



TREVOR BREEN ON HORSES, HEART & HARD WORK

FROM AN ALMOST POETIC BOND WITH HIS HORSES TO HIS UNWAVERING MINDSET DURING A DIFFICULT RECOVERY, IRISH SHOWJUMPING RIDER TREVOR BREEN IS A TOP ATHLETE WITH A UNIQUE STORY.

A SPORTSMAN KNOWN FOR HIS REMARKABLE SUCCESS AND DEEP CONNECTION WITH HIS HORSES, BREEN NEEDS LITTLE INTRODUCTION. IN THIS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH HORSE TIMES - WE DIVE INTO THE WORLD OF THE MAN, THE RIDER, AND THE HORSEMAN. HE SHARES HIS "NO PAIN, NO GAIN" APPROACH TO REHABILITATION, THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF RUNNING A BUSINESS WITH HIS WIFE, AND THE SURPRISING SUPERSTITION THAT HAS FOLLOWED HIM FROM THE RUGBY PITCH TO THE SHOWJUMPING ARENA.



WHILE WE KNOW HIM AS A HUSBAND, FATHER, BREEDER, AND CHAMPION, DISCOVERING HIS PERSONAL SIDE AND WHAT TRULY MAKES HIM WHO HE IS, IS A VERY REWARDING EXPERIENCE.

You've had incredible success with horses that have a unique connection to you, from Adventure 'Addy' de Kannan with his one eye to Highland President, who was bred from a filly with the same affliction. How do you explain this almost poetic link you have with these horses?

I'm not really sure. I think, obviously, I have had both horses for a long time, which helps create a relationship.

I started riding Addy when he was just seven years old and continued with him until he was retired at 16. Over that long period, I got to know him incredibly well. It's the same with Highland President a horse we bred, so I've had him his entire life; he knows me as well as I know him.

Having that much time with a horse creates a fantastic connection. It's always going to be more beneficial than just buying or being sent an old-



er horse. While it's not impossible to build trust quickly, plenty of people do it and the longer you can spend with a horse, the more beneficial it is for both of you.

You've talked about the importance of being 100% focused on recovery after your neck and back injury. What mental exercises or techniques did you use to maintain that focus and push through the pain during your rehabilitation?

During my rehab I was always very brave and it was never a question in my mind that I wouldn't come

back. As soon as the doctors gave me the green light to move, I was ready to go. From the very beginning if they told me to take five steps, I'd take ten. If they said ten, I'd do twenty. If they asked me to walk to the end of the room, I'd go to the end of the corridor. I always pushed myself to do that little bit more.

What helped me was my love for rugby. I've seen other rugby players come back from injuries and the old saying, "no pain, no gain," really resonated with me. To recover well, you have to go through the pain and push your body to do the exercises so you can get everything working again as quickly as



possible. That was my mentality: get stuck in and don't quit. My attitude was to not only do what they said, but to do twice as much or three times as much as they asked.

You and your wife Caroline run Breen Sport Horses together. What is the most challenging and most rewarding aspect of blending your professional and personal lives in this way?

Being husband and wife in business together is both the most rewarding and the most challenging thing we do. We get to spend so much time together which is amazing, but it also means we have to

work hard to keep our professional and personal lives separate. We might disagree on a client's plan, a horse's training, or travel, and we have to put those business decisions aside without letting them affect our personal relationship or our family.

But when it all comes together it's just incredibly rewarding. We live and work in the same place, the stables are literally right outside our door. I love not having a commute or worrying about traffic. The challenge is making sure our work doesn't consume our personal space, so the horses don't



completely take over our lives.

Do the Irish conduct business deals over WhatsApp, particularly late at night, and is the kitchen/dining area a central hub for social and business gatherings, as it can be in some Middle Eastern cultures?

