

Congratulations, Zara And Mike!

Our royal correspondent, Ian Lloyd, joins us in wishing this sporty young couple all the happiness in the world.



Mike is very supportive of his bride-to-be.

IT'S been a year of royal celebrations. The Queen was eighty-five in April, the week before "the wedding of the century" between Prince William and Catherine Middleton. Then, in June, Prince Philip marked his ninetieth birthday, surrounded by friends and family.

Now his eldest granddaughter, Zara Phillips, is about to marry the love of her life, England rugby star Mike Tindall, in a ceremony to be held at Canongate Kirk on Edinburgh's Royal Mile.

It will be the first royal wedding to be held in Scotland since Zara's mother, the Princess Royal, married her second husband, Tim Laurence, at Crathie Kirk on Deeside in 1992.

Zara, like her mother, has always done things her own way, so it was no surprise that she and Mike were happy to forgo Westminster Abbey or St George's Chapel, Windsor, and opt for somewhere completely different. Their ceremony won't be as lavish as William and Kate's, but it will be just as memorable.

It was Prince Harry who played Cupid for the couple when, back in 2003, he and Zara were in New Zealand to watch England's victorious performance in the rugby world cup. Afterwards, he introduced his cousin to Mike at a party to celebrate the team's victory over Australia.

Zara had just broken up with another sportsman, the National Hunt jockey Richard Johnson. They had had a pretty volatile relationship and their romance was always front-page news. Zara was, of course, an equestrian in her own right, and they both worked and played hard.

The Queen's granddaughter has inherited her mother's strong personality and when it came to reining her in (no pun intended), no-one was better equipped than sixteen-stone Mike, who is nicknamed "the Fridge", but who has a really

easy-going nature. When Zara does throw the occasional strop, he simply ignores her, giving her the time and space to calm down.

Mike has always been on hand to support his girlfriend. He was at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire in September 2005 when Zara collected both an individual and a team gold in the European Eventing Championship. And a year later he was in Aachen in Germany when she triumphed and became the Eventing World Champion.

Zara has often joined her cousin, Harry, to

watch Mike play for England, creating a funny conflict of loyalty in the family, as her mother is, of course, patron of the Scottish side!

Having dated for seven years, Mike suddenly proposed last December, which Zara said took her by surprise. They knew they would have to wait until after William and Kate's wedding before they tied the knot, but they were in no particular rush. It also suited them to avoid some of the limelight, as neither of

them wants the level of attention the new Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have to cope with.

Talking of titles, the Queen won't be thumbing through Debrett's peerage for ideas. Princess Anne made it clear at the time of her own marriage that any children she had would remain plain "Master" or "Miss".

This suited Zara and her brother, Peter. Any honour Zara has received she has done so on her own merit — from winning Sports Personality of the Year in 2006 to being awarded an MBE by the Queen for services to equestrianism the following year.

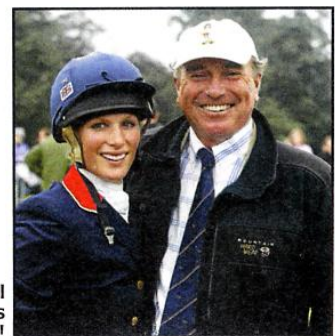
The newlyweds won't have much time to settle down, though, as Zara has one other award she desperately wants to achieve — an Olympic gold medal. With Mike backing her all the way, that really would be the icing on their wedding cake! ●



Sharing her joy with her mum.



Another win for Zara.



She's still a daddy's girl!