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# 5 4 3 2 1 Paris: Jonelle Price

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 5 4 3 2 1 Paris: Jonelle Price

Co-authored by Suzanne McFadden, LockerRoom

## In part two of LockerRoom’s countdown to Paris, four-time Kiwi Olympic equestrian Jonelle Price talks horses, heat, riding alongside her husband and hunting an elusive Olympic team gold

In 2004, Jonelle Price and Eric, her first international horse, left New Zealand for England, and were named surprise travelling reserves for the three-day eventing team at the Athens Olympics. Though she wasn’t called up to ride, the experience paved the way for the rest of her stellar equestrian career.

Eight years later, the Motueka-born rider got the call and helped New Zealand win team bronze in the 2012 London Games. She’s been a rock-steady member of the team ever since.

Paris will be the 43-year-old’s fourth Olympic Games.

### First Olympics: London 2012

In 2012, Price (then Jonelle Richards) was on the rise in the equestrian world, but still “a long way from being a given starting team member”, she says.

“So I needed one or two things to go wrong for someone else, for me to get a serious look-in, which, as we’re all aware in this game, can happen. I wasn’t one of the frontrunners, by any means.”

But she got the call-up in the five-strong eventing team for the London Olympics. Things almost went wrong for her – breaking her arm in a riding fall five weeks before the Games, but recovering in time to compete.

At Greenwich Park, Price was the trailblazer – the first to go for the team. She rode Flintstar, a Kiwi thoroughbred gelding who was Tim Price’s horse; she’d taken over the reins while her future husband recovered from a broken leg.

“Flintstar wasn’t particularly good at dressage, but he was a great jumper. We went well, and we did our job to what was the expectation,” she says, playing her role in the New Zealand team winning bronze.

“But I was certain if I got to another Olympic Games, I wanted to be a frontrunner.”

London was a “magical” Olympics for Price. “Coming home with a medal when I was very fresh off the boat, was something I’ll never forget,” she says. “And it was a very accessible Games; the locality meant it was quite easy to meet with family and friends.”

Staying in the athletes’ village was another highlight for Price. “That’s always a big part of the Olympic experience – wandering through the village and seeing athletes of all shapes, sizes and ages, and wondering what sport they do.”

*Results: 3rd in team, 32nd in individual*

### Second Olympics: Rio de Janeiro 2016

Jonelle married Tim Price in 2013, and in Rio de Janeiro three years later, they became the first husband and wife to represent New Zealand in Olympic eventing.

She appreciates the uniqueness of competing at an Olympics with her husband, and that their different riding styles complement each other: he’s cool, calm and laidback, and she’s “more intense and a bit stropky”.

By now, Jonelle had finished fourth at the World Equestrian Games and second at the five-star Luhmühlen event in Germany. “A lot happens in four years. In London, I was very much the new kid on the block, whereas come Rio, I was a bit more comfortable and I’d had a bit more success,” she says.

In Rio, she chose to ride her mare, Fairie Dianamo, the “princess” of their yard in Wiltshire, England.

Getting the horses to Brazil added to the complexities of competing. “It’s a big trip, and you could just see the horses struggling to acclimatise to the heat and the bugs,” Price says.

"We had to be up and riding at 5am before the heat of the day, but then we had nothing to do all day. We were very much out of our normal day-to-day routine where we probably ride solidly for six to eight hours. So, we had to be careful we didn't over-pressurise the situation, because we had too much time on our hands. All these other factors come into play at a championship like this."

Rio still carries some painful memories for Price.

The New Zealand team were in a strong position to win their first team gold during the showjumping on the final day, until Sir Mark Todd, the senior statesman of the team, had a disastrous round, dropping four rails. New Zealand slid off the podium.

"It would have been okay had we risen from sixth to fourth; it was the fact we were in the gold position and slipped. It was just unfortunate for Toddy, he was the last rider and his horse was typically a good jumper," Price says.

"So you can never think you've got it in the bag. But we were blimmin' hopeful it was going to come off, and it was just quite extraordinary when it didn't. It was devastating for us all to be so close.

"For Toddy nearing the end of his career, it could have been the fairytale finish. But it wasn't to be and yeah, we've been trying to scrape ourselves up ever since."

*Results: 4th in team, 17th in individual*

### **Third Olympics: Tokyo 2020 (in 2021)**

By her third Olympic campaign, Price was a mum of two – to son Otis (born in 2017) and daughter Abel (born in early 2020).

