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I've always joked that the reason I learned to ride a horse was so that I never had to run; the horse could do the running, and I would tag along. I have never been a good runner. I've tried a few times in my life, but invariably, I get a stitch in my side, a cramp in my leg, or a twisted ankle within the first five minutes. I just can't find the inspiration to persevere to the next level. I have total appreciation for anyone who runs regularly, and those who run marathons seem super-human to me. I never understood how or why people do it.

Recently, my daughter joined her school's cross country team, and I learned a lot about this new sport. The middle school runners race through woods and trails on a two-mile course of hills and rough terrain. The course is the same for the boys' and girls' teams, and the winning time is usually somewhere in the neighborhood of 14 minutes. Some races have as many as 100 or more individuals competing, and the last of the runners may finish as late as 30 minutes after the start.

I really didn't know what to expect as a spectator at a cross country meet. I anticipated that it might be the least engaging participatory sports event I would ever encounter, because most of the time you can't see the runners unless you run alongside them and as I stated above, that was not going to happen. But in a very surprising way, my suspicions proved to be way off.

The wonderful thing about cross country is the cheering! Parents, coaches, and competing teams stand along the route and cheer for EVERY runner who passes by. It is so inspiring to know how hard each child is working to achieve their personal best. Some are trying to win; some are trying to cut another minute off their time, and some are just trying to finish without stopping. I recently attended a race where the last runner finished almost five minutes later than the girl ahead of her, but she kept on running, and she DID finish that race, and even gave a little sprint at the finish line! I was inspired to tears at the determination of that runner, and I was equally inspired by her teammates who went back to run the last five minutes beside her.

This moment reminded me that I see the same kind of camaraderie and inspiration at IEA events. How many times is the whole team rooting for that one rider who is attempting their first show, or riding a bigger horse than ever, or attempting their first over-fences course?

A few years ago, I had a beginner student who was a beautiful, but timid rider. She could win at the walk and trot, but she would only canter on the familiar horses at home. When we took a big road trip to a show at Thacher School in California that year, she was finally inspired to try cantering. Our team stood by the rail and anxiously waited for the announcer to call the command and see what she would do. “Canter, please, all canter.” She was right in front of the judge when she promptly stepped to the correct lead and began a beautiful canter. Our entire team erupted into a scream of cheers!

Then, her ride took a turn for the worse. The cheering, predictably, spooked her horse. He shied just enough for her to lose her balance, but she landed on her feet, and began to laugh. No, she still didn't get a ribbon, but she thrilled her teammates by giving her personal best, and even overcame her fear of falling off. It was one of my all-time favorite IEA coaching memories. And, of course, the next time she showed, she successfully cantered and won her class.

Riding is a sport that demands so much physical and mental preparation. Every day offers a new challenge, and a chance for a new personal best. Be sure to pat yourself on the back for each of those small victories along the way, but more importantly, never forget to cheer for your teammates and fellow competitors as they do the same. In the act of lifting up others, we achieve our greatest personal victories. Ultimately it's not the ribbons or trophies that define us, but the way we each grow in the eyes of others by our actions and our beliefs. So don't forget to stay to the end and cheer those who follow. If you do that, you'll be a winner in your personal race every time.
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IEA’s Boys of Fall
Since the fall of 2010, equestrian competitions have seen an increase in male youth competitors.

Limerick Lane Farms, in IEA’s Zone 5 for Ohio, boasted a complete male Middle School Team during its 2012–2013 season. Currently six boys ride at Limerick Lane, according to owner/trainer Maureen Fagan. At least five of them plan to continue or develop into IEA competitors.

What’s the draw? One is the challenge of jumping. Riders must maintain good form, proper contact and leg for consistent speed, accurate memory of the pattern of fences, and good distance judgment to launch from the best distance to the jump. They need to do it all smoothly and more effectively than the other riders, all while on unfamiliar horses.

The other draw is each other. It seems the more boys who ride; the more boys reclaim their equestrian skills and friendships.
For the third year in a row, an Alfred University (AU) interscholastic rider has won the National Crossover Champion title and buckle: Elena Hurd captured the title in 2011, Haley Ruffner earned honors in 2012 and in Oklahoma City in June, Kiley Stadtmiller became the third rider to bring home the much sought-after prize. Alfred University must be doing something right—but it’s no top-secret training approach or magic potion creating these strong riders. Instead, AU focuses on good old-fashioned horsemanship to build a team of balanced and versatile riders.

