

Sunday, 11 July 2010 13:17

## The Namibian WEG Team - The Long Road from Africa

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**Three Namibian girls gain qualifications to ride for the Namibian Endurance team on US horses at the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. "It's an awesome feeling," said 19 year old, Anna Wucher. "We're happy to finally get to say we're going to the WEG and not if, when, and maybe! We are all very excited and hope we do well there, too!"**



The three girls have been working and training at Darolyn Butler's Cypress Trails Ranch in South Texas near Houston. Kordula Voigts, 24, was the first to arrive. "Dulie is an excellent rider, but had no previous endurance experience before she started riding with me in April of 2008," said Butler. "She's a brilliant horsewoman and perhaps the most compassionate, yet effective trainer I've ever known. She's turned three different, almost man-eater horses completely around. Duli is also unbelievable help in organizing the training schedule, the packing up on the trips and generally very pleasant to be around. The other ladies have only been here four months, but they are equally as nice and I'm growing to love these 'lil gals too."

"I grew up on a stud farm for warmbloods used for jumping and dressage," said Kordula, aka Duli. "My parents say that I rode before I walked. I started competing in jumping and dressage shows at the age of six."

Anna and 18 year old, Olivia Mattaei (pronounced Mat-tie ), both keen endurance riders in Namibia, were directed to Butler when Mrs. Voigts met Mrs. Wucher at an endurance ride in Namibia. "We were looking for a year's break before University," said Anna.

The girls have tackled Visitor Visas, mastering English with a Texas twist, fiscal realities, home sickness and hard work in their determination to succeed in their goal of riding at the WEG for Namibia.



"When the girls are not racing, they are working hard at the ranch and trail ride business in Humble," said Butler. "The days start at 6:30 AM for them and many times end at 8 or 9 PM if we have late rides. I keep telling them it's good training for the endurance rides, but frankly, we all know that the 160 km rides are actually easier than a big Saturday at Cypress Trails where one might help over 100 novice riders get on and off horses and go traipsing around the woods for 1-3 hours at a time. On slow days for the business, we go out

and do 32-48 km training rides for the near 20 horses that have FEI passports on this farm. It's no small feat keeping them all sound and in shape, but the trail business really does help immensely with that." Butler, whose daughter, Ceci Butler- Stasiuk has also earned her qualification for the US team and as of March 2010 was number one in the USEF endurance ranking, has joined them on many endurance rides as they all work towards qualifications for the WEG.

Anna grew up on a 9,112 hectare (506 acre) farm in central Namibia, located between the capital of Windhoek and Okahandja. Her father is a dentist and mother, Diana, runs the family's 650-850 head cattle farm. "Anna began riding endurance when she was 9 years old. In 2009 she was chosen for the second time to Captain the Namibian Junior Team in an International FEI ride in Beaufort-West, South Africa", said Diana.

Olivia's family manage a Game Ranch where horses are used by the staff to check the animals and are available for clients who book custom safaris. "As a youngster Olivia took riding lessons but after a while was not very interested in dressage and show jumping and rather opted for normal riding, her start for endurance in the future, " said her father, Jürgen Matthaai.

According to Butler, it is easier for the girls to get their qualifications in the United States as there is no financial support from Namibia. "They could not afford to transport Namibian horses here. At their request and my invitation they decided to come here to complete their qualifications on my horses." The girls have the blessings of their Namibian Endurance Federation and will most likely be the only riders able to attend the Endurance ride at the WEG, as qualification and quarantine make it almost impossible to bring horses from Africa to the US event.

Funding for the WEG adventure is not inexpensive. "Most of the qualification rides are paid by the girls coming from their ranch work," said Mr. Matthaai. "The entrance and competition fees for the WEG are still to be found. It would be most welcome if some additional funding could be found for the girls."

The girls plan to stay in the USA until after the September endurance event at the WEG. "The gap year for Anna and Olivia will end when they both go to University," said Diana Wucher. "Anna hopes to study Medicine in South Africa, and Olivia hopes to study Physiotherapy in Germany."



**Note:** In June the USEF hosted three Regional Selection Trials for the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, paring down the number of eligible horse/rider combinations for the US Endurance Team from 62 to 47. The horses and riders who attended one of these trials will be eligible to attend the Observation Trial August 8-11, in Danville, IL. Following the Observation Trial, the top ten horse/rider combinations will be named to the nominated entries, from which the final five horse/rider combinations will be selected to represent the US on the Endurance Team in September at the World Games.

Website: Namibia Endurance Ride Association: [www.namibiaendurance.org](http://www.namibiaendurance.org)

**Photos:** Anna at Beaufort West in the South African Cape area. Taken in Namibia at the Walvis Bay ride in 2009. Anna Wucher is #18 closest to the water. Olivia Mattaei is the other rider. The second one is in the sand dunes area. Photo credit: Leana Erasmus.

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