Well, we can make the deals anywhere! But yes, the kitchen is definitely and traditionally the hot spot of my house. It was the hot spot of my home when I grew up in Ireland in Cashel; that's probably a fair remark to make. Definitely. I suppose there are pros and cons in both of that.

You've won major titles, been part of winning Nations Cup teams, and have had a storied career. What is a specific, non-competitive moment with a horse that you cherish most?

One of the most touching moments was when Highland President arrived back at my stable after a two-hour drive. As soon as I opened the partition in the horse truck, he saw me and gave me a long look, as if to say, "Oh, it's you!" I gave him a quick hug before leading him out. He came halfway down the ramp, stopped, looked around, and took in his surroundings. He seemed to recognise exactly where he was and then walked directly to his stable. Once inside he had a big roll and a shake, and then came over to me, nuzzling into my side. It was a really special moment.

Looking at the next generation of showjumping riders, what is one piece of advice you would give them that has nothing to do with riding technique?

To be personable. To be a professional rider, you've

got to be personable and approachable. Honestly, the riding part of the job is probably only about 40% of what you do now. You need to be good at a lot of things besides riding, and I think the most important is being personable. People have to like you and you have to get along with them. You need to attract owners, sponsors, and investors, so it's a huge part of the job. You have to have great people skills, that's probably the main thing.

What's the biggest "rookie mistake" you see even the top riders still making?

Probably doing too much too soon with the horse. When a horse starts performing well, whether at Grand Prix or ranking level, some riders make the mistake of thinking the horse must stay at that level constantly. They push the horse too much too soon. I prefer to go up and down with my horses. Just because a horse jumps 1.60m once doesn't mean it has to jump 1.60m every time out. It's important to back off and give them some easier rounds at 1.30m or 1.40m. This way the horse doesn't feel like it has to bust its gut every single time it enters the arena.

Besides winning, what's the most satisfying moment you've ever had in the saddle?

I can't pinpoint one single moment but there are so many satisfying ones. It's when you're on a horse, trying to get them to understand what you want, and suddenly, it just clicks. They do realise it and they do it, and they do it well. That's a hugely rewarding feeling and it's why I do it. It's those small moments all the time, that keep me going. Some people might think it's boring, just riding in circles, but every day we're winning those small moments, getting those little bits of understanding from our horses. That's what's so rewarding.



If you had to switch to another competitive sport for a day, which would you choose?

Rugby!

What is the one thing you would change about the sport of showjumping?

I suppose that one of the biggest issues facing our sport today is the constant scrutiny and the frequent rule changes. While some of these changes are necessary, I disagree with certain regulations like the one concerning nosebands being too tight. We need these tools to control our horses properly. Professional riders always ensure that our equipment is fitted correctly and never too tight.



I'm concerned that the sport is headed in the wrong direction where we might eventually be prevented from using essential equipment. Some of the world's best horses might not be able to perform at their highest level without the right tack - and if that happens - the crowds won't get to see them do what they love to do. These horses genuinely enjoy performing; otherwise they wouldn't do what we ask of them. Many of them wouldn't be able to compete at the top levels without the specific tack that their riders know is best for them. While it's important to ban certain equipment that's genuinely harmful, I believe we need to be careful not to go too far. We must protect both the welfare of the horse and the art of horsemanship itself.

Given the significant scrutiny this sport is facing, do you believe it will still be around in let's say, the next 15 years?

I really hope so, but that's precisely what concerns me. There's a real worry that if certain people get their way, we'll be restricted in what we can do and we might even be prevented from riding at all. I would strongly disagree with that, but we have to be careful. These are critical moments. We need to preserve the right way of doing things, and as I said, keep horsemanship alive by monitoring correctly. I'm all for protecting the horse, but in the right way.

Do you have any pre-show superstitions or rituals that no one knows about?

Nothing major, but when I used to play rugby, I was overly superstitious. I've tried to get out of that but one thing that came from rugby that I still do is put my left shoe or boot on first. It's always the left one, and it's something that's still with me.