“Our program at Alfred University seeks to produce horsemen and horsewomen,” states equestrian program director Nancy Kohler. “We’re not trying to train pretty riders who will go out and win, but well-rounded equestrians who can get the most out of their draw and ride with balance and sensitivity to the horse.” This philosophy governs both the Western and hunt seat teams: riders are given the tools to manage multiple types of horses and learn how to adapt to a draw rather than forcing the horse to go in a certain way. The fact that this approach also produces nationally-ranked teams and individual riders is a big bonus.

Riders on Alfred’s teams are encouraged, but not required, to “cross over” or ride on both the hunt seat and Western teams. No rider is ever prohibited from trying another discipline. Because of the emphasis on horsemanship, the programs complement each other and most riders don’t find it difficult to move between disciplines. Almost half of the interscholastic squad’s members ride for both teams, a statistic that holds true when looking at Alfred University’s intercollegiate teams (also producing nationally-ranked riders).

And from the sounds of it, the riders themselves love the fact that they can ride on both teams and be successful, especially when they have access to Alfred University’s top-class equestrian center, excellent horses and full-time coaching staff. “If I had to pick just one discipline to focus on, I couldn’t,” says Haley Ruffner. “Even though a reining horse’s sliding stop isn’t much like jumping a course, I’ve learned that it all comes from riding a horse back to front and putting it together from behind. The

BY KRISTEN KOVATCH
2013 IEA National Crossover Champion: Kiley Stadtmiller of Alfred University
coaches teach that the basic concepts are the same." Ruffner plans to ride in college and wants a school with both disciplines—hopefully Alfred University.

Elena Hurd loves being able to work and excel in both disciplines, rattling off a long list of school horses that she considers her favorites. “I’ve always ridden both English and Western and I plan to continue doing so,” Hurd reports, showing her horse in all-around events when the IEA is not in season. Hurd plans to continue riding and showing through her college years.

Kiley Stadtmiller, a new rider on AU’s team showing in IEA competition for her first year, couldn’t have been happier to win one of the 2013 season’s highest honors on the national level. “I like that we learn how to communicate with our horses and how to be better horsemen,” Stadtmiller states. “Crossing over made me just a better overall rider and I can’t believe how much I learned in one year.” Stadtmiller has dreams of showing in college, either through the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association (IHSA) or the National Collegiate Equestrian Association (NCEA) formerly NCAA, and continuing her own riding and showing on the side.

It’s not just the IEA and collegiate riders getting in on the cross-over action, either—on a typical show day at Alfred University, the staff of the facility can be spotted schooling horses no matter what discipline. The hunt seat coaches will be out spinning and stopping the reining horses and the Western coach can be found warming up over fences. These coaches set the example for their students; not only is trying a different discipline fun, it’s also rewarding and can teach a brand new set of applicable skills.

“A good rider is a good rider, no matter what saddle they’re sitting in,” says Kohler. Her original vision in sharing AU’s Bromley-Daggett Equestrian Center with the local equestrian community through the IEA program has been fulfilled and more as Alfred’s IEA team continues to excel and earn national honors.

ABOUT THE WRITER
Kristen Kovatch is the Western teacher and trainer at Alfred University’s Bromley-Daggett Equestrian Center in Alfred, New York. She also coaches Alfred University’s IHSA and IEA Western teams.
STUDENTS IN GRADES 6–12:
TAKE THE REINS AND JOIN THE IEA

No Need To Own A Horse!

Riders in grades 6-12 can compete with teams in the Interscholastic Equestrian Association (IEA). School-age children, with various level of experience, compete in Hunt Seat, Western and Saddle Seat disciplines throughout the school year. Riders not only compete for individual points, but for their team as well.

It’s fun and challenging—and there is no need to own your own horse! Horses are provided to each rider at every event. All mounts are selected by a draw. Moms and dads really like that the IEA provides an affordable format for their child, as they build their equestrian skills. Many of the IEA senior championship riders receive college scholarships based upon their winning performance at the IEA National Finals, too.

Founded in 2002, the IEA has over 8000 members across the United States. For additional information about the IEA or answers to questions concerning team organization, please contact Jennifer Eaton-Membership Marketing Coordinator by phone at 877-RIDE-IEA (877-743-3432), Extension 1 or email Jenn@rideiea.org. You may also visit the IEA website: www.rideiea.org.

