tail, finally tying it up to a cargo loop, and arrived safely in the UK. In Stockholm the team bested the 3-day grueling endurance test, winning the bronze medal, a first for Canada.

From an oral history in the King Township Archives
www.kingtownshiphistoricalsociety.com