

Two Years of Preparation for the Olympic Games Culminates on August 11 at Hong Kong GC

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August 11, 2008 was the culmination of 2½ years of planning and works in preparation for the Olympic Equestrian Cross Country Event at the Hong Kong Golf Club. Leaving my residence at 5 a.m., I was greeted by a typical Hong Kong summer morning of heat, humidity and rain-fall. Just the type of conditions that had been prepared for in the planning of the Olympic Event. The day began with our normal morning briefing at 5:30 a.m. with the various course superintendents, assistants, equipment manager, and the equestrian supervisor and his staff. These people and myself were the only staff members that had been granted Olympic credentials for the day due to very strict security reasons. All other golf course maintenance staff members enjoyed a day off away from work. After the briefing, everyone headed out to the venue for security clearance and admittance. After 6 am a staff member could leave the venue, but was not permitted to re-enter as the staff security entrance was closed. The superintendent and assistant for their particular course had the responsibility of monitoring their course greens while the Event was held. All greens had been roped off, but with 18,000 people attending, I was a bit apprehensive about people being curious and wandering onto the putting surfaces. With very little green space available to the public in Hong Kong, we had concerns that many of the attendees would treat the Event as a day in a public park. Each of the Equestrian team members had specific duties related to maintaining the track and jumps in the best possible condition during the event. Jumps that were prone to divoting by the horses had a team of two individuals stationed at the jump site. After a horse and rider went thru, the team quickly went out to retrieve the divots and quickly pack them back in place with hand tampers. With the competitors going off at three minute intervals, quickness was a necessity.

The first of the spectators arrived and

entered the security area beginning at 6:30 a.m. Due to limited highway access, a shuttle service had been set up from a train stop located at the Shatin Jockey Club site. This shuttle service transported 90 per cent of the spectators that attended the event. The Jockey Club Shatin site also served as the venue for the other Equestrian events that were held during

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the week with Dressage and Show Jumping events being staged at the Shatin site. The shuttle service was set up such that spectators were bused to and dropped off at the car park of the golf club. A temporary walkway or hexi deck had been installed to create a hard surfaced walkway from the parking lot, traversing across three golf course fairways and eventually ending at one of the golf course nursery site. The nursery had been transformed into a security entrance similar to the security that is in use at most airports today. Although I was a bit apprehensive of the logistics, the security area was able to process approximately 18,000 spectators between 6:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. My visual observations bore out the fact that a large number of the attendees were non-Asians. It appeared that Equestrian events are not of great interest to the Asian culture compared to the open interest. The Asians derive more pleasure from betting on the horse compared to equestrian events. The major form of gambling in Hong Kong is betting on horses. During the racing season the Hong Kong Jockey Club holds races on Wednesday nights and weekend afternoons.

An important attraction of the Cross Country event was the opportunity for the Asian people to get onto and enjoy the

open spaces afforded by the golf courses. Hong Kong has a limited amount of open green spaces such as parks, and very few homes have green spaces. The Hong Kong Golf Club is located in the most rural area of Hong Kong called the New Territories. Traveling south from the New Territories towards Hong Kong the amount of open land and greenery diminishes, quickly giving way to commercial developments and high-rise apartment buildings and Chinese flats or small homes. Any type of open land is at a premium no matter how small. For many people, this afforded them a chance to spend some time walking on grass and getting close to nature.

The Equestrian Event itself is one of the 28 sports in the Olympic Games and is made up of three disciplines: Dressage, Jumping and Cross Country. There are both individual and team competitions in all disciplines, thus a total of six gold medals are awarded. The Cross-Country Track covered 5.7 kilometers with a total of 29 jumps. The track was somewhat shorter than in previous Olympics due to weather concerns. The heat and humidity of a typical Hong Kong summer day was of concern to all involved with the Equestrian events, thus the track was designed to be shorter than in other Games. The weather really was not an issue as the day was cloudy with a light rain, so heat and humidity never became a problem.

I was able to basically spend the day moving around the venue taking photos and watching the competition at various jump sites. The water jumps provided the most interest as these jumps provided the most difficulty for both horse and rider. Seventy competitors were sent off at 3-minute intervals during the competition. The first rider to have a problem and fall from her mount was an American girl at the Birdcages jumps. The Birdcages did not appear to be a difficult jump site, but

