

SPORTING LEGENDS: HARVEY SMITH

SPORT: SHOW JUMPING

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1958 - 1984

The youngster christened Robert Harvey Smith was always an animal's child. He wanted to play with something that would respond and react, and would often spend his time at local gymkhanas vaulting on and off his saddleless pony.



The experience proved invaluable for young Harvey, and by 1953 he was ready to make the jump into serious competition. He bought a horse named Farmer's Boy for £33 at York market and set about schooling it himself.

Still only 17, Smith progressed to his first big-money win at the 1958 Blackpool Show, beating many of the country's top show jumpers. His promise didn't go unnoticed, and by the following year he was helping Britain to victory at the Nations Cup in Dublin.

Harvey's natural riding skills were augmented by true Yorkshire grit, turning him into a fierce and feared competitor. Success in a major international event came in 1962 with his first John Player Trophy win on a horse called O'Malley. A year later, on the same mount, he became only the second British rider to win the Italian Grand Prix in Rome.

More major titles followed when he teamed with another outstanding horse, Harvester. Together they achieved a hat trick of John Player wins and claimed a European Championship silver medal.

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Harvey Smith was great at getting the best out his horses.

A disappointing Mexico Olympics failed to dent Smith's will to win and he bounced back with a vengeance on a new horse the great Mattie Brown. The new pairing were an instant hit, and in 1970 they took the King George V Gold Cup, the Hickstead Derby and a bronze in the World Championship.

Smith's out-and-out competitiveness had by now made him a controversial figure - and never more so than at the following year's Hickstead Derby. Riding Mattie Brown, he again triumphed in the Gold Cup; but then came the two-fingered gesture to the organisers, which made headlines around the world.

He put the furore behind him with two further John Player wins and a third Hickstead triumph. But authority feathers were ruffled a second time when Smith became the first British rider to turn pro.

Yet still he kept winning, with further victories in the Nations Cup and at Hickstead. By this time his sons, Robert and Steven, had also developed into top riders, and during the early 1980s Smith and Sons dominated the British show jumping scene.

Harvey based his riding style on two great competitors - Englishwoman Pat Smythe and Italy's Raimondo d'Inzeo. Both rode in a well-balanced, bouncy manner, which takes little out of the rider, and following their example had undoubtedly prolonged his career.

Yet other factors had been important too. One is his tremendous horsemanship, shown by the way he has coaxed excellent performances from indifferent horses. Another is Harvey's own character; he had always ridden with great guts and determination.

SPORTING LEGENDS: DAN MARINO



Scott Burton's Final Thought

Harvey Smith was extremely passionate about horses, and it was this trait that helped elevate him to the peak of show jumping success.

He never wrote off a horse's potential, and did whatever it took to get the best possible performance out of them.

Never one to listen to the critics, Smith was also never afraid to voice his own opinions.

This approach won him legions of fans, yet may also have isolated him from some of show jumping's so-called hierarchy.

Yet he never saw show jumping as a popularity contest; he saw it as a skilled coalition between man and animal. Certainly, he was one of the best riders of his generation.



Harvey Smith's competitive philosophy was all about one thing - winning!