

Saddleback College student **SADDLES UP**

By Taryn Bruette

Some college students would consider themselves busy people with 12 units of coursework, a significant other, midterms around the corner, and a part time job to boot. Recently, while most students were studying for their upcoming exams, Saddleback College student Jaclyn Meinen, 19, was doing that and more as she and her European-imported horse, Rivaal, trained for the 2006 North American Junior and Young Rider Championships.

Jaclyn and Rivaal's specialty is dressage. Although the word dressage is French for "training", this equestrian sport is often regarded as a dance between horse and rider as the pair effortlessly perform the maneuvers and gait changes that a dressage competition entails. The fundamental art of drawing out a horse's natural athletic ability and willingness to perform is part of what makes the sport so versatile – any horse and rider can benefit from it.



Jaclyn is not alone in her wish to be a champion. The goal of many young equestrians is to one day make it to the Olympics—yet it is a select few that actually attain that goal—the world of horses requires time, dedication, and most importantly, financial backing, to make dreams come true. Only a handful of people are lucky enough to have the financing available to maintain a top competition horse that can often cost in the six digit range, with the additional cost of training, showing, transport, general care and vet support. And those lucky few are very rarely 19 years old.

A stereotype is that students in South Orange County benefit from having things handed to them with no regard to responsibility, with many parents of the opinion that horseback riding is nothing more than an expensive hobby. Jaclyn's parents, however, recognized the talent, desires, and long-term goals that drive their daughter and were willing to make sacrifices to see her dreams come to life.

"We knew she was a serious rider, the issue was providing her with what she needed to succeed [in dressage]," says her mother, Virginia Meinen. "The horse that she wanted was expensive, and if we provided the finances for him, we were going to need something from her in return."

Jaclyn and her parents agreed that she would stay on top of her schoolwork. "The more responsibility we gave her, the better she performed. She always rose to the occasion," Virginia said. "As far as our agreement was concerned, she was fulfilling it."

With financial help from her parents, Jaclyn purchased seven-year-old Rivaal in the summer of 2005. At that time Jaclyn was a senior at Dana Hills High School and trained the young horse to the beginning stages of top-level dressage all on her own. "Her philosophy has always been that she wants to do it herself," says her mother. "Jaclyn sacrifices everything for her passion, her social life always comes second."

When Jaclyn entered the qualifiers for the North American Junior and Young Rider Championships, she and Rivaal went into it with the mindset that they were only participating to gain experience. She never imagined they would actually qualify for the Junior Olympics.

"Rivaal and I really weren't ready for a competition of that caliber because we hadn't been working together very long," admits Jaclyn. "We surprised ourselves and ended up placing in the top ten out of 43 competitors." And what does a junior Olympian do when she isn't commuting an hour's drive from Dana Point to Murrieta to train for four hours a day, six days a week?

She takes 12 units of coursework in International Business at Saddleback College with a class that begins at 6 A.M., then trains eight to nine horses a day in the afternoon at various horse stables in southern Orange County. "I really appreciate the low cost and convenience of being a student at Saddleback. Starting my College classes at 6 A.M. allows me to spend the majority of my day in the saddle, either working with students or training with Rivaal. I couldn't manage to fit everything in otherwise."



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Jaclyn Meinen— continued



Her most recent position is as an instructor at Tar Farms in San Juan Capistrano. “I kind of fell into working at Tar Farms,” says Jaclyn. “Erin O’Steen, the head dressage trainer needed help, and I needed a job and experience.”

It is Jaclyn’s perseverance and commitment to the sport of dressage that has helped her to become a champion in her own right. “Jaclyn’s one of the most determined people I know,” says Erin O’Steen. “She’s very knowledgeable and competitive, but she’s also great with the kids. They really look up to her.”

Through all the stress, tears, and exhaustion that comes with the territory of being a top-level rider and trainer, while still a working community college student, Jaclyn insists it is worth it in the end. “I have a passion that I can’t put into words. I will sacrifice anything to do this. It’s just the way it is.”

Saddleback College can help you reach for your highest goals and become a champion in your own chosen field. For more information, please call 949.582.4500 or visit the College website at: www.saddleback.edu.

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