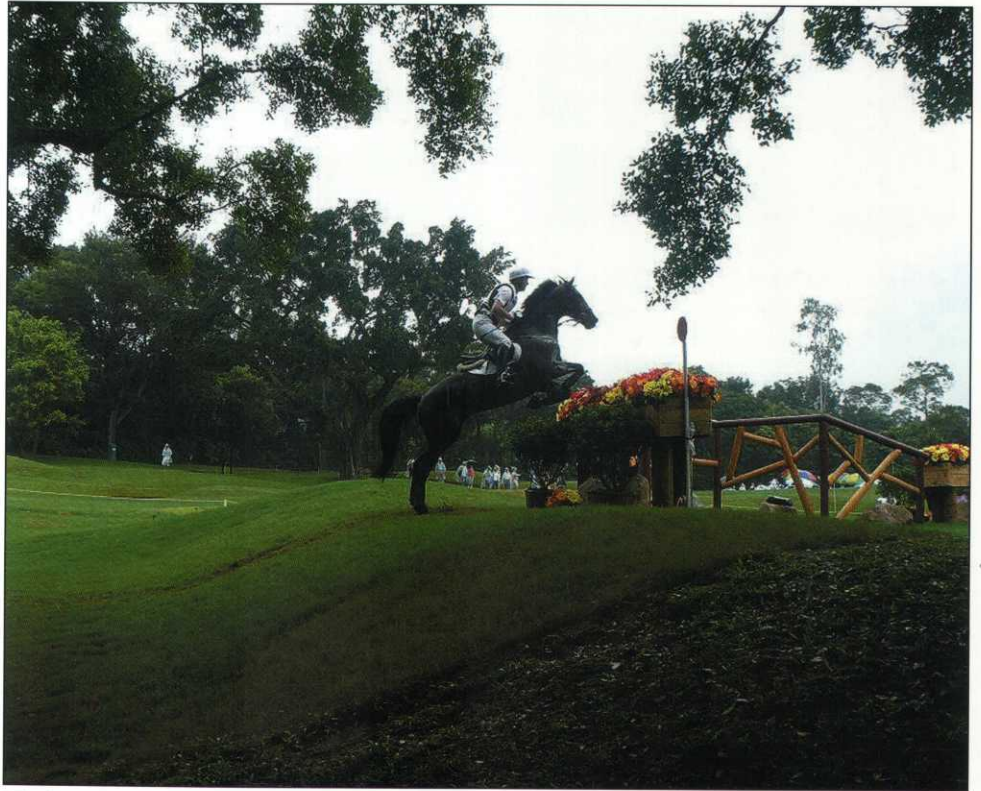
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Equestrian-

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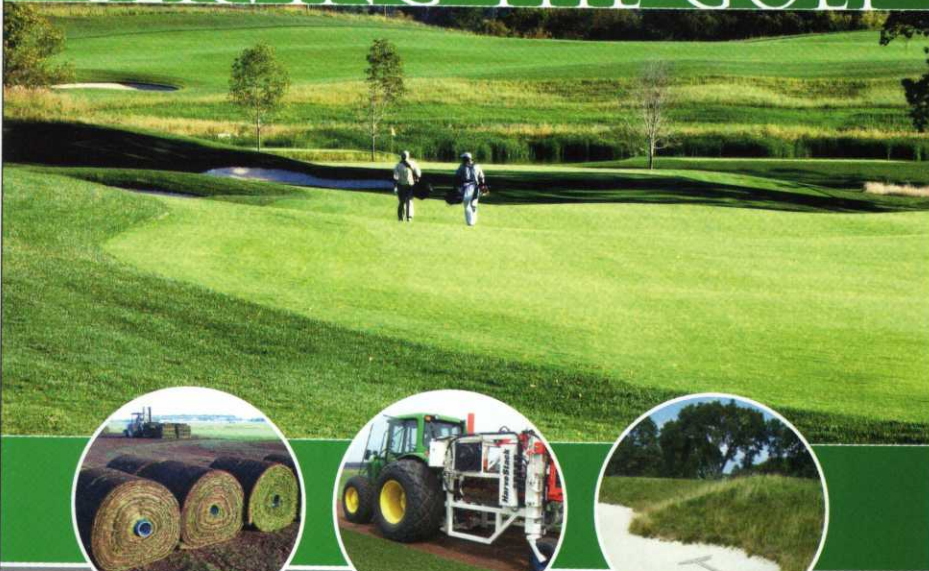
as the horse landed after clearing the jump he stumbled and the rider came off leading to a disqualification. Unfortunately, the American team did not fare too well in the Cross Country event, with the German team finishing on top. As the last competitors were making their way through the venue, the intermittent rain turned into a steady rain and finished with a significant downpour. This served to clear the venue area rather quickly as the spectators headed out looking to catch the shuttles to return home.

After a lot of planning and hard work, the event itself went off with a minimal amount of problems and the day and the Event was deemed a rousing success. Now the real work and challenge would begin: returning the three golf courses back into playing condition as quickly as possible and preparing for the 50th Hong Kong Open in November, setting the stage for another Adventure in Life.



The Equestrian Cross Country event for this year's Olympic Games was held at China's Hong Kong Golf Club. MGCSA member and Hole Notes columnist Randy Witt is the Courses Manager at Hong Kong Golf Club.

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