

Unique Opportunities to Prepare Your ‘Mental Game’ at the Aiken Eventing Camp

Don't let the chilly temperatures drag you down this winter—head down to Aiken, South Carolina in early February for the Aiken Eventing Camp to jump start not only your riding skills, but the competitive edge you need to be successful through the power of positive thinking. Learn from top riders Craig Thompson, Allison Springer, and Abigail Lufkin about handling your nerves, dealing with pressure and outside stress, and remember the true meaning of why you event in the first place—for the love of the sport!

Though all three of these top-level riders have many years of competition experience, Abigail brings something new to the table. As a former top event rider Abigail represented the United States in the World Championships and the Pan American Games on two occasions. Now trained and working as a Sports Psychology Consultant, she joins the Aiken Eventing Camp to focus on our mental game. If you think your nerves are bad before you head into the ring for your Novice dressage test, try getting ready for a test with the weight of the entire team riding on your shoulders!

Many riders have similar skill level and talent, so what makes some people successful while others always seem to struggle? Very simply, winning athletes have mastered the ability to consistently create a mental state which allows them to achieve their potential, maximize their training time, and utilize all of their hard earned skills. Just as you can learn how to do a shoulder-in or count down a five stride line, you can teach your mind to be your ally rather than your enemy. Join Abigail for seminars on such topics as: the "zone"- focus and flow, creating motivation and confidence, and managing performance anxiety and fear.

After a heartbreaking round at the 1992 Olympic selection trials in Luhmühlen (Germany) blew her chances for a team spot at the Games, Abigail began using sports psychology before the 1996 Olympics. “Going into that season I realized that I needed to be more consistent in my approach to competition,” wrote Abigail in an article in *The Chronicle of the Horse* last year. “I knew that I had the physical skills, but some days I would get on and feel completely unable to access them. Or I would have a good day, feel fully focused and present, able to perform my best with ease. The term athletes often use to describe this is “the zone,” or feeling a “flow.””

Abigail made a successful return to the sport after taking a sabbatical from 2000 to 2003 to attend graduate school, but then returned when she found a special partner in Kildonan Tug. “It has come back to me more quickly than I would have thought,” said Abigail at the 2004 Rolex event, proving that once you get “bitten by the horse bug,” you can never truly be healed. She then finished the prestigious four-star event in third place, and became short-listed for the Athens Olympic Games.

Abigail's road to a top finish at the premier event in the country wasn't an easy one—especially since Tug was a new ride for her. Their first Intermediate event out together proved disappointing as they were eliminated early on course. “The road continued to be challenging for the next few weeks, but when negative thoughts entered my mind, I willed myself to replace them with positive ones. Less than two months later, I finished third at Rolex Kentucky on the same horse. This would never have been possible if I had not practiced my ability to control my thoughts and channel them in a positive direction,” said Abigail.

“Many athletes and coaches will tell you that success is at least 50 if not 90 percent mental, and yet we devote so little time to our mental preparation,” she continued. “Most of us, however, aren’t even aware of our mental game. Whether your goal is the Olympics, the Area championships, or your first Novice, actively developing your mental capacity can lead to tremendous improvement, success and enjoyment.”

With these positive philosophies in mind, come and join us at the Aiken Eventing Camp to improve your mental game and prepare for an enjoyable, successful season in 2009!

For more information on the Aiken Eventing Camp, visit [the website](#) or email Sarah Heffron at aikeneventingcamp@gmail.com