

SIDELINES

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Her Journey to Olympic Silver

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On the cover:
Sabine Schut-Kery competed at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics with her equine partner Sanceo, where they shattered their personal best with an 81.596% to help bring home silver for Team USA.

About this photo:
Sabine Schut-Kery, with her Olympic partner Sanceo, in Wellington, Florida.
Photos by Melissa Fuller, msfullerphotography.com



Sabine Schut-Kery and Sanceo, her Olympic partner, in Wellington, Florida.

Sabine Schut-Kery

THE JOURNEY TO OLYMPIC SILVER

By Ruby Tevis
Portraits by Melissa Fuller

On a steamy summer night in Tokyo, under bright lights and empty seats, Sabine Schut-Kery not only took the world by storm, she set and shattered personal bests each day she competed. The first-time Olympian has risen to fame with her longtime partner, Sanceo, after the pair secured the silver medal for Team USA at the Tokyo Olympics—the first team silver in 73 years. Sabine's silver medal represents more than the results of one dressage test—it represents the results of a lifetime of hard work, a loyal team of supporters, and one very special horse.

Born in Krefeld, Germany, Sabine was introduced to horses through her sister. At the age of 10, Sabine began riding ponies at a local stable, and her occasional lessons turned into daily bicycle treks to the barn. Throughout her teenage years, Sabine competed locally in dressage and jumping, all while improving her riding skills and piquing her interest in training.

"I always loved learning and the challenge of getting better," Sabine said. "When I was 18, I couldn't afford lessons, so I started an apprenticeship in Krefeld with Jan Bemelmans." Though she wasn't yet planning to pursue a career in dressage, the apprenticeship offered Sabine the opportunity to earn a German

certification in riding, known as a Bereiter. "I knew my time wouldn't be wasted because I could get my Bereiter at the end, and I'd thought if I didn't want to pursue riding as a profession, I might go back and try something else I loved—I wanted to become a florist or interior designer—but I stuck with the horses!"

With her Bereiter complete, Sabine returned to her first stable, and because her legs were too long for riding ponies, she acquired a new type of mount upon Friesian horses. "There was a gentleman at the stable who imported Friesians from Holland and Andalusians from Spain, and he wanted to make them known as nice dressage horses," Sabine said. "We formed a group of riders and traveled throughout Europe to do demonstrations with the breeds. We learned to ride side saddle and work in long lines, and we taught the horses how to bow, lie down, sit and rear on command. We really learned how to train."

While the demonstrations were a hit, it was an important aspect of the program to showcase the horses as mounts who could hold their own in the competition arena. "We wanted to prove it was classical training and not just trick-training," Sabine said. "Two of the Friesian stallions, Tinus and Jorrit, were awarded with the Golden Horse Award by the German Friesian registry for their success at Grand Prix."

MOVING TO THE UNITED STATES

As a young professional, Sabine relied on sales to finance her training and horse care, but she never expected one sale would bring new horizons across the world. "I sold my Friesian to Jim Mosebrook and Larry Riggs of Proud Meadows Farm in Texas," Sabine said. "I went over to show Jim the buttons to make the horse lie down, sit and rear, and Jim offered me a job on the spot!"

Sabine made the move with her boyfriend, Krisztian, a fellow equestrian and professional stunt man, whom she met working in the traveling horse exhibition. "When I told Jim I'd met somebody, he told me to bring him with me—so I did," Sabine said. "It worked out because Krisztian and I share the same passion, and then we got married!"

During her seven years at Proud Meadows, Sabine passed on the skills and program she'd learned in Europe to choreograph a traveling exhibition in the United States. "It was a really nice opportunity for me to get to know a different country," she said. "I also believed we shouldn't limit ourselves to demonstrations, so I got to compete and choreograph exhibitions and quadrilles through the Grand Prix level."

Though Sabine found resounding success in the show ring, she was not yet a United States

After Tokyo, Sabine received messages from around the world saying that Sanceo displayed elegance, harmony and power in their Olympic debut.



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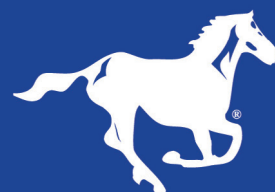
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“Through my training with Sanceo, I tried to stay very correct and true to the training principles—and it got us there. I think the overall mindset not to put pressure on my horse or myself became my motto. I put my trust in the process.”

