



# YEAR IN THE LIFE OF ALLISON SPRINGER: THE ROAD AHEAD

BY ALLISON SPRINGER

*Eventing USA's 2013 columnist reflects on the past year and looks to the future in her final written chapter.*

**I**t is hard to believe that the 2013 competition season is coming to an end! It feels like it was just yesterday that I sat down to write my first article of this series and already I am bidding you farewell, in this form at least.

The year started with great excitement for the future of U.S. High Performance Eventing. A new coach, goals, and plans were set; everyone felt the same excitement/desire to get the U.S. back on the podium—a real collective effort on so many fronts. Now that we are approaching the end of 2013, how are we doing? What is our current status? Are we really improving? Are we on the right path? I think these are all good questions to consider.

## **MEDIA INFLUENCE**

I recently read a Facebook post (and the 28 plus comments/arguments back and forth) about our media perhaps being too positive about our mediocre performances on the international scene. As these sorts of conversations always spiral out of control online, I did not comment on this thread myself, but it certainly resurrected some strong feelings that I have had about the real influence that the media and online chatter has on both our personal and team performances.

While I agree that we need to all understand that our results are still just mediocre compared to the rest of the world and as of yet may not be good enough to get us back to being consistent medal contenders, we need to be able to field

LESLIE THRELKELD PHOTO

a team that not only can consistently produce solid team scores (finishing in the 40s with maybe—and I say maybe because I think we see scores continue to improve more and more all the time internationally—one low 50), but we must also have two of those scores reliably finish on an individual medal score (30s or low 40s).

Where I disagree with the author online is his sentiment about the media being too fluffy about our individual performances. The media can honestly and positively report on an individual's progression—be it good or “character building”—despite the effort not being good enough to help win the team a medal. Believe me, we, the riders, do not need to be told from the media that our performances were not good enough to win a medal...we already know it!

On our path to greatness for both our individual horses and ourselves, it is rare that a path is as storied as that of my good friend Sinead Halpin's stellar horse Tate the Great (Manoir de Carneville). In most cases, to get really good you need great experience.

Great experience does not come from things happening right all the time, which even Tate showed at Fair Hill despite many of us starting to believe he and Sinead might be immortal as a duo. Great experience comes from things not going right a lot of the time, and then after things are still not going right for a while, despite your moments of brilliance, some top finishes, your potential, and your promise, you eventually figure out how to make it happen, and then you learn how to make it happen consistently. A lot of this consistency comes from skill, effort, perseverance, and belief. I would never ever expect or hope for Sinead and Mr. Tate to not be total rock stars at every show as they have been in the past, but sometimes the pressure of having to be good all the time is tough, and even our country's best can have a bad day, too, which only makes us stronger.

If I were making my money betting on three-day eventing, I would bet you that Tate is even better

to start 2014 after he and Sinead parted ways at Fair Hill, which will be no coincidence! Sinead and Tate are one of the most talented duos there is on the eventing scene, and every now and then when things do not go your way it is a reminder that even the best pairs have moments of defeat, driving them to be even better. Yes, some of us are faced with more of these times than others, but the truth is, as a friend told me, you are never given anything you cannot deal with, so it appears some of us were just made to be hardier than others!

What we do not need is online conversations influenced by the media that pit our riders against each other. I have been an alternate twice now for U.S. teams, and in both instances, I felt that the media was incredibly hurtful to our U.S. teams. It had a lot to do with the fact that the teams we were sending did not feel like a cohesive team. This is really sad and simply wrong, realizing that the majority of the U.S. High Performance riders are really good friends. All the top riders at some point or another have felt like some media outlets dislike them or do not support them in the same way they do others. I remember one of them saying I needed to do well at Burghley to prove that Rolex was not a “fluke.”

## **BELIEVE IN SUCCESS**

This is a hard sport at any level, let alone the four-star level. I look back on my Burghley experience last year; my success there had to do with the fact that not only were we good enough, but we had created such a supportive team environment all those months spent together overseas that we were able to thrive. When asked about my dressage test at Burghley and the highlights of the day, I was happy with Arthur but ecstatic for my teammate because I had seen the hard work Sinead had put in each and every day and believed in what she and Tate were capable of producing there.