"It didn't really change anything for me. Each woman has a very different experience, and I think I've been quite lucky I've always been able to separate my personal life from my competitive life," she says. "Our children enhance our lives, of course, but I'm still able to remain professional and as hungry as I ever was before."

The Prices spearheaded the New Zealand team at the delayed Tokyo Olympics. By now, they were both consistently in the world's top 10 eventing riders, and Jonelle had two CCI5\* victories (the highest level of eventing competition) to her name – Badminton and Luhmühlen in 2018.

From her four horses nominated for the Games, Price chose 11-year-old Grovine de Reve as her horse for the testing three-day eventing in the sweltering midsummer heat. She was by now a frontrunner in the team.

"Another five years, and I felt a bit more at home in that position," she says. "You can really own the role you play in the team."

The Kiwis were once again in the mix for a medal going into the individual showjumping round, with Price and Grovine de Reve absorbing the pressure and producing a perfect round. But the team ended up fifth overall.

"Again we weren't too far away. Expectations were high, but we just haven't delivered," says Price, who topped the individual placings in 11th.

The entire Games experience, affected by Covid, was also a case of "what might have been".

"Wearing masks really drove me mad. I hated those damn things," Price laughs. "And I felt sorry for Japan because even though I'm not a city person, looking out the bus window from the village to the venue every day, it looked like a really spectacular city.

"We were there longer than normal, because the horses needed more time to travel and settle. So you couldn't help but think how you could have filled those days, spending a few hours in the afternoon experiencing the culture and the city.

"But Tokyo ran a fantastic games and the main thing was athletes got to compete. We had to be grateful we were there."

*Results: 5th in team, 11th in individual.*

### **Fourth Olympics: Paris 2024**

"It's nice to be staring down the barrel of another Games," Price says after being chosen to ride alongside her husband again. The couple made equestrian history in 2022 as the first married couple to be No 1 and No.2 in the world eventing rankings.

Price and her horse for these Olympics, 12-year-old Dutch-bred mare Hiarado, are "a match made in heaven".

"We're actually quite similar – she's a bit of a stropky, feisty and determined little mare. We get on pretty well, and I think all those character traits will hold her in good stead in Paris," she says of the partnership that's barely two years old.

"She's a really strong jumper – I think she's had one fence down since I've had her. Showjumping is going to be pretty telling at these championships."

The last three Olympics have given Price "valuable mileage".

"I know what to expect, I know the championship environment, I've proven I can perform under pressure, and historically – touch wood – I've delivered at championships," she says.

For the first time, Price will be staying outside the athletes' main village at a satellite village near their venue (nearly half of the 195 Kiwi athletes at these Games are staying outside the village).

And the venue for equestrian events will be spectacular – the Palace of Versailles.

"We've been there and had a wander around the park, and it will be one of the most magical venues. From everywhere you look, it's just extremely beautiful," she says.

In contrast to the complexities of the past two Olympic Games, Price expects Paris to be much easier for the equestrian team. "We're based in the southwest of England now, so it's a hop, skip and a jump for us to get to the docks to cross the Channel. Hopefully that means it reduces the chance of some of those variables coming into play."

The Prices' young children won't be going to Paris to watch their parents ride: "Our focus needs to be solely on our job," says Jonelle. But she hopes one day they will be old enough to witness their parents compete together on the world's largest sporting stage.

It's been 12 years since Price's first Olympics – and 12 years since New Zealand eventing has won a medal. Winning a team medal remains the top priority, she says.

"Obviously, we've had a bit of a dry spell the last couple of Games, and I feel we've had a couple of stories of 'so close'. I really don't want to be coming home with another one of those," she says.


"But we're coming into the championship with a really strong squad this year – the most depth we've seen for some time. So hopefully that bodes well. And hopefully we'll be having a fun conversation on the other side of it."


[Paris Olympics](#)


## SUZANNE MCFADDEN

Suzanne McFadden is a contributor to LockerRoom, dedicated to women's sport, and is the 2021 Voyager Media Awards Sports Journalist of the Year. [More by Suzanne McFadden](#)

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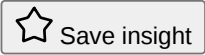
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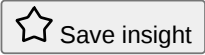
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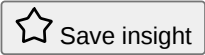
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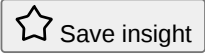
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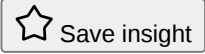
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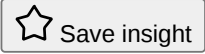
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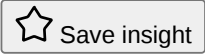
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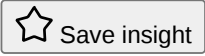
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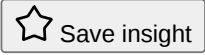
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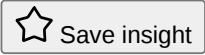
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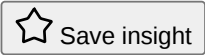
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