

# Set High Standards Every Day

By Eliza Sydnor

If I had to sum up in one word what I took away from this year's Olympic Dream adventure, it would be: standards. These top riders and trainers all had incredibly high standards in many areas, but I always felt that their skill level is attainable. The only difference was that they kept their standards so high and maintained that quality on a daily basis.

At Fleyen Hof, for example, Hubertus Schmidt would not move on to the "meat" of the training session until the thoroughness, suppleness and reactions of the horse were near perfect in the warm-up. The half passes were ridden again and again (very quietly, very encouragingly) until the balance, bend and expression were just the way he wanted. As I watched him, I thought to myself, *I would have been more than happy with half pass number one, and I probably wouldn't have done another one.* But the improvements he made were fantastic. He wanted a *great* half pass, not a good one.

The competitors we watched, both at the European Young Rider Championships and the young horse competition, also held themselves to the highest standard. While some of the Young Riders were better than others, all their tests were impressive because they were clean and accurate. Some horses had more expressive, uphill flying changes than others, for example, but we hardly saw any real mistakes. I know I have often been guilty of going into a show hoping that I will be able to get through the movements. These riders would not go to a show until they *knew* the movements would go off without a hitch.

The top riders we watched all rode horses of the highest quality. The top Young Riders all competed on horses that would have been welcomed on our Pan Am team or at the top of our Intermediaire I championships—incredibly talented horses with phenomenal movement as well as super training. Any less would not be acceptable.

Lastly, the European work ethic is of the highest standard. Hard work is the norm. Having a light day or taking a day off because they didn't feel like working that hard seemed inconceivable. To make it to the top requires hard work, daily hard work. This was evident in watching the pony riders all the way up to the Olympians.

Now that I have been home for a few months, I try to remind myself of these standards every morning when I get up to work with my horses. I envision those beautiful riders and horses, and I know if I keep my standards high and work just as hard, I, too, can ride like that one day.

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