



Champions Share Their Winning Strategies

Work Behind the Scenes Leads to Show Ring Success

Rose garlands, silver buckles and trophies worthy of mantle space. No matter the breed, discipline or level of expertise, competitive riders all strive for one thing: winning.

But what does winning mean? It's different for everyone. Maybe winning is finally beating a horse that has always placed above yours. Maybe it's mastering a specific movement. Maybe it's beating your fastest time or having a clear round.

Winning is defined in many ways, and the hard work, dedication and time commitment leading up to it is just as varied. We polled riders and trainers representing various breeds and disciplines from around the country for their "winning" tips. The one component they all agreed upon: It takes a lot of effort behind the scenes.

"Every journey is unique. If you accept the ups and downs of the journey while bleeding determination, hard work and the desire to learn every day, you're winning."

Meghan O'Donoghue

4 Event Rider*

2014 WEG Alternate

United States Eventing Association

"I do a little every day, in every lesson with a rider so they enter the show ring prepared. Repetition is also really important to me, so both horse and rider understand the expectations and build enough confidence to execute under pressure. That, along with proper nutrition, grooming, veterinary care and training help bring me success."

Sarah McClintock

Highland Ridge Stables

American Saddlebred Horse Association

“My winning strategy is to simply focus on what I can control. I do not like to think too much about how my competition is doing/did, who the judges are, etc. I only focus on myself, my horse and our partnership when we go into the show pen, fully trusting in myself and our preparation. If something goes wrong or we do not do as well as we had hoped, at least I know that I’ve done everything in my power to be prepared and that my horse and I gave it our all together.”

Lauren Love

American Quarter Horse Association

Amateur Western Horsemanship

“When you step out in the show ring, just ride exactly how you ride at home. Don’t worry about failing, just go out there and give it your all.”

Julie Wolfert

4 Event Rider*

Chaps Equestrian Center

United States Eventing Association

“I always go to bed early the night before my class, even if my class is later the following day. I don’t drink, not even a glass of wine, or go out to dinner. We have a coach bus, so I stay there. I feel that no matter how much I have worked at it, my body needs to be hydrated and prepared for the class. Sometimes it’s cold and then it can be hot in the show pen, and I like to be physically comfortable and not fatigued. I don’t get ‘nervous.’ I feel that I’m ready to go into my class, and we just do our best. I also think it’s important to have some camaraderie with the other people in my class, because we are all doing the same thing and it’s fun to meet new people and to connect with old friends.”

Marylyn Caliendo

American Paint Horse Association

“Never give up! If your ride isn’t following Plan A, switch to Plan B, and keep showing.”

Kelly Ponce

American Quarter Horse Association

“I try to do all the pre-work right when I arrive. I look at the arena and develop a game plan based on the arena conditions. After that, I try to turn my mind off and just focus on warming my horse up and making sure we are both prepared.”

Carley Richardson

Barrel Racer

“Relax, have fun and show off your horse to the judges.”

Joe Frizzell

Arabian Horse Association

“Just before you ride into the pen or begin a pattern, take a deep breath and blow it out as you mentally run through one positive to-do task, such as closing your leg before going to your hand or using your voice command first or sitting on your seat.”

Stephanie Lynn

American Quarter Horse Association

“Right before I walk out to show, I bridle my horse, reach down, pet him and say, “We are world champions, the hard part is over! Now let’s go have some fun!” When I’m riding in the hunter under saddle division, I sing a song that I made up so every time I rise, I sing ‘Point, point, point that toe.’ I know it sounds silly…….”

John Zeldenthuis

American Paint Horse Association

“My tip for feeling good for both people and horses is to stay hydrated. Sometimes headaches in the mornings are from lack of water. Drinking water with electrolytes can really make a difference. The same is true for horses.”

Deanna Searles

Circle S Ranch

American Quarter Horse Association

“Real winners wear helmets! Everyone should protect their head. Crazy, unpredictable things happen on horses – even to the best riders in the world.”

Ellie Johnson, DVM

Woodland Veterinary Hospital

“When you get to a show, trust in your training. It works every time!”

Joni Nelson

Nelson Quarter Horses

American Quarter Horse Association

“Don’t ride faster than your guardian angel can fly. And it’s important to ride smart. In order to do that, you must use your brain, and your brain needs oxygen to think, so you must breathe. Once my riders are on course, I remind them with ‘Oxygen to the brain!’”

Courtney Hayden-Fromm
Seoul Creek Farm

Another winning tip, this one from Megan Green, DVM, manager, equine and large animal veterinary services, Merial, is to be sure your horse is healthy enough to perform at his or her best. “The stress of activities such as training, traveling and competing can lead to the development of stomach ulcers. That’s why it’s important to be proactive and help prevent them from occurring with the use of ULCERGARD® (omeprazole). It’s the only proven and FDA-approved product to help prevent equine stomach ulcers.¹ Don’t risk wasting your hard work.”

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