

## **2012 IHSA Senior Athletic Academic Achievement Essay**

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Four years ago, I remember nervously standing in front of a brightly lit arena, waiting to try out for the Dartmouth College Equestrian Team. I felt my heart sink as I watched potential Open and Intermediate riders try out for the team, cantering in perfect strides and then flying over jumps, landing safely on the other side.

“Oh no,” I thought. “I’m definitely not going to make the team. I’m not that good!”

My ride was a disaster. I was confused at how to pick up the right diagonal, my hands bounced as I performed the posting trot, and I finally picked up a lopsided canter after trotting two lengths of the arena. I was sure I hadn’t made the team.

To my surprise, my coach called me over when tryouts were over.

“We’re looking for a Walk-Trot rider.”

Those words began my journey with the IHSA. I spent my freshman year in the Walk-Trot division, and then advanced to Beginning-Walk-Trot-Canter, Advanced-Walk-Trot-Canter, and finally Novice in my senior year. But while I could feel myself becoming a better rider as time passed, I still felt disappointed many times over the years when my performance in shows didn’t reflect the amount of effort I put in during practices.

Now looking back though, I feel that it was beneficial that I didn’t win a blue ribbon at every horse show. The pink ribbons I received over the years have taught me that it’s okay to fail sometimes. I learned that just because you don’t win a blue ribbon doesn’t mean that you should stop trying and give up.

Over time, the resilience I learned from competing at horse shows has affected my academic performance. Although I faced several hurdles along the way, ultimately I never gave up: I never quit the team, and I never withdrew from a class. Instead, I turned the negative feelings I experienced after doing poorly in a show or on an exam into motivation to do better the next time around. After getting the wrong lead in a show, I would work on canter transitions in practice the following week. Similarly, after doing badly on the first midterm in a class, I would study harder. I believe that the times I did win a blue ribbon or get an A on an exam were the direct result of the mindset I learned and practiced: to keep trying my best no matter the immediate outcome.

Four years ago, I remember nervously standing in front of a brightly lit arena, uncertain of my future. Now, four years later, I can walk confidently into the ring, unafraid to make mistakes. This confidence, stemming from my learned ability to convert failure into motivation, was essential to my academic success at college, and I know will be incredibly beneficial in any career path I choose as well. Life after college will undoubtedly be full of its own hurdles, but the past four years have taught me that one ride (at tryouts, for example) doesn’t really matter; what matters is one’s willingness to pursue a long journey full of both successes and failures.