

MAGGIE HERZOG

2006 FOXCHASING SCHOLAR



Regina Welsh

All smiles: Maggie Herzog

by Regina Welsh

Each year, the Maryland Steeplechase Association hands out season-end awards in its Governor's Cup series. Most awards are based on points accumulated by horses, riders, and trainers, but there is a special award given to the junior rider who has shown outstanding commitment and dedication to the sport of steeplechasing.

This award is known as the Junior Foxchasing Scholarship, and its goal is to foster the traditional relationship between foxchasing and steeplechasing. This year's winning junior only started racing a few years ago, but due to her vast improvement, fantastic sportsmanship, and all-around good attitude and enthusiasm, Maggie Herzog collected the prize.

Under the terms of this coveted scholarship, Maggie not only received free tuition to the Green Spring Valley Hounds (GSVH) Cubbing Camp but also to the Potomac Hunt Club's Hopeful Hunters Seminar. In addition, she was invited to hunt with all five of Maryland Governor's Cup participating hunt clubs.

It was hard for the Governor's Cup committee to overlook Maggie last spring. She

and her ponies were on fire, going undefeated over fences and on the flat. Sweet Adeline clinched victories in the Medium Pony Field Master's Chases at both the Howard County-Iron Bridge Race Meet and the Green Spring Valley Point-to-Point before she was sidelined by injury. Then Maggie and another medium pony, Annabelle, went 2 for 2, winning flat races at the Maryland Junior Hunt Cup and the Potomac Hunt Races.

The highlight of Maggie's spring came when she got approval from the North American Point-to-Point Association (NAPPA) to ride Annabelle over jumps at the NAPPA Championships – and she won! Five starts, five wins. Not bad. But the Foxchasing Scholarship is about much more than winning.

Why Racing?

Like many young girls, Maggie adores horses. She is very involved in her local 4-H group, Horsin' Around, and loves eventing. She's even ridden a little Western. But her desire for the thrill of jumping combined with speed brought her to the Maryland Governor's Cup junior race series.

The Fifth District Elementary School fifth grader has her mother Brenda to thank for this interest. "My mom has always taken me to the local races like the Maryland Hunt Cup and the Grand National when I was little, so I knew about steeplechasing," she says. "I really like going fast and so does my pony Sweet Adeline, so I tried [racing] and loved it!"

According to Brenda, NAPPA played a crucial part in her daughter's involvement in junior jump racing. Maggie has learned a lot by attending racing clinics

held by NAPPA. Through this organization's efforts, the popularity of such clinics grew, and half of the Governor's Cup race meetings have now carded Junior Field Master's Chases. With the encouragement of her family, leadership from NAPPA, and a couple of great ponies, Maggie was bitten by the steeplechasing bug and has rarely missed out on a junior racing opportunity in Maryland.

While Maggie is out on the course, her mother, sister Heidi, and father Mike stand by the sidelines cheering away. For Brenda, who was paralyzed from the waist down after a riding accident, watching her daughter ride races is bittersweet. It is hard to send her out onto the course knowing what could happen, but as Brenda puts it, "Maggie loves the horses. You can get hurt doing anything, and I don't want her to suffer because I got hurt. When I watch her [racing over jumps] I just take it one jump at a time. She got over this one, now this one, now this one...."

Talking Strategy

Both of the ponies Maggie campaigned last spring were very "energetic," she says. In a Field Master's Chase, competitors follow behind a pace-setting "field master" while on the jumping course. After the last fence is cleared, the field master releases the field at a designated point; from there, they race to the finish on the flat. Passing the field master at any point before the field is released results in elimination. Keeping her ponies behind the field master has not always been easy, given their enthusiasm. "I always worry about passing the field master," she admits. "I keep [Sweet Ade-



Zane Gorove

Maggie Herzog and Sweet Adeline, on one of their two winning excursions last spring.

line] at the back of the pack until we are allowed to go at the end. And with Anna-

(continued)

belle, I just concentrate on her jumping.”

Maggie doesn't have a favorite race meet; she maintains that she likes them all. However, she does look forward to occasions on which GSVH jt.-MFH Sheila Brown serves as the field master. “[Mrs. Brown] goes fast, but not too fast or too slow,” she explains. “It's really fun when she leads the field.”

Maggie would like to continue racing as long as her body agrees to stay the appropriate size. “I am already 5'2 and I'm 10 years old!” she says. “I hope I don't grow too big to race.” But, no matter how tall she gets, Maggie plans on keeping animals in her future. In fact, she has her sights set on becoming a veterinarian.

Giving It Her All

Brenda is happy about Maggie's involvement in horses because it brings much more than recreation to the young girl's life. “It takes a lot of responsibility to work with and compete horses,” she begins. “No matter how tired you are, they still need to be cared for and exercised. They are a lot of work, and you don't only need to keep yourself fit; you have to make sure your horse is fit to do the job asked of [it].”

“Maggie knows that there is always room for improvement for both herself and her horses and attends clinics, demos, and lectures, and competes at many different types of equestrian disciplines,” she continues. “Maggie has learned to win and lose and has become a real sportsman. She gives it her all and that is what life is about. Do your best and keep on trying!”

Which is exactly why Maggie Herzog received the 2006 Maryland Governor's Cup Foxchasing Scholarship