

Column Jacob Melissen

Totilas is not dead, he remains very much alive.

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Edward Gal - Moorlands Totilas Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games Lexington - Kentucky 2010 © DigiShots

There are many kinds of people. One species thinks they are great in their deeds and walk in shoes that have become too small. The shoes of the other kind will always fit, because they do not boast of their great deeds. As humane representatives of both species emerge, they receive a lot of media attention through extensive obituaries.

However, the fact that the passing away of an animal gets attention in all the media says something about the emotional chord that this animal has managed to touch with many people. The great thing about Totilas is that his shoes always continued to fit him. Despite his self-confident appearance in the box, in the front ring and in the competition arena, he did not in any way claim to be many times greater than any of his peers.

Medal machine

Even the biggest Dutch public news channel NOS created airtime after the announcement was made that Totilas had succumbed to colic. All top performances that this Eusebio of horses had achieved in Dutch service were cited. Attention was also paid to his failure when he entered a foreign military service. That failure was not his fault; it seems to have been due to the new owners underestimating the medal machine they believed he was. A horse that manages to perform at the top under one rider will certainly also be capable of top performance under another rider, they seemed to think. The underestimation of the horse's psyche?

Spontaneous tears

I was there in Hengelo when Totilas first competed. I saw him become Dutch champion in De Steeg under a rider dressed in a gray dust coat. I saw him rise above himself at the European Championships in Windsor and be invincible on the WEG in Kentucky. People who never watched equestrian sports on TV told me afterwards that during the rides of Gal and Totilas they had spontaneously teared up.

I was there when Totilas was presented in a megalomaniacal way to the German media and Germany by his new owners under his new rider. Totilas would bring Germany not one, not two, but certainly three gold medals at the London Olympics and many more medals at the upcoming international championships. The German treasure fleet seemed to have been brought in with Totilas.

Magic

It was magical for the Netherlands to see Edward Gal and Totilas going through the slopes together. The light-footed canter, the swinging changes, the power and power radiating piaffe. In the Grand Prix as well as in the Special and in the Freestyle, the magic of Edward Gal and Totilas worked enchanting. We saw in Windsor, more like Kentucky, something we had never seen before and which many horse people felt they might never even see again.

From special to ordinary

I was also there in Munich-Riem, where thousands had gathered along the warm-up arena to watch the upcoming gold medal winners of London in action and they rushed like a horde of commuters after Rath and Totilas to see them shine in the competition arena. Afterwards I saw them in Aachen and in Rotterdam, but it was as if with every step the light-footedness diminished, the swinging body stiffened and the always brightly shining eye lost its sparkle. Totilas descended from a miracle through special to ordinary.

It was sad to see that Totilas started to look like a top athlete who, despite an increasingly stiff body, was no longer able to make it to the top. Totilas became the skater who was once able to complete the 10 kilometers in 12 minutes and now took 20 minutes. He became the marathon runner who ran the 42 kilometers in two hours, but now needed 24 hours. It hurt my eyes and it hurt to the bottom of my soul to watch this decline.

Unique phenomenon?

We have experienced something that many thought we will never experience again. They thought that Totilas would be a one-time and completely unique phenomenon for many years to come and would remain so. I wasn't one of them because I assumed we would see it again ten, twelve, twenty years later. Why? Because breeding always shows progress, because what was exceptionally good in 1960 can no longer keep up in 1990.

Could the Gondelier that became Dutch jumping champion in 1972 under Henk Nooren still be able to participate? Could Olympic Vincent, who became Dutch champion in 1989 under Annemarie Sanders-Keijzer, be able to repeat that now? I'm sure they can't, because breeding cannot be stopped.

Live on

Yes, Totilas could still play a role in the sport today, provided under Edward Gal, but he would be surpassed by his descendants. Nothing but good about the dead, but in his son Glock's Toto Jr. already better than his father?

You are not dead until the last person you knew has died. For Totilas it will certainly be the case for a very long time to come. Not because of his - at that time - unprecedented performance in the competition ring, but perhaps even more because of his offspring, who already achieved extremely appealing results in the first generation. Therefore, Totilas will certainly continue to live on, just as Gambo and Oregon still live on in the collective memory of horse breeding and horse loving Netherlands.

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