WWW.RIDEIEA.ORG

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I looked at him
As he looked at me
With those big, blue eyes
Fear took over me
Under his frayed mane
Under that bad streak
Beneath those pale eyes
There was something I could see
I wondered if luck
Had anything to do
With those big, blue eyes
Pouting those thoughts aside
I saw him hurt by distrust
And gently swung around his side
Not because I must
But because I wanted to
And nestled my leathered foot into his shiny flank
He trusted me, looked at me
And I saw myself
In those mirrored blue eyes.

Blue-Eyed
BY GWYNETH BERNIER

Gwyneth Bernier
I am in sixth grade. I am 12 years old. I am a novice rider
in IEA and I am on the Olde Towne Equestrian Team with
Myrna Treuting in Selden, New York. I had a horrible
concussion when a wild horse bucked me off, but I am
now the “fearless rider” who tries to show as much as
possible. My horse’s name is Oreo, he’s a Paint, and I aim
to be an Olympian.
Having a "BLAST"

Stephanie Keough
Horse Director
Western Finals 2013

Autumn Rose Western Finals 2013

Rocky Mountain 2013 1st place party

Southeastern Connecticut
Course Walk Hunt Seat Finals 2013

Roxane Lawrence
and Sue Wentzel
Western Finals 2013

KM Equine Western Finals 2013
with IEA

Coly Daly and Simon Towns
Hunt Seat Finals 2013

Hancock Horsemens
Western Finals 2013

Oakridge Western Finals 2013

Dare Team Western Finals 2013

Myron Leff Photography Director
Western Finals 2013

Rocky Mountain Wranglers
Western Finals 2013
Everyone knows how geographically large IEA Zone 4 is, encompassing six states in the Southeast, however, I doubt that everyone knows how generous and giving the coaches and teams are in Zone 4. It was a pleasant surprise to research the activities in our eight regions—the truth is that we have very benevolent people that coach our riders. From helping rescued horses to donations for children with cancer, it happens in this zone!

Last season, Nancy Unger-Fink (Region 5, Team Condee) and I had a conversation about different ways to give back to the community. That discussion led to my team’s decision not to give coach gifts at our IEA show but to make a donation instead; last year it was to St. Jude’s Hospital where 100 percent of the money received goes into research and treatment of childhood illnesses. This year we donated the money back to our own IEA community: we made the donation to the Zone 4 Scholarship Fund.

Following our decision to give back, Alicia Story (Region 8, Storybook) and I had a conversation and she decided to do the same thing. Last year her team donated the money saved by not purchasing team gift bags to a charity in their area, LEARN (Livestock and Equine Awareness and Rescue Network, learnhorserescue.com, 843-991-4879). This rescue organization offers education for the community and supports the local Animal Control departments with the care and housing of abused and neglected farm animals. The team chose Whisper’s photo for the Storybook IEA Program for their show because the neglect and abuse he faced was so severe, but with the love and care from the wonderful people at LEARN he completely healed and is a beautiful testament to their mission.
I talked to many coaches in our zone and discovered that Rachel Abel, **(Region 6, Lambert Equestrian)** donates 10 percent of the profit from their IEA show each year to the Will Davison Memorial Scholarship Fund. The principal of Lambert High School lost his son to SIDS at the age of 4½ months in 2007. The Foundation was formed as a way to honor the ‘angel among us’ in an effort to assist deserving students with their college plans. Each year every sports team, equestrian included, makes a donation to this foundation.

Another coach, Kathy Jones **(Region 1, Classic City Equestrian)** said, “It is easy to volunteer and get involved, just do it.” She has applied for non-profit status for her team and felt that in keeping with this, they should give back to their community. Last year, her team donated the profit from her show to Butterfly Dreams Therapeutic Riding Center (bdwfatkinsville@gmail.com, 706-310-1600). This center offers therapeutic riding lessons as well as hippo-therapy. They have a volunteer staff and teach almost 60 lessons a week to special-needs students of all ages. Kathy’s team also volunteers at special events and during the summer for ESP Camp Day. As a direct result of their continued relationship with this group and Kathy’s knowledge in the equestrian community, she is now a board member for this organization.