I had to stop reading some of these forums and blogs for a while because I knew it was not good for me, my

performances, and certainly not for the cohesiveness of the U.S. team. I always appreciated the fact that these sources brought more attention to our sport, especially during a time when there was no other group trying to promote us. However, it seemed to be at the cost of sensational writing and unhealthy debates. It has not been until the last year that I felt comfortable reconnecting with some of these outlets, largely in part to my forging a relationship with their correspondents. Even things like this can be so much a part of the mental game!

Why is this important? Because we have to believe! Not only do we have to be good, but we have to believe and surround ourselves by others that also believe in us. We have to be able to learn from our troubles, ignore the junk we do not need to hear, and learn to be successful. Case in point: Jan Bynny! I am so inexplicably over the moon about Jan's recent win at Fair Hill. Being a friend of Jan's, I have personally witnessed her many highs and lows. We talk about the necessary character-building experiences that teach us how to be good, but let's face it, sometimes it just feels insurmountable. I know that Jan had doubts this year, and she had worried about the doubts that others may have had about her, but she persevered, tried harder, did not stop believing, and put all her experience to good use. Good on you Jan! You make us all believe!

When I talk about the need to surround ourselves with people that believe in us, I believe our teams need to feel this from our country, especially in the heart-wrenching times of selection and the lead up to a team event. The media plays a very big role in this.

## **STICK TO THE PLAN**

One of the things that David talked to me about in my meeting with him this time last year at the USEA Annual Meeting and Convention was the idea of my success being repeatable. Can I replicate it again on other horses? I think I was just beginning to get to this

point of making it happen on Arthur last year, and that took me many years of a lot of hard earned-experience (“character building”) to get to that point. I think I could have gotten there a bit quicker if the majority of my experience did not come from primarily just one horse. I have missed competing my handsome horse this year and cannot wait for 2014 to begin!

Earlier in the year I told you about the project I did for myself in which


I analyzed what happened in the last four years and what I felt like I needed to do differently to make this next Olympic cycle a success. This project evolved into a real plan that allowed me to work towards acquiring another horse to develop that I think has potential to be a team contributor. Many people doubted my decision to purchase Copycat Chloe based on her somewhat inconsistent record, and I do agree that it was a risky

move. That project however, made me realize how important acquiring Chloe was and also led to my recent attempt to buy a very big time horse from England. Although I fell short in obtaining the hefty price tag of funds I needed to get this “England Horse” to the United States, I still believe in my plan and am kicking on with great enthusiasm to 2014.

Chloe’s dressage score has improved over ten points in FEI competition, which is a huge feat in just a few short months. And, as it turns out, some of those people who were wondering most what the heck I was thinking at the time were quick to say they were impressed in the change she has made and that she does show the potential I had known was there for the future.

I have never been one to take the path most traveled or the easy road. However, I am a fighter and it is that fight within that I know will lead us back to a medal, if we can all fight for one another.

Everything happens for a reason, as they say, and thanks to the team vets and some of our evaluations, a horse that has shaped me in many ways and taught me an unfathomable amount, that could have faced devastating injury but was instead given a precautionary workload, will be back in top shape in 2014. I have missed leaving the box on Arthur this season more than I can say, but you can be sure that we are both more ready than ever to come out next year, and I will have a big smile on my face when we do. I am still hoping to add another top horse to my string of contenders but am more clear than ever on how to attack the road ahead.

I want to thank each and every one of you readers for coming along on this journey with me. Reflecting on my past articles and looking at all this year has brought—both good and bad—has taught me valuable lessons. I love this sport and all that it is above all else! 



**Fleeceworks™**  
Get Real!

**Feel the Difference... Your Horse Does.**  
**Fleeceworks Sheepskin or Therawool™**

[www.fleeceworks.com](http://www.fleeceworks.com)