

comeback with a Badminton win and Andrew Nicholson holds his strongest hand of horsepower ever.

Australia didn't have much fun at last year's WEG, but on form, the likes of Clayton and Lucinda Fredericks and Sam Griffiths are world class.

CURRENTLY OUT OF ACTION

BRITAIN has two top-class horses sidelined — Pippa Funnell's Redesigned, who hasn't competed since being withdrawn from Badminton lame, and Tina Cook's Miners Frolic, who has been seriously ill with enterocolitis.

POSSIBLE DARK HORSES

- CANADA, team silver medallists at last year's WEG, but unable to reproduce that form since.
- FRANCE, who rarely send combinations abroad, so can spring a surprise.
- KARIN DONCKERS, Belgium's best and constantly just outside the individual medals. She could be up there if she can speed up across country.
- FOR British team selection, Francis Whittington must have a chance with Sir Percival III.

THE COMBINATION I'D MOST LIKE TO SEE SELECTED

NICOLA WILSON and Opposition Buzz — pretty much guaranteed to settle our nerves by getting a cross-country clear in the time early in the day.

IRISH HOPES

IRELAND still need to qualify as a team so must go to this year's Europeans on form to get that in the bag. Otherwise, they'll be relying on getting at least individuals in through the rider rankings. Their pool of four-star riders is widening, but their flagbearers are Sam Watson, Elizabeth Power and Camilla Speirs — all back on form after falls in the spring — as well as Mark Kyle and Geoff Curran.

The Brits are likely to rely on Nicola Wilson and Opposition Buzz to deliver a pathfinding cross-country clear

Showjumping

Britain hasn't won an Olympic medal since 1984, but there's a more positive vibe in the camp this time. Lack of horsepower has been a factor, but there's a growing pool of talent now, suggests Jennifer Donald



NEED TO KNOW

- FOUR per team (also ride as individuals), best three scores to count. A few individuals from countries not fielding a team.
- TWO sets of medals — team (three rounds) and individual (five rounds).

LAST OLYMPICS

Individual:

Gold: Eric Lamaze on Hickstead (CAN)
Silver: Rolf-Goran Bengtsson on Ninja (SWE)
Bronze: Beezie Madden on Authentic (USA)

Team:

Gold: USA
Silver: Canada
Bronze: Switzerland

THE BRITISH STORY SO FAR

AT championship level, British form has been lacking recently. But the FEI Nations Cup series is a good testing ground for riders and results have been solid this season, with equal seconds in two of the five rounds.

LOOKING AHEAD

WITH horses changing hands on almost a weekly basis and uncertainties due to injuries, the British team is far from set in stone.

But contenders include Nick Skelton — who has a serious chance with Carlo and enviable back-up in Big Star; Michael Whitaker, who always impresses with GIG Amai; and Peter Charles — Murka's Nevada looks an Olympic horse-in-waiting. Guy Williams had pinpointed Depardieu Van't Kiezelhof as his 2012 hope, but his recent team debut with Titus impressed team manager Rob Hoekstra.

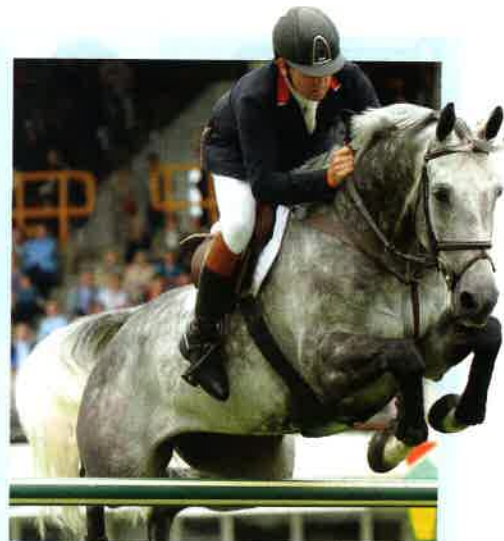
Equine greats Peppermill (John Whitaker) and Robin Hood W (Ben Maher) have had spells on the sidelines, so it would be great to have them on the team. Both riders have a plan B though — Argento and Tripple X III.

Scott Brash is only 26, but he was at WEG and has Nations Cup form with Intertoy Z.

Tina Fletcher was an 11th-hour withdrawal from WEG when Hello Sailor picked up a leg injury but has superb team credentials. In a traditionally male-dominated team, we could also see Laura Renwick.

Bruce Menzies only made his five-star team debut this month but Sultán V has been produced with 2012 in mind. Don't forget William Funnell, David McPherson, Tim Stockdale, Robert Smith and Robert Whitaker.

Hello Sailor could take Tina Fletcher to her championship team debut



Britain's Nick Skelton has a potential star in Carlo

THE COMBINATION I'D MOST LIKE TO SEE SELECTED

SCOTT BRASH and Intertoy Z — they've produced sparkling clear rounds when it's counted and are fabulous to watch. Scott is only 26 and may lack the championship experience of some contenders, but he deserves a place.

The selection for the Europeans in September will be an interesting pointer.

THE OPPOSITION

THE Netherlands and Germany are always a mighty force, as are France — although below par until recently. Don't be surprised to see USA and Sweden in the shake-up, too.

Belgian world champions Philippe Le Jeune (Vigo D'Arsouilles) always impresses, as does Olympic champion Eric Lamaze (Hickstead), for Canada. Another hope is German World Cup victor Christian Ahlmann (Taloubet Z) and France's Kevin Staut has a strong team.

Several countries have been investing heavily in top-class equine ammunition, so Saudi Arabia should be well armed. But could a full team cut it at the top level?

CURRENTLY OUT OF ACTION

MCLAIN WARD'S (USA) Sapphire has missed 2011 with a check ligament injury and we eagerly await the return of Robin Hood W. Hello Sailor, too, is sidelined at present. Christian Ahlmann has had back problems.

POSSIBLE DARK HORSES

- UKRAINE, who have only just qualified for the Olympics.
- AZERBAIJAN have invested heavily in horsepower recently, so could be a late entry.

IRISH HOPES

ALTHOUGH Ireland is not yet qualified — the Europeans are crucial — Billy Twomey and Denis Lynch are at the top of the world rankings and the team has been the talking point of the FEI Nations Cup.

