



ALLISON SPRINGER: A MENTAL CHECKUP WITH DOC

A lot has happened since the USEA Convention when I last wrote to all of you, and much of it has involved reflection and a clear plan for success leading into the next Olympic cycle.

BY ALLISON SPRINGER

I was inspired by Coach David O'Connor in my individual meeting with him back in December and continue to be by his feedback each day since. He and I discussed bringing the same focus and clarity of mind that I have learned to create in my daily training and competing of Arthur—which I believe has been the key change that resulted in our more recent years of consistency and success—to more aspects of my daily life. DOC said that he has noticed a lot of times where I have too much going on in my head all at once, making it hard for me to organize my thoughts and focus them.

When we spoke, I thought it was interesting he chose this topic to address with me rather than discussing my riding, which others who met with him mentioned he highlighted with them, things like extra steps in the corners of the dressage ring. One of the only things he did say about my riding was something I have to admit meant a great deal to me; he started and finished our talk by saying that he thought that I have not received half the credit that I should for what I have done

Allison Springer and recently purchased Copycat Chloe during a flat lesson with David O'Connor at a USEF Training Session in Aiken this March. HANNAH BENNETT PHOTO



with Arthur; and that I should always remember that. Receiving credit for what I have done with my beloved, yet ever so challenging, Arthur is not what I am looking for, but I will admit it feels great to feel like your coach recognizes your work and believes in you. It is definitely nice to feel like your coach is on your side, especially when there have been times in my career I know people would not have blamed me if I decided to give up on my incredible horse.

I think that a great coach is someone who tells you the truth, gives you compliments when you deserve them, and above all else, demands excellence from you by giving you tools and feedback to improve. I am incredibly grateful that David pointed out my mental game and the importance of improving it in my day-to-day life.

A PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS

Prior to my meeting with Coach O'Connor, I had to fill out a rider

profile, which included doing a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). This was a great exercise for me to do and as an athlete forced me to look a bit deeper within. I was kind of hoping that David would read what I wrote on my SWOT analysis and make all my problems go away and just hand me some amazing, already paid for horses to ride. Is that too much to ask? Yes, probably too much to even dream of. Anyways, I had the month of December to think and time to reflect with many of my horses on vacation...I thought a lot.

On December 31, I went to a special New Year's Eve yoga practice at the studio I frequent. At the end of practice, my instructor read "What Will Matter," a poem by Michael Josephson, to us and then asked us to write what we no longer need on a piece of paper. Afterwards, we threw the paper away and were invited to then write down our intention for the New Year on a rock. I was very clear on what I wanted to write, and when I was finished, my

rock simply said "focus." I talk a lot about my yoga because it has helped me tremendously physically and is the reason for the improved mental game in my riding. Admittedly, I probably take on too many responsibilities; I sit on a lot of committees and am a managing partner in a completely non-horse related business, Platinum Pistol Couture. I need my yoga, because it helps me to bring clarity and a relaxed state of mind from the craziness that is my daily life. I left that New Year's Eve practice thinking a lot about my conversation with David, and it really dawned on me what he was talking about in our meeting. David was pointing out that I would not miraculously overcome my threats and weaknesses without approaching them and living my life with the same thoughtfulness I have when I am sitting on a horse or in my yoga practice. My inability to ask for the help that I need the most, especially with horse ownership, was not going to change without my focused effort.

Allison Springer and Copycat Chloe. HANNAH BENNETT PHOTO



LOOKING FORWARD WITH CLARITY

The following day, I sat down and put a great deal of thought into how I have been doing things and what I need to do to make the next Olympic cycle a success. This was one of the best things I think I have done. Just as David was so specific in his goals and every step he laid out for the path to U.S. Team success, I specifically wrote down what I needed to do to accomplish my goals and to help the U.S. become

the number one eventing nation in the world. This resulted in what I think is an amazing presentation I titled "Success in the Next Olympic Cycle... How you can Become a Part of the Dream." Please email me if this intrigues you and I will be happy to share: allisoncspringer@gmail.com.

As top riders, we all have different needs or things to work on. For me, my biggest needs are horses. It physically makes me ill to think about asking people to help out in this way. I made Arthur myself, and any horse I have ridden has

been one I have worked with from the lower levels up and purchased for what some would consider to be basically nothing. I think I am a good example that through hard work, determination, skill, and belief, you can make it to the top on a challenging, inexpensive, yet talented horse. However, I know now that to truly fulfill my goals will require more horses than I currently have.

A BIG STEP TOWARDS MEETING MY NEEDS

Within a short period of sitting down and writing out what it would take to accomplish my goals, i.e., more horses, I was able to secure the purchase of a three-star mare named Copycat Chloe. I wrote that I needed at least two more upper level horses, and I had always dreamt about being able to compete this wonderful mare, so in a way it was like achieving two things at once. She is not the easiest ride on the flat, but I know Chloe very well from having her previous owner, Kelly Pugh, as a working student for over a year, and I know what extraordinary work she is capable of. Although I still need to find funding to purchase at least one more upper-level partner, this has been a huge step forward towards accomplishing my goals.

REALITY

Just after Chloe arrived, my season officially got underway. What you have to love about horses and especially eventing is that they both have a funny way of keeping you in check. Just when I felt a wave of relief come over me, having sat down and outlined my plans and needs, I fell off in competition twice in just one week! Of course it happened to be the week after my return from the Riders4Helmets Safety Symposium in Lexington, Kentucky where I received a Craig Ferrell MD Equestrian Safety Award. My first fall was very unexpected: a horse I was competing slipped and fell going around a turn. It happened so suddenly that I could not help but think of Courtney King Dye's recent video that she put together for the Safety Symposium (watch it at www.riders4helmets.com/2013/02/courtney-

king-dye-video-4th-riders-helmets-safety-symposium-2). My second fall was off Going for Gusto (aka The Big Goose), and I think I might have been trying to be a little overly careful in attempts to not fall off, causing me to not give him the right ride to the coffin at Pine Top. It was completely my fault.

Both of these falls show that slip-ups, just as in life, happen at every level, and we need to dust ourselves off and keep going. They also made me very proud and thankful for all of the safety improvements our sport has made, especially with helmets (thank you Charles Owen for keeping my head in one piece) and the air jacket technology (thank you Point Two for softening my falls).

LOOKING TO THE 2013 SEASON

I am feeling really good about the start of not only 2013, but also the start of the next Olympic cycle. I have Arthur geared toward Pau CCI4* in the fall in preparation for the World Equestrian Games in Normandy next year. I have both Copycat Chloe and hopefully Going for Gusto aiming for Bromont CCI3* with the hopes of doing the Boekelo CCI3* Nations Cup team event in October. Additionally, I have a couple of wonderful young French mares that will make the move up to the Preliminary level at the end of the year, and I will then be able to gauge their futures a bit better.

My main goal remains to obtain more world-class horses at all levels and especially another going upper level mount. I will continue to try to fight my inner self and get the courage to ask for help to get these horses. Sometimes the hardest things to do in life, in any situation, are to admit you need something and then try to go out of your comfort zone to get it.

So here I am at the beginning of the 2013 season, with my head freshly checked out via CAT scan thanks to my unfortunate dismounts, my goals and needs clearly outlined, and more determination than ever to make my quest of representing the United States and winning our country a medal reality.

Until next time, take care of yourselves, your horses, and do what you love! 🐾



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