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Andrew Driffield

Sponsorship Prospectus

Dual Virtus Global Games equestrian gold medallist Andrew Driffield had long campaigned for a live competition at the event. Now he's setting his sights on the Paralympics.

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Andrew Driffield has always exceeded expectations. Specialists told his mum, Libby Rodgers, when he was a youngster that he was best suited to a sheltered workshop doing repetitive tasks. He was always wandering off, so Libby put him on a horse to ensure he wouldn't get lost.

Andrew had an amazing "natural seat", and the mares he rode knew they needed to educate and protect him. He couldn't read or write, but boy could he ride.

Success as a rider allowed Andrew to grow in confidence, socialise, and develop physical skills. Now, as a grown man and decorated Australian representative, Andrew needs a platform that offers the opportunity to reach out for funding, but also to generate awareness of the lack of equality in the pathway available to elite athletes/riders with an intellectual impairment. They seek selection into the Paralympics and the chance to represent their country on the world stage.

The incredible results from the Virtus Global Games 2023 in Vichy, France, provided proof to Equestrian Australia that these riders are capable of winning gold medals for their country. This creates a win-win situation – increased government funding to the sport while encouraging other riders with their disability to have a go.

Adele Severs wrote a great story for Equestrian Life Magazine (Issue 91, July 2023), "Golden Games for Virtus Trailblazers", which provides great information on the requirements to reintroduce intellectually disabled to Para competitions, not the least the Paralympics (<https://shorturl.at/suBS9>).



Andrew was the only Australian rider to make his final qualifying ride when the IPC banned all athletes with an intellectual disability from the 2004 Paralympic Games in Greece. He waited 23 years for his opportunity to ride for Australia again, and his efforts in France vindicated his patience and ability.

As the double gold medallist at the Virtus Global Games 2023 in Vichy, Andrew must attend all the Australian Concourse Para Equestrian Dressage International competitions (CPEDI) as Equestrian Australia has now included the Virtus tests, for the Intellectually disabled riders, enabling Andrew to display his abilities as a rider and competitor alongside the Para riders, in front of the Para selectors

These international qualifying events require entry fees, transport for horse and rider, and their accommodation. Fuel and travel expenses don't come cheap. The trip to the Sydney International Equestrian Centre from h costs about \$2,500. The other competitions are at Boneo Park on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, Brisbane, and Willinga Park on the NSW south coast. These events are held twice and sometimes three times a year. At present, Andrew leases a 17-year-old horse who may be too old to travel, or his owner may not approve it. So, he needs to buy his own, younger, educated horse, who will allow him to be competitive at the top level.

Excerpts from "Golden Games for Virtus Trailblazers" by Adele Severs published in Equestrian Life Magazine (Issue 91, July 2023, (<https://shorturl.at/gtQ56>))

"Imagine travelling halfway around the world, being matched with a foreign horse, and then – with just a few rides under your belt – heading into the international competition arena to represent your country. That's exactly what Australia's Virtus Global Games Equestrian Team did – and they also brought home the gold!



“It was a long road to France for Australia’s Virtus Global Games Equestrian Team. Andrew Driffield, Sarah Sherwood, and Sui Watts have been training towards the goal of representing their country on the world stage for many years, and 2023 was the year it finally happened.

“As the world’s largest elite sports event for athletes with an intellectual impairment, the Virtus Global Games brought together thousands of athletes from around the globe across a range of different sports – with equestrian added as a live event for the first time at this sixth edition.

“Following a monumental fundraising effort spearheaded by Heath Ryan and Mary Nitschke of Ryans Horses, the team arrived in Vichy, France, and had just a matter of days to acclimatise and match athletes with horses. With only a few rides aboard their new equine partners before competition began – and competing against nations such as France and Spain on their own horses – it was a big ask for the Aussies. Well, the determination that came next blew away not only their families and support team, but also the entire Australian equestrian community.

“Ultimately, it was team gold for Australia, followed by individual gold for Andrew and Sui, and individual silver for Sarah. Six tests on borrowed horses, and each performed with a level of focus, skill and determination that delivered impressive scores and accolades to match.”

It’s the best feeling you can have ... it’s just unbelievable. – Andrew Driffield

Andrew had never given up on his lifelong dream. Virtus Global Games gold was a long time in the making for the 49-year-old. He has campaigned through Sport Inclusion Australia for live equestrian events at the Games for more than 20 years. Previously, they were video competitions.

With live equestrian events included for the first time this year, it was only fitting that Andrew forged ahead, gained selection, and brought home two gold medals. In the team competition – the Grade IV Intro B (III) – Andrew scored 71.319% for a close second and contributed to the team’s historic gold medal. In the individual Grade IV Novice A (III) class, he claimed the gold with an impressive score of 71.437%. Andrew was also named as the Australian flag bearer for the closing ceremony.

“When we won, I was sobbing, we all started crying,” Andrew said. “It was just unbelievable, and probably a relief as well. [Before competition] we had two rides per day, so we had four rides on our horses and then went out and won. It’s the best feeling you can have ... it’s just unbelievable.”

Despite a team gold medal in the bag, Andrew wasn’t about to rest on his laurels the next day for the individual competition.

“I still went out to really compete, I didn’t relax or say, ‘Oh well I’ll just take it easy because I’m a gold medallist.’ I went out and really rode the horse.

“After it all had finished and we were at the stables, we knew Sui had won the individual gold medal [in her division], and Sarah and I were waiting for our results. And when Jenny [Carroll – Chef d’Équipe] said, ‘gold ... silver, gold’, my reaction was, ‘are you joking or are you serious?’ I just could not believe it!

“The support from all around Australia was unreal. It was really great. We thank everybody so much for getting us there.”

Andrew now seeks long-term sponsorship to achieve his dream of representing Australia at the Paralympics. The initial target is \$30,000 and a fuel card would be an absolute bonus. With major events in February 2024, Andrew needs your help now. Andrew’s mum Libby Rodgers is also his manager. She and Andrew seek a positive two-way relationship with sponsors.

If you think you can assist, or you seek more information, please contact Libby Rodgers via esrodgers@bigpond.com

We do not seek charity. We seek a solid two-way relationship with sponsors. Australians are charitable by nature, and we offer opportunities in return for your support.

