

2004 Snowbound

In the Mexico City Olympics of 1968, Snowbound helped Bill Steinkraus achieve a goal that had eluded U.S. horsemen for well over half a century: an individual Olympic Gold Medal. There had been team Golds and individual Silvers, but never an individual Gold.

The horse that changed all that was an unlikely candidate to do so. Cast off as a temperamental, chronically unsound California racehorse, Snowbound (a 1958 foal by Hail Victory out of Gay Alvena) was bred to jump as well as to run. However, nobody gave him a chance to prove it until he caught the eye of Show Jumping Hall of Famer Barbara Worth as a hunter prospect. He'd hardly jumped a show-ring fence when he was spotted by a major team patron, John Galvin, and purchased as a gift for his daughter, USET dressage star Patricia.

Loaned to the USET as a jumper candidate, Snowbound showed remarkable precocity and debuted briefly with the team in 1964. By the following year he had become a solid anchor for the Nations' Cup team, jumping double clear rounds to help win in London and Dublin and twice more in North America. To top off the year he also won the Grand Prix of New York. In 1966 and 1967 he only got better, despite physical problems, and in 1968 he truly put it all together, jumping double clears to help win all the major European Nations' Cups for the U.S. By the Olympics, he had put together an astonishing string of 15 clear Nations' Cup rounds in 16 attempts!

In the first round of the Mexico City Olympics, he came up with the performance of his life, jumping one of only two clear rounds, against the best in the world, over one of the most difficult Games courses ever seen. In the second round, over even larger fences, he incurred a single knockdown while struggling to clear an oxer whose dimensions now exceed FEI limits. He reinjured a tendon and had to jump the last two fences on three legs...and his heart...but the Gold was his!

Snowbound seemed to heal well and, returning to competition in 1970 and part of 1971, turned in some brilliant performances while preparing to defend his title at Munich in 1972. However, he remained injury-prone. In the Games he failed to qualify for the second round, and afterwards was retired to the Galvin farm outside of Dublin.

Asked for a final assessment, Bill Steinkraus replied, "I only need a single statement: If my very life depended on jumping a clear round over the toughest, most technical jumper course I can possibly imagine, the horse I would want to be riding would be Snowbound at his best."

