

Sarah Kaufman wrote the winning essay and was one of eight riders nationally to be awarded a Senior Athletic Academic Achievement award by the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association. To qualify for the award she had to be on her team for three years and maintain a GPA above 3.5. Those who qualified were invited to write an essay on the following topic: “What you have learned from horseshowing in the IHSA that has helped your academic life and will help in the future.”

Sarah Kaufmann

Senior Academic Achievement Award Essay

“One Stride at a Time”

Four years ago when I entered the jump on, jump in, jump off world of the IHSA I wasn't quite sure what I had gotten myself into. I was an eventer with very little equitation experience, and as my coach stood in the center of the ring and described the difference between my two-point position and the correct one, we came up with a plan. I was going to wipe the slate clean. To equip myself for the challenge I needed a “toolbox,” a place to store everything I'd learned. Each mount added a new tool, or taught me when to use an old one, and with a lot of work and even more patience I rebuilt my riding for the IHSA.

Riding was not the only medium in transition; life at college presented an entirely different series of obstacles. Though it took time, I found my place at Sarah Lawrence in a variety of roles: student, activist, leader, athlete, and friend. Each area of my academic life was like a different horse. I needed to use the correct tools and take things one step at a time.

As I approach the end of my IHSA career I have realized that it's no small feat to jump on a horse, jump into the ring, jump around a course, and jump off. Sometimes it's

great, and other times it's less than great. It is, though, always productive. As I have felt the charged rhythm of a perfect approach to a fence, or the ground-eating step of a perfect pass on the flat, I have wondered why every class can't be this good—why they can't be a series of perfect moments. But you have no idea what your horse is going to feel like until it is under you. You jump on, toolbox at the ready, prepared to ride each stride for what it is. The ability to jump into any situation with the self-confidence that I will pull out the right tool is what I have learned from the IHSA. I know that I won't do everything perfectly, but the IHSA is not about perfection, nor is it about matching my expectations. A horse that looked straightforward in schooling can feel like a squid en route to fence one. The trick is not to force the situation into an ideal, but to trust your ability to ride one stride at a time.

As I stand on the edge of my next transition I wonder what life will be like. When I was younger I imagined that life after college would follow a simple course: outside line, diagonal line, single fence. Instead I am faced with a series of complicated rollbacks and triple combinations. One may require more leg; another a quiet, confident hand. As I draw my next ride out of the hat I am grateful that the IHSA has taught me to leave my expectations at the ingate. With my toolbox in hand, I know I can ride whatever comes my way.