

Equestrian Perfection

Courtney Branscome

Class of 2008

On February 8th 2008, the St. Andrews Presbyterian College Equestrian Program made history as the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association team made a perfect score at the show hosted by St. Andrews

In the history of the equestrian program at St. Andrews, this has never been achieved. In fact, it was achieved one other time in the region by Virginia Intermont in 2006. In many other regions there has never been such a thing as a perfect score. A perfect score is when every single point rider gets a first place for their respective class. “Unbelievable” was the first word that Peggy McElveen uttered after realizing the IHSA team had made perfection. McElveen then proceeded to do her happy dance which had the entire team laughing, yet proud of their achievements.

Getting a perfect score is surely no easy feat, especially in the St. Andrews region 3 (in Zone 4). Out of 31 regions in the United States the St. Andrews region is the largest with 404 riders. It is the only region in the country with over 400 riders. This region also hosts the three time national champion Virginia Intermont, and four other championship contenders: St. Andrews, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Charlotte, and Virginia Tech. Each region can only send one team forward to Zone Finals.

St. Andrews is known for being one of the larger host colleges that allows many more rides from each school to compete. This opportunity gives other team members of the teams a chance to compete and show off their skills for their respective school. Virginia Intermont is the only other school out of 17 in the region that allows more students to show as well. At the February show, St. Andrews provided 47 horses to be used for 219 rides at the show.

Many St. Andrews riders pointed out and qualified for Regional finals which are held at St. Andrews in April. There is also a race for the Cacchione Cup. The Cacchione Cup is an event in which each region is allowed to send one rider to IHSA Nationals for this specific class. At the end of the Regional Show, the highest pointed open rider is the one sent to nationals for the cup. Which is being hotly contested by Brittany Denton (last year's Cacchione Cup rider) from Virginia Intermont; Maggie Wahl from UNC-Charlotte; Janelle Harcus from St. Andrews; and Ashley Miller from Virginia Intermont. All of these riders are only one point from each other in the standings. With only four IHSA hunter seat shows left, the competition will be fierce.

It was the last division of the day which was “Advanced Walk Trot Canter”. Our last point rider was up, Katie Lavery. Katie quoted “I knew there was a possibility of a perfect score, and I could feel all the pressure on me. I felt that if I messed up it would all be on me, but yet thrilling at the same time that I could make this feat happen.”

In IHSA, these shows depend heavily on volunteers and team effort. The facility started opening up the barn around 6 am and didn't close the gates till late 7pm. All the horses have to be tacked up and ready to go for their divisions, then cooled down and put away properly. The volunteers all had tasks to perform such as the concession stand, announcing, jump crew, and paddock master just to name a few. The show was a tremendous success and ran smoothly with almost 100 St. Andrews volunteers helping out throughout the day. “It was all about the team and teamwork, we couldn't have done

this with out the entire equestrian program and IHSA team, I was so proud of everyone” commented point rider Jess Gesel.

It was a long, exhausting but successful day. A large number of St. Andrews riders and volunteers went to the local Mi Casita’s restaurant to celebrate a day of hard work and success, myself included.

Charlotte native Courtney Branscome is an Equine Business Major minoring in Equine Studies. She is on the show team, participates in riding council, volunteers for the therapeutic program every semester, and helps out at IHSA shows.