~Sabine Schut-Kery

Sabine, with Sanceo, hopes to qualify for the World Equestrian Games in Denmark.

citizen, so her accolades were limited to USDF Year-End and Horse of the Year awards. “I had two Friesians win the Grand Prix Freestyle in Wellington in 2001, and another I’d started earlier sweep national titles every year moving from Second Level to Third, Fourth and Prix St. Georges, and top ten at Grand Prix against all the warmbloods,” Sabine explained.

To continue her education, Jim brought Sabine’s coach, Jan Nivelles, over each year for training. However, when Jan acquired a coaching position with the Spanish Young Rider team, making the trip to America became too difficult to coordinate. “He couldn’t come so much anymore, and I just loved learning, so it was hard for me to continue with my education in Texas—that led me to either Wellington or California,” Sabine said. “I fell in love with California because I’m such an outdoorsy person. The landscape is varied and beautiful, while the weather is perfect for horses. I made the move in 2005.”

A HORSE OF A LIFETIME

Today, Sabine operates a boutique training business in Napa, California. “I like to keep my business small so I can give each horse the time and attention needed for proper development. I work hard on keeping my passion while I make a living training horses,” she said. “I never want to lose sight of why I began riding, so I’ve always made sure I can maintain that balance. Luckily, I have great owners who support this philosophy.”

Before moving to California, Sabine caught the eye of Alice Womble and Dr. Mike Heitmann at a show in Texas. “Alice was always very gracious and would come up to me to compliment my ride,” she said. When Sabine moved, Alice reached out about training her 7-year-old stallion. Now a citizen, Sabine sought the opportunity to qualify for Gladstone in the Small Tour. “We qualified, but unfortunately he sustained a small injury. I remember Alice then said, ‘You did such a great job with him, but I want to see what you can do with a horse from the beginning.’”

Sabine boarded a flight to Europe to shop, where she came upon a young Sanceo—just 3 years old. The tall, dark and handsome Hanoverian stallion captured Sabine’s heart. Together, Sabine and Sanceo broke out onto the scene, racking up three California Dressage Society futurity titles and representing the United States at the World Breeding Championships in Verden, Germany, in 2012. The success didn’t stop there for the pair: Sanceo’s talent for FEI earned them a win in the 2014 Developing Horse Prix St. Georges National Championship in Wayne, Illinois.

“In my training, I try to aim for the young horse classes, but I don’t push a timeline on the horse. With Sanceo, it worked out beautifully,” Sabine said. “Through my training with him I tried to stay very correct and true to the training principles—and it got us there. I think the overall mindset not to put pressure on my horse or myself became my motto. I put my trust in the process.”

Seventeen years after moving to the United States, Sabine earned a spot on Team USA for the 2015 Pan-American Games in Toronto.



"It was my first team experience, and I was so excited to represent my country," Sabine said. The Pan-American Games served as a qualifier for the upcoming Rio Olympics, so the pressure was on the American teams to secure their spot. "The Canadians had incredible Small Tour horses, so it was a close competition! This made it even more special for me to be part of the gold medal team!"

TROTTING IN TOKYO

Sabine and Sanceo found success in the qualifying season prior to the COVID-19 pandemic rocking the world, shutting down horse shows and ultimately postponing the Tokyo Olympic Games. "Looking back, I feel like the extra year really helped everyone. We must remember to take our time with these animals, and we should always design our time frame around their needs," Sabine said. "COVID has proven that taking our time pays off, so the slow-down was really beneficial to us."

One year later, the pair returned to Wellington to bid for the Team spot once again. "I put a lot of weight towards making the Team—making every show count through the observation event," Sabine said. "When I got the call that I'd made the Team, I was beyond myself!"

Sabine, alongside two seasoned Olympians, Steffen Peters and Adrienne Lyle, with Nick Wagman as reserve, made up Team USA to compete in an Olympic Games the world had never seen before. With no spectators, mask restrictions and strict health policies, the Tokyo Games posed unique challenges. "My husband always travels with me, but this was the first time we decided not to go together," Sabine said. "My longtime friend Christie Erickson came along as Sanceo's groom, and having my personal coach, Christine Traurig, there gave me a great supporting team."

