



## Victorious Victoria Birdsall Junior Rider on the Way to the Top



Victoria Birdsall's poise and professionalism are even more impressive when you realize that at just 16 years old she is already a leading junior rider in the sport of jumpers and equitation. This dedicated equestrienne has many significant accomplishments to her name since she began competing in the third grade, yet she is quiet and unassuming about her demanding sport. She won the title in the Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Hall of Fame, a talent search program that for more than 50 years has supported the search for the show jumping stars of the future. She completed her 2009 high school year with honors while successfully competing on the east coast show jumping circuit and went on to win the prestigious George Morris Excellence in Equitation Exhibition. A resident of Topsfield, Massachusetts, she also calls Silver Oak Equestrian Center in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, her home. Owned by her family, the impressive facility is the site of the annual Fidelity Investments Jumper Classic, New England's largest show jumping event held this year from September 15-19, 2010. She graciously took time between competitions to answer some questions for fans of the sport.

**1. How do you prepare yourself and your horse(s) for a competition – how much do you practice, take lessons, and how do you get both physically and mentally prepared?**

Before a competition, I like to keep my horses fit so showing is easy for them and they are as comfortable as possible. I flat most of the week. I usually practice different exercises and gymnastics two times a week to train my horses' ride-ability and strength. Once a week I will set up a course that resembles the challenging courses the horses will see at a horse show. This program will set them up mentally and physically to handle any of the challenges at a competition.

**2. What do you like the most about being a rider and if you had to explain to someone what your sport is, what would you say to make them understand just how challenging and interesting it is?**

My absolute favorite part about riding is the relationships I gain with the horses I ride, especially my own horses. Horses are amazing animals that want to please their riders. They try so hard for us, and I love knowing when my horses trust me. It's a partnership. I would tell someone that riding is such a technical and difficult sport to master because it requires the perfect balance between teamwork, strength, accuracy, and poise.

**3. How do you balance your year-round riding schedule with school, keeping up with friends, and all the typical activities of a 16-year-old?**

I have been balancing my double life since third grade, so I've gotten pretty good at it. However, I can't do it alone. My family and friends are amazingly supportive and always try to give me every experience I can possibly have. For keeping up with school, my teachers are also extremely supportive and always work to keep me updated on all the materials I need. As hard as I try to keep my life as normal as possible, it would be impossible if I wasn't surrounded by people looking out for me.

**4. Where do you hope to be five years from now?**

In five years, I hope to be graduating college and starting my life. I would love to pursue a career in training and showing horses, and I would especially like to travel and compete around the world.

**5. Can you pick a special moment in your riding career - a lesson, a particular ride, a breakthrough moment, or friends and family support and describe it and what it means to you?**

Whenever I am asked a question like this, I always think of one instance at Harrisburg when I was twelve. In fact, I wrote a paper about it in ninth grade. It was my first year competing in the Prix De States High Junior Division in Harrisburg. I was mounted on my first jumper, Maxim W, who was a little over his head in the High division. The combination of his insecurity and my inexperience resulted in a disastrous first two

rounds, in which I fell off at the third jump in the first round of the second day of competition. After that round, I was up in the stands with my trainer crying because I wanted to pull out, I wanted to give up because I knew I wouldn't make it around the second class. My trainer, Patti Harnois, gave me the most inspirational speech. She believed in me, and she told me that I could make it around that ring. She encouraged me to dig down deep and come up with any anger, strength, and desire to show everyone I belonged in that division. So, that is exactly what I did, and I got my horse Max around the ring. I was so proud, and that day of showing proved that I had the courage, I was strong enough to achieve anything I thought to be impossible.

## **6. Outside of horses, what are some of your favorite things to do?**

I love cooking. Whenever I'm home with nothing to do, I will always pull out a cook book and make something. I especially love to bake. Also, I enjoy going to Boston, going to the beach, or just hanging out with my friends.

## **7. What would you advise a young rider to do to get ahead in the sport?**

I would tell a young rider to ride every horse or pony that presents itself. It is important to be able to ride any and all types of horses, even the most troublesome and fresh. In the long run, with the experience of riding all different styles and temperaments of horses, it will teach a rider to be able to handle any situation a horse can confront you with.

## **8. What's it like to win your biggest classes?**

When I win an important class, it is always so exciting. I'm so proud of our performance, especially my horse's. It is the most amazing feeling knowing that all your hard work and practice has paid off, and that everyone watching sees your hard work and talent. Without my horse's attentiveness and eagerness to please, it would be impossible to have any success.

## **9. What do you listen to on your iPod?**

I have almost every type of music on my iPod except hard rock/metal. I listen to alternative, reggae, hip hop, classic rock, pop, some country, almost anything. My favorite band/singers are probably the Beatles, Coldplay, State Radio, and Jack Johnson.

## **10. How does it feel to be "aging out" of juniors - what do you look forward to and what will you miss?**

The idea of aging out doesn't really scare me. To me, I don't feel like it is the end of something, but rather it is another stepping stone toward my future as a rider. I think it is exciting because I will start to compete against the best in the show circuits, even though it will be much more competitive.

## 11. What other riders have inspired you and why?

Beezie Madden is my greatest inspiration because she is one of the greatest riders in the world, and she is also one of the modest riders I have ever met. Also, she always cares about the horses and has such a strong relationship with them that I don't see in every grand prix rider. When I watch her ride, I can see the horse listening to Beezie, and vice versa. The horses love to perform for her.

## 12. How has your success as a rider impacted other areas of your life?

The successes I've had in riding have taught me about dealing with defeat, and how important it is to keep my mind positive. Also, I have learned that success is a result of hard work and practice. It is important to be patient and do your homework if you want to be successful, there are no short cuts.

