

# ALLISON SPRINGER: INSPIRATION UNBRIDLED

*This year, Allison Springer went to Rolex Kentucky without Arthur, participating as a spectator for the first time. She walked in the shoes of her childhood heroes and was inspired by her friends in competition. With her eyes on the horizon, Allison made the most of this new perspective.*

BY ALLISON SPRINGER

**I**t's hard to believe that another Rolex has come and gone already. I have to admit it felt very odd not putting Arthur on the trailer this year to head to Kentucky for the biggest event in the country. Growing up I said I would never go to Rolex unless I was competing, not because I did not want to go, but because I knew that this vow was a way of making myself more determined to accomplish my goal of competing there. Luckily, years later, I have accomplished my childhood goal of riding at one of the greatest places on earth, the Kentucky Horse Park, and now after seven entries as a competitor, I finally went to Rolex as a spectator for the first time.

I was a bit nervous about how it would feel to not be riding, but I was really excited to watch everyone compete. Most of all, I was looking forward to seeing how some of the U.S. riders have progressed under the Team's new program.

I thought I would have plenty of time without a horse competing to relax, enjoy some of the food in the ever-popular ringside tents, and take in the environment. However, the weekend seemed to whirl by, filled with doing things for the incredible sponsors that make so much possible for me, challenging Sinead Halpin and Coach O'Connor to a reining competition, catching up with familiar faces, and supporting my good friend Jan Bynny, who has always been there for me at my big competitions.

As I watched some of the U.S. riders, it dawned on me that I felt a bit odd signing autographs for kids, because I feel like I don't even compare to my first eventing idols from the 1984 Olympic Team: Karen Stives, Torrance [Watkins] Fleischmann, Bruce Davidson, and Mike Plumb. They were such a huge inspiration to me and were responsible for my dream to ride for the U.S. in the Olympics. Now, it just seems bizarre to be thought of as an inspiration to the next eventing generation. I guess if my past few years with Arthur have inspired some young riders to stay determined, believe in themselves and follow their dreams, then I'll take it! The more eventing enthusiasts we can draw into this sport, the better!

A great new group of eventing enthusiasts was the many syndicate members and horse owners at Rolex. I feel like the presence of owners in this country has blossomed, and man, these people are having fun! I think this is due to, and with necessary thanks for, the increased number of syndicates in our sport. It was really fun spending time talking to so many people who knew only a limited amount about eventing when they became involved as an owner, but they did it to support a dream and as a result have fallen in love with our sport.

I really loved all the kids and their enthusiasm. I now know that there is a pony out there named Arthur (yes, named after my Arthur), and there is a pony out there named Springer as well...too funny. I especially enjoyed asking the kids if they were going to

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Allison Springer and Copycat  
Chloe in the Advanced division at  
The Fork Horse Trials in April. LESLIE

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ride at Rolex someday and, believe me, I can tell from their answers which ones will really be back to take on the world years from now—the laughing response of “that would be nice!” or “maybe!” versus my favorite response from the ever so determined ones reminiscent of a younger me, “Yes, ma’am. I will be competing at Rolex someday!” It all starts with a dream and a lot of determination! I think in the end, the kids were the most inspiring part of Rolex for me. They were the ones that reminded me of myself at a younger age, how far I have come, and how far I have yet to go.

Another inspiring part of Rolex was watching our newest generation of four-star eventing horses and riders in this country. I thought Caitlin

Silliman and Meghan O’Donoghue were fantastic, (both from our 2013 USEF Developing Riders/Eventing 25 Program) which is really exciting for the future of the U.S. I thought Donner, Lynn Symansky’s off-track Thoroughbred, was remarkable and is one to watch for making the team in the coming years. Will Faudree rode very wisely and beautifully all weekend with Pawlow; I thought that he really showed a new maturity in his riding and that his many years of experience have helped him be better than ever. I was happy to see Ballynoe Castle RM back on top. I have a huge fondness for Reggie as he and Arthur trooped around together to many of their first big CCI events coming up the levels. Buck, of course, is always

amazing to watch cross-country, so I thought it was very fitting that he got to take home the new Land Rover for being closest to the optimum time. Seeing Jan Byyny back at the four-star level again was so much fun to watch. I know this is not a first, but she has overcome a lot and it is a huge accomplishment in itself. I know Jan was bitterly disappointed about her show jumping, but she has probably taught me more than anyone about determination, and this Rolex will surely make her a force to be reckoned with the next time around.

That feeling of disappointment when you know you could have done better is probably the most dreaded feeling of any competitor, and it has a terrible way of not going away

soon enough! When I am nervous at a competition like Rolex, it is not because I am worried about a certain fence or falling off; I am worried about not wanting to ever feel that dreaded feeling of disappointment again. This disappointment is generally what makes us work harder than ever and gain more of that experience that will one day turn us into the next Andrew Nicholson or William Fox-Pitt (in blonde, female form with a Chicago accent of course)!

So what is next for me? That was the big question I was asked all weekend long in Kentucky. The first big “next thing” I had planned following Rolex was taking two off-track Thoroughbreds to their first recognized competition at MCTA. Maine and Azul Moon made their debut event a successful one. I love that the off-track Thoroughbreds are coming back into fashion as they have always been my favorite, and I especially love that our sport has

given the Thoroughbred a home. There is nothing like the feeling of galloping a Thoroughbred cross-country, the ease and efficiency of their gallop is unparalleled.

Copycat Chloe and I are aiming for the Bromont CCI3\* with our final run being at Chattahoochee Hills CIC3\* in May. My partnership with Chloe has made huge strides forward, and I finally feel like we are at the steep upslope on our learning curve with one another. I get such a kick out of her personality and am so grateful to be riding her each and every day!

Arthur’s big goal is the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games in Normandy next year and making him as competitive and strong for that as possible. He is doing great and I know he missed being at Kentucky as much as I missed riding him there this year. I am excited for the season to progress and for the excitement, which defines our lives as eventers to continue at a full gallop. 🐾



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