Probably the most involved coach that I spoke with is Nancy Unger-Fink **(Region 5, Team Condee)**. She has been volunteering her time, farm, family, and horses for over 20 years to many organizations that involve children. Many years ago one of her students was diagnosed with leukemia. She received a bone marrow transplant when she was 7, calling Nancy every evening so she could say “goodnight” to her pony. Sadly, this child died, but her death served as an impetus to Nancy to “do as much as possible for kids with cancer.” With this in mind, she teaches her team riders to do “Random Acts of Kindness” every month as a way of learning how to make their world a better place. She has sponsored Walkathons for children that she doesn’t know who had cancer; she donates profits from shows, art festivals, and pumpkin patch sales to St. Jude’s Hospital and the American Cancer Society, and she held a silent auction to raise money to cover the cost of chemotherapy for people that she only heard of through customers and friends. She even surprised her farrier one year when he was having a hard time with a complete Thanksgiving dinner served by her family to his family, because she, “chooses to be nice every day.”

It is through examples such as these that we can be inspired to be better people, more involved coaches, perhaps find new ways to give back to our communities—both human and equine. Although I have given you a small sample of benevolent acts of kindness to others, one thing I know for sure: Zone 4 is a great place to be.
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THE LEG UP

THE LegUp

STOCK PHOTO
Interscholastic Equestrian Association teams across the country are filled with riders, coaches, and parents who epitomize sportsmanship. Their good efforts and kind words ensure a fun and successful season for the entire team. Below are a few examples.

**BY MAKALA LUTZ, FIELDSTONE RIDING CLUB IEA TEAM MEMBER**

“The Fieldstone IEA Team is brand new this year, and new to all of us. Hosting a home show, the whole team, and families pitched in, whether it was cleaning crossties, organizing tack and making the barn spotless for our guests; we did it all together. We got to travel, have sleepovers, and sightsee. We also helped feed the less fortunate for Thanksgiving, and adopted a family for Christmas. We as a team helped out Elvenstar, which is right down the street, host their home show, shuttling 21 horses back and forth for Zone 10 Finals. Whatever we do, we do it not only as a team, but as a family. I’ve made great friends on my team as well as on other teams.”

“Thanks to our amazing trainers that made this all possible; Michelle Pacyna, Teal Pacyna, and Liz Mackenzie. A special thanks to Lisa Lutz for all of her time organizing and planning all of our road trips, and putting up with all of us. We couldn’t have done it without you!”

**BY ADDISON DIAN, GALAXY FARMS IEA TEAM MEMBER**

“The Galaxy Farms IEA team was new this past season and we had a blast! I would like to acknowledge one of our riders who is now going off to college. Brittany Drenth was a big sister to all of us and was always there when we needed her. I personally feel close to Brittany because at every show something happened making me unable to show. Although I tried to keep a good attitude around my team, I would go to the hotel room and cry because I wanted to be somewhere and at every show I was farther and farther from my dreams. But even when I thought I would never stop crying, Brittany always made me smile. She treated every one of us like a best friend and always made us smile right before we walked into the ring. Brittany qualified for regionals but was unable to make it. She could have made it to nationals. This was her first and last IEA season and we will miss her so much.”

**SUBMITTED BY MAYPINE EQUESTRIAN IEA TEAM MEMBER**

“It was our first year as an IEA team and one of the people that helped me the most throughout the entire season, starting with our first show, and ending at Nationals, was Colleen Shaw. She was the captain of the upper school team this year and she couldn’t have been a better role model. Whether she was helping with hairnets or fixing your number, she was always around. She came to every single show throughout the season, despite whether she was showing or not. If you were nervous, she would make you sing with her until you forgot what you were nervous about. Whenever I didn’t show as well as I could have, she would always be there to cheer me up. Colleen was one of Maypine Equestrian Center’s biggest fans at nationals this year. She was a huge support to me and the rest of the team. When we found out that we were the Middle School Team Champions she was the first to cry for happiness, and everybody else couldn’t help but join her, because she was one of the most important people that got us to that National Championship. Colleen was one of the nicest people to everybody on the team, and I can honestly say she is one of my best friends.”

In the next edition of Take the Reins, The Leg Up column will feature teams who have made charitable contributions to service organizations and those in need. Let us know if your team has been helping others. Send your submission via email to Susan Wentzel at swentzel13@gmail.com.
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