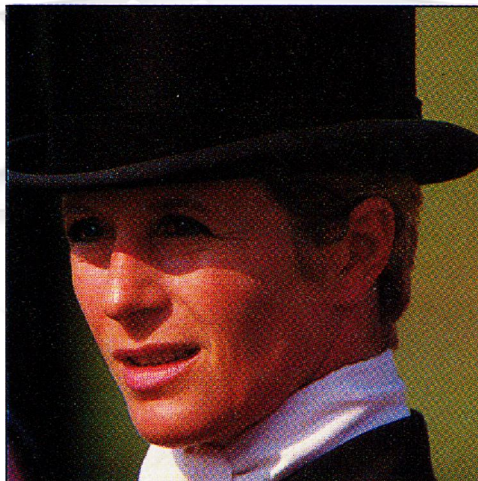


SPORTING LEGENDS: VIRGINIA LENG

SPORT: SHOW JUMPING

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1972 - 1999

Britain's leading horsewoman was born Virginia Holgate in 1955 on the island of Malta, where her father was serving with the Royal Marines, and went on to spend large parts of her early life overseas.



When Ginny came to England as a three-year-old her mother wasted no time in sending the youngster to a riding school for weekly lessons. However, it was not until she left boarding school at 16 that she began to ride regularly, on a horse bought for her by her grandfather.

Although Ginny decided to concentrate on the all-round discipline of eventing, her early performances were less than encouraging. She was disqualified from her first gymkhana, her first cross country event and her first National Horse Trials, and even helped eliminate her pony club from an area trials!

But thanks to the encouragement of her mother, Ginny continued to persevere, and was rewarded with selection for the British team in the 1972 Junior European Three-Day Event Championships.

Although her challenge was ended with a fall on the cross-country course, she was back the following year to claim the individual title and help Britain clinch the team gold.

SPORTING LEGENDS: VIRGINIA LENG



Virginia Leng's daring style helped her overcome many daunting race obstacles.

Leng was soon being talked about as a future champion, but in 1976 her career came to an abrupt halt - a fall at the Ermington Trials in Devon shattered her left arm, breaking it in 23 places. Five operations saved the arm, but Ginny was left with a long, hard fight to regain her fitness and only managed one three-day event ride in the next three years.

Things were to change with the purchase of a young horse named Priceless. Together, horse and rider helped Britain to European and World Gold, catapulting Leng to the top of international riding. Backed up by her second-string horse Night Cap, Ginny won at Burghley, before she and Priceless performed brilliantly to carry off the individual bronze at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.

Flushed with success, Leng returned to retain her Burghley title on Night Cap, followed in 1985 by triumph at Badminton - the toughest event in the sport. This was capped at the end of the year by victory in the European Championships, and with two new horses added to her stable, Ginny looked to have the world at her feet.

Riding Murphy Himself, Leng captured the world title in Australia in 1986, and then retained her European crown at Luhmulen. Her other young animal, Master Craftsman, was being prepared for the Seoul Olympics, and although not quite ready in time, the combination still managed to take the bronze.

However, they were at their peak for 1989, when victory at Badminton was followed by an unprecedented third European title for Britain's top rider.

Ginny put much of her success down to teamwork - with her mother, trainer and of course - her horses.

SPORTING LEGENDS: VIRGINIA LENG



Scott Burton's Final Thought

Virginia Leng achieved many successes during her career, and is remembered by an entire generation of sporting fans.

In a sport often only considered for the over-privileged, Leng transcended the mundane and became one of the few enduring icons associated with the sport.

Much of her success can be attributed to her strong will to win, and ability to put negative performances behind her quickly.

She also had an excellent entourage around her, and this team-based ethic no doubt inspired her to greater successes each time.



Virginia Leng enjoying her Olympic Bronze Medal success at Seoul 1988