

## Dominican Hoofbeats

The 2003 Pan American Games, held August 1-17 in the Dominican Republic, are qualifying events for the 2004 Olympic Games. We visited with a top local Dominican equestrienne to see what island life is all about.

### By Summer Best

Dressage medallist Yvonne Losos de Muniz hasn't had a real vacation in three years.

There's just been no time for it. Day in and day out, this tall, graceful equestrienne wakes up early, works diligently all day and pushes nonstop toward her life goal: to be one of the top 10 dressage riders in the world.

### Pan American Jumper

How's that for ambition?

At the rate Yvonne is going, she could very well reach that lofty goal. In 2002, Yvonne won the dressage individual gold medal at the Central American Games, and at the 2003 Pan American Games, Yvonne won the individual bronze medal in dressage, along with helping her country, the Dominican Republic, nearly win the bronze as a team.

"We were fourth as a team, missing the team bronze by just ½ of a percent!" she says. "We were ecstatic. Two years ago, we were praying that we could have one individual in the top 12. Now look at us!"

Yvonne, who grew up in Kenya, Africa, and later trained in Germany and Canada, is a show jumper and a dressage rider, but her current focus is dressage.

"I won't quit jumping, but my future is dressage," she says. "What it meant for our country to win the first equestrian medal in the Pan American Games was huge. It was definitely worth not jumping for a little while."

### Dominican Home Yvonne Losos de Muniz

Even though Yvonne hasn't had an official vacation in three years, many would argue that her home itself is a vacation paradise. Yvonne and her husband, Eduardo Muniz, own an exclusive hideaway farm in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, on 16 acres of carefully manicured, rolling land on the outskirts of the city. They call the farm "Las Marismas," which, when translated, refers to a type of smooth grass that grows near rivers. The family also owns a 50-acre farm in Vankleek Hill, Ontario, Canada, where they own nearly 40 additional horses.

Dominican vacation location or not, Yvonne will assure you that

maintaining a large-scale, top-quality horse facility in Santo Domingo is no cakewalk. Plus, she has a killer show schedule that includes traveling and training in the United States and much of Europe for up to 6 months out of every year.

“ Each morning, I’m typically up at 6, then have four to five horses to ride before noon,” Yvonne says. “And it’s year-round. I have a great indoor arena that’s 25 degrees (Celsius) even when it’s hot outside. There are some days the humidity is bad, but the heat isn’t so bad. There’s nothing that stops us from training every day. Not even rain!”

Yvonne’s afternoons are filled with coaching the riders in her individualized working student program, in addition to spending time with Andalusians raised at Las Marismas, routine farm maintenance, and care of the 35 horses residing there. Plus, every six weeks or so, Yvonne’s trainer, Diederik Wigmans of the Netherlands, flies in to spend several days coaching. Diederik is a former international dressage competitor who has coached dressage greats such as Anky Van Grunsven.

Equine Care  
Lauren Hough

Yvonne considers herself “fanatical” about equine care.

“ Everybody thinks I’m totally neurotic,” she says. “To me, farrier and feed come first. I bring in T.J. Jones from Wellington (Florida) to do my shoeing, and my vet bills have gone straight down. After feed and farrier, I look at maintenance and training.”

Her philosophy is to create an environment as natural as possible for the horses in her care.

“These are grazing animals,” Yvonne says. “I don’t pound my horses all day. I don’t believe in stable rest. They have to move and walk, even if they are on three legs. We bring them down from a competition slowly. Then we turn them in the field... my horses are moving 6 out of 12 hours of their day.”

While many horse owners begin pampering their horses as competitions arrive, Yvonne says she turns her best mare out in the pasture the week before her biggest shows of the year.

“ Truthfully, there have been times in the past when I’ve done the opposite,” she explains. “I’ve tried to treat them so they don’t break, and it was 10 times worse. I had problems all the time! So now, I treat them all the same – from the top horses to the bottom ones just beginning.”

feed room

For the actual health care of her horses, Yvonne is a hands-on guardian.

“ I do a lot of basics,” she says. “I’m not a vet, but I’ve had to learn. For any lameness, colic or large problems, I find someone else.”

Yvonne pulls a lot of expertise and experience from her father, Dr. Joe Losos, a leading expert in tropical diseases in domestic animals. In the past, Dr. Losos has held the most senior public health position in Canada.

“ He’s my lifeline,” Yvonne says of her father. “Anything sneezes, I call him.”

#### The Future

Yvonne’s goal of becoming one of the top 10 dressage riders in the world might take a few years, but first, the 2004 Olympic Games, to be held in Athens, Greece, beckon. Watch for Yvonne and her 12-year-old Dutch mare, Inatana Las Marismas, at major dressage competitions around the world in the coming months.

Yvonne and her husband, Dominican Republic native Edwardo Muniz, have two children, Toshimi and Sylvia. Edwardo is actively involved with the International Equestrian Federation, which oversees equestrian sports worldwide.