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Trainer Kjersten Elliott, groom Mackenzie Young, horse owner Rowan O'Riley, U.S. Para Dressage Chef d'Equipe Michel Assouline and Paralympian Rebecca Hart.  
PHOTO COURTESY ROWAN O'RILEY

## U.S. PARALYMPIC DRESSAGE TEAM STRIKES GOLD AT GAMES IN PARIS

BY KARA PINATO SCRO/JUMP MEDIA

In a landmark result, the U.S. Paralympic Dressage Team stamped its place in the history books by earning the gold medal at the conclusion of team competition at the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris, France.

This marked the first-ever team gold for the U.S. Para Dressage Team at a Paralympic Games and the second consecutive paralympic team medal, following its team bronze at the Paralympic Games in Tokyo, Japan.

The three team athletes included Rebecca Hart of Wellington with Rowan O'Riley's Floratina, Roxanne Trunnell of Royal Palm Beach with Karin Flint's Fan Tastico H, and Fiona Howard of Boston with Diamond Dunes, owned by Dressage Family LLC and Hof Kaselmann.

The athletes also brought home individual medals, with Hart taking gold in the Grade III Individual test and the FEI Grand Prix Freestyle. Howard scored two additional gold medals in the Grade II Individual test and the FEI Grand Prix Freestyle. Additionally, Trunnell finished with silver in the Grade I Individual test, while Wellington's Kate Shoemaker and

Vianne, owned by NorCordia USA, captured the bronze medal in the Grade IV FEI Grand Prix Freestyle.

All sports require a team effort to propel athletes to the world stage, but equestrian sport has one unique differentiator — the horse owners. The costs associated with producing, caring for and competing top horses are steep, particularly as the U.S. does not provide any government funding for equestrian programs. As a result, it can be challenging for athletes to sustain excellence at the elite level without the partnership of an owner or sponsor. This is especially true for para dressage athletes, who often have significant day-to-day expenses related to therapy, medications or extra care.

Thankfully, the sport has a dedicated and passionate group of individuals who share the aspirations of successfully representing the country at the highest international levels. These individuals have offered their support by way of horses to many of U.S. elite athletes and have maintained years-long relationships with them to ensure consistent competitive excellence.



Paralympian Rebecca Hart with Rowan O'Riley, owner of Hart's mount Floratina.  
PHOTO COURTESY ROWAN O'RILEY

Among them are paralympic horse owners Karin Flint and Rowan O'Riley, who spoke recently about their experiences at the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris and the vital role they play in helping the U.S. equestrian teams sustain prominence on the world stage.

O'Riley, of Boston's Fair Sky Farm, owns Hart's paralympic mount, Floratina. "It's so rewarding to represent our country, and I'm so proud to wear the team jackets and to be together with the team contingent," O'Riley said. "It's such a thrill to see the U.S. flag go up the pole. We also have a friendly and competitive relationship with our counterparts in other countries."

O'Riley noted that it is an extremely time-consuming and expensive task to own horses for U.S. equestrian teams. "The flip side is that it's an incredibly rewarding passion project," she said. "I love the travel, and I love the whole experience. It has added a lot to my life." >





# Equestrian Season Preview



Fiona Howard, Rebecca Hart and Roxanne Trunnell with their medals. © DEVYN TRETHERWEY/US EQUESTRIAN

She invited others to get involved in supporting the para dressage program.

“U.S. Equestrian’s para dressage program receives funding from the USET Foundation, and that has helped the program grow and improve,” O’Riley said. “Over the past five years in particular, the USET Foundation has helped fund training for emerging and elite athletes, and Chef d’Equipe Michel [Assouline] has produced a handbook for trainers to learn about training para athletes. The para dressage program now has a high-performance pathway that helps guide emerging athletes toward the elite level. That didn’t exist before. This is a direct result of funding from the USET Foundation and vision and insight from Michel, who saw what could be improved in this young sport in the U.S.”

Karin Flint of Wellington owns Trunnell’s 2024 paralympic mount Fan Tastico H, as well as her Tokyo mount Dolton. She enjoyed her experiences in Paris.

“I kept saying, ‘Pinch me! Is this real?’ It was so special and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” she recalled. “The venue

was wonderful, and the experience will be in my heart for the rest of my life. I was proud to be there for my country, for my trainer and for my rider. I’m blessed that I can do this.”

She particularly enjoyed the team attitude on display.

“In the stables, it was such a loving, warm and happy environment. It was a great atmosphere for everyone and very encouraging because all the riders understand the hard work it takes to get there. When the athletes had fabulous rides, the other athletes shared in the celebrations,” Flint recalled.

Flint was proud to do her part to support U.S. athletes on the world stage.

“I always wanted to represent my country — I’m very patriotic — so ownership is a fulfilling dream,” she said. “The riders are a group of people striving to represent their country in the best way, and they have all worked so hard. I’ve seen the ups and downs and tears. When it doesn’t go right, you feel it with them.”

Winning the gold medal was just the icing on the cake.

“In the team competition in Paris, when the last team score was tallied, and we knew the U.S. had won the gold medal, the joy we felt was so fabulous. It was really wonderful. I love seeing other people happy. We were sad when the Paralympics ended,” Flint said.

Like O’Riley, she urged others to get involved in supporting U.S. equestrian sport.

“The USET Foundation provides funding for USEF’s para dressage program,” Flint said. “Everyone knows it takes a lot of money to run a program like this, so if you love horses and love what you see, then I hope you will contribute whatever you can. We couldn’t have done what we did in Paris without the USET Foundation’s support. If you’re a participant in any of the wonderful USET Foundation or USEF programs, it’s great to support them.”

To show support for the U.S. equestrian teams, visit the USET Foundation at [www.uset.org](http://www.uset.org).

Roxanne Trunnell with Karin Flint at the USET Foundation’s Victory in Versailles benefit in Wellington. © LUXECINÉ

