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The Vermont Summer Festival has a rich history in playing host to Olympians both before and after medals were draped around their necks.

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Photo: Andrew Ryback Photography



The Vermont Summer Festival

A Training Ground for Olympians

By Lindsay Brock

When the news broke this spring that the Vermont Summer Festival was canceled for the first time in nearly 30 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, fond memories of the event flooded in from all corners of the world. From adult riders who grew up showing at the base of the southern Vermont mountains, to entire barns whose members looked back on family-friendly experiences, it's clear that the Vermont Summer Festival has left its mark on the show jumping community.

One reputation that the Vermont Summer Festival has proudly carried through the years is that of being a place where talent thrives. Whether it's up-and-coming riders getting their first taste of grand prix competition or young horses stepping up to the big time, Harold Beebe Farm in East Dorset, Vt., has been a show where athletes from around the globe have chased ribbons, show-ring experience, and even Olympic glory.

The Vermont Summer Festival has a rich history in playing host to Olympians both before and after medals were draped around their necks. One of the most popular is Kent Farrington. Hailing from Chicago, IL, Farrington notched grand prix wins in Vermont in 2006 and again in 2008 riding Up Chiqui. That same horse, standing at just under 16 hands, carried him to an appearance at the 2008 World Cup™ Final in Gothenburg, Sweden.

While he piloted a seasoned mount to the top, Farrington noted the Vermont Summer Festival's appeal for developing the future stars of his sport.

"It's a great place to bring up young horses and young riders who are stepping up to the grand prix level," said Farrington. "It's a laid-back feeling there, which is much different than a lot of the other big circuits, and that makes it welcoming to those horses and riders."

Ten years after claiming his first grand prix title in Vermont, Farrington now regularly represents the U.S. Equestrian Team at the top level and earned a team silver medal at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games in Brazil.

While some U.S. riders used the Vermont Summer Festival and its internationally known course designers, including the likes of Alan Wade (IRL), Anthony d'Ambrosio (USA), and Michel Vaillancourt (CAN), to prepare for Olympic and other major games appearances, others already had their medals to their names when they headed to Vermont.

Norman Dello Joio, originally from New York City, won an individual bronze medal at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain. Fifteen years later, in 2007, he won two Vermont grand prix events. Fun fact: Dello Joio's decision to head north to Vermont was an easy one because his in-laws lived up the road from the Vermont Summer Festival in Manchester, VT.

Kent Farrington and Titus. David Mullinix

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Still a familiar face at the Vermont Summer Festival, Joe Fargis of Middleburg, VA, won both individual and team gold at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics aboard the iconic Touch of Class and was also part of the silver medal team four years later at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. Fargis could be seen coaching students in schooling rings of Vermont as recently as last year. However, he was in the tack himself to win a \$10,000 Welcome Stake in 2007 and last competed in a grand prix event in 2016.

Rounding out the list of who's who among Vermont Summer Festival winners, 2004 Athens Olympic team gold medalist Peter Wylde of Medfield, MA, enjoyed two grand prix victories at the 2013 Vermont Summer Festival.

"I tailored my plan that year based on experience, and I had a great experience in Vermont," said Wylde. "I love the grounds and the lay-out. I am also always happy to go to a show where course designers like Alan Wade are building because his courses are consistently excellent."

The Vermont Summer Festival is a favorite among U.S. competitors, but also attracts international talent. Manuel Torres, a five-time Olympian for Colombia, first competed at the Vermont Summer Festival in 2013. He liked the show so much, he made the trip north again in 2014, bringing 10 horses, several working students, and his family along to enjoy the Vermont charm and the great competition. That year, he closed the circuit with a bang by winning the pinnacle \$50,000 Grand Prix in a fairytale ending aboard a horse fittingly named Cinderella.

"We love the horse show!" said Torres of his time in Vermont. "Look around you, it's fantastic! It's a great horse show for the family, the courses are challenging, and the prize money is great."

Kevin Babington, who represented Ireland at the 2004 Athens Olympics where he placed fourth individually riding Carling King, has also picked up wins at the Vermont Summer Festival. In 2008, he and Caracas 49 topped a \$10,000 Welcome Stake.

New Zealand's Kirk Webby made a name for himself at the Vermont Summer Festival with a grand prix victory riding Sitah, the horse he would go on to ride in the 2008 Beijing Olympics the following year. His Kiwi teammate at the 2008 Olympics, Sharn Wordley, finished third in the same class.

"The Vermont Summer Festival is like a vacation for us," said Webby, who can often be spotted with his wife and two children. "We love it there. The management is so nice, and it's a beautiful part of the world to be during the summer months."

Webby was the one to beat last year at the 2019 Vermont Summer Festival, bringing home two grand prix wins riding Brando du Rouet.



Peter Wylde and Lewin 5. David Mullinix

“The Vermont Summer Festival represents a very special piece of history for horse showing in North America for so many people”

John Ammerman