During the first leg of competition, riders competed in the Grand Prix to secure their spots for the Individual Freestyle. For their first ride in Tokyo, Sabine and Sanceo danced to a personal best of 78.416% in the Grand Prix, wowing the world with their harmony and grace—no doubt a result of their twelve-year partnership. Sabine had earned a start in the Freestyle, but not before riding the Grand Prix Special for the Team competition.

Among the last three combinations to go in the Grand Prix Special, Sabine and Sanceo shouldered the weight of the bronze medal win. With Charlotte Dujardin to follow, the pressure

was on to earn at least a 75% to win bronze for the United States. As the world sat on the edge of their seats, Sabine and Sanceo shattered the personal best they'd set just days before—bursting through to an 81.506% and bringing home silver for Team USA.

"It was incredible just to be there, but to have Sanceo really peak at the Olympics and finally crack an 80%—coming out of it with a silver medal when we were aiming for bronze leaves me speechless," Sabine said. "I wasn't sure we would make it to the Freestyle, so I brought an old one from 2018, which I hadn't ridden since 2018! To finish fifth with this huge score of 84.3% was unbelievable, I still have to digest that."

THANKFUL AND THINKING AHEAD

Now that Sabine is home and the fanfare has settled, she is reflecting on her incredible journey and spending time answering to every congratulations she received. "I received messages from Holland, Germany, all of Europe and even Australia! Everyone said how much they enjoyed watching our ride and that we were able to perform with elegance, harmony

“ It was incredible just to be there, but to have Sanceo really peak at the Olympics and finally crack an 80%—coming out of it with a silver medal when we were aiming for bronze leaves me speechless. ”

~Sabine Schut-Kery

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, red riding pants, and black boots, stands next to a grey horse. She is petting the horse's neck. The horse is wearing a black halter. In the background is a tan barn with a weather vane on the roof. The scene is set during sunset or sunrise, with warm lighting.

Born in Krefeld, Germany, Sabine traveled throughout Europe doing demonstrations with Friesians and Andalusians. “We really learned how to train,” she said.

and power,” Sabine said. “Everybody made the same comments, loving the lightness and partnership we had. So many people said Sanceo looked happy with what he was doing. As a trainer, to get that kind of feedback when that is what I’ve been working so hard to achieve is so rewarding.”

Another aspect of the Olympics Sabine is grateful for was her teammates. “It was so nice to be around Steffen, Nick and Adrienne. It was my first time on an Olympic team, and they really showed great sportsmanship and support,” Sabine said. “I didn’t feel any different as a newcomer. It was such a positive environment to be in—we took a van to the barns early in the morning, went back to the hotel during the heat of the day, then went back for schooling at night.”

Despite the pressure of competition, Sabine’s time in Tokyo served as a time to focus on herself and her horse, away from the distractions of every day life. “I might have to hire full time servants for Sanceo, he’s become so spoiled,” Sabine laughed. “He loved to be the only horse getting attention from Christie and me. Sometimes it’s hard when you have so much to do at home you feel like there is never enough time, but in Tokyo, we were never rushed. We had time to focus and work out and enjoy each other’s company. By the end I thought, *I could do this longer, I don’t want to go home yet!*”

Alas, all good things must come to an end, and a new chapter is beginning for Sanceo. “He’s going to breed now after his short vacation, and then we’re looking forward to some down time,” Sabine said. “After that, we plan to head to Wellington and try to qualify for the World Equestrian Games in Denmark.”

Alongside Sanceo, Sabine is developing new partnerships with young horses she hopes will follow in his footsteps. “I’m shopping now, and have a few young ones that aren’t ready to come out yet. I’m starting with 3- and 4-year olds. It’s a bit of a longer road, but it’s what I’m so familiar with. I like to have that relationship from the beginning. Getting that opportunity from Sanceo’s owners, Alice and Dr. Heitmann, has been something I’m very grateful for,” she said. “I’m so thankful for the success I’ve had with Sanceo, and I trust that whatever the future brings will be exciting.” **SI**

For more information, visit www.sabineschutkery.com

Photos by Melissa Fuller, msfullerphotography.com, unless noted otherwise



Photos top to bottom:
Sabine and Sanceo, at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics,
shattered their personal best with an 81.596%
to help bring home silver for Team USA.
Photo courtesy of FEI/Shannon Brinkman

Sabine with Comisario CDF, owned by
Denise Cato, in Wellington, Florida.