Which one horse you've always wanted to ride past or present?

I'd have to say it's Sir Milton for me. He was something special and I grew up watching him in awe. Him and John Whittaker; they were both incredible. So, yeah, he'd be the standout for me, really.

What's the funniest or most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you in the ring?

I'd say during one final at the Dublin Horse Show probably. I was still riding ponies and I was the last

rider to go in to a jump-off. The atmosphere was electric as it was right after the Agha Khan Nations Cup, so a massive crowd was watching, and it was all being broadcast on TV.

I was going in for the first fence but my pony slipped and I fell off before we even got to the jump. Luckily back then, you had a minute to get through the start, so I was able to get back on and continue. It was still probably the most embarrassing moment of my life.

If you had to trade places for a day with any professional athlete outside of equestrian sports, who would it be and why?

At the moment I'd probably trade places with Rory McIlroy. I love golf and in my spare time I play especially when I'm in the UAE. Actually, that's when I play most of my golf! It would be cool to see what a day in his life is like.

If you had to give one of your top horses a side hustle or a job completely unrelated to show-jumping, what would it be?

Addy was an amazing horse and he'd been an eventer before I got him and I always said I would have loved to have ridden him in a cross-country



event. He was unbelievable, he won the Eventing Grand Prix at the Longines Royal International Horse Show, the Hickstead Derby and the Speed Derby. I would have loved to have had a go around Badminton or Burghley on him just for the crack. I think he would have been unreal.

What's the most surprising or unexpected place you've ever found yourself in while on the road for a show?

I rode at a show at Posestvo Ugar in Slovenia years ago. It was a strange place. We were told there were bears in the woods just beside us so I remember thinking I'm not going to be straying down there! I'm too easy on my own as a target! It was a cool show and I really enjoyed it but it used to be quite hot in the day and then freezing cold at night as it was at the base of a mountain. Strange but a fun and weird place all at once.

When you're competing abroad what's one thing from home whether it's a food, a tradition, or a particular brand of tea that you absolutely can't live without?

When I go to Dubai every year I bring my Flahavan's porridge with me. I have porridge for breakfast every morning and I always bring my own with me because you can't find it there. That's definitely the thing I have to have.



What's the most memorable or unusual fan interaction you've ever had? Was there a particularly unique sign or something a fan said that has stuck with you?

At CHIO Aachen this year, I had a great interaction with a lovely couple in the elevator. The wife - a huge fan - looked at me and said, "Oh my God, you're Trevor Breen!" She couldn't believe she'd met me. The hotel restaurant was full since neither of us had a table as such they suggested a nice Italian place they knew down the road. Eventually we all ended up having dinner together. As it turned out, they'd flown all the way from South Africa just for the show, and they were huge fans of the sport - and me! It was a really neat experience and the conversation was hilarious. Her husband was a massive rugby fan, so we spent most of the night talking about that, while his wife kept steering the conversation back to horses. It made for a very interesting, and very memorable dinner.



* Trevor was born on 8 March, 1979.

** He's the father of Mia and Ollie, and younger brother of Shane.

*** He sustained a severe injury in May 2024 during a fall from his horse Highland President at the Longines Grand Prix of Hamburg and suffered three fractures in his lower neck and back.

****Some of his best results in 2025 include:

- 5th place on Highland President, Rolex Grand Prix of Brussels,
- 1st place on Kannoon Blue, CSI2* Chepstow Big Tour Grand Prix
- 3rd place on Konrad Obolensky, Minerva Stakes Dublin Horse Show
- 3rd place Team win on Highland President, Falsterbo Nations Cup
- 7th place on Luidam's Warrior, STAWAG-Prize, CHIO Aachen
- 2nd place on Luidam's Warrior, Clipmyhorse.tv Master's Trophy, Hickstead
- 1st place Team win on Highland President, Longines League of Nations, Abu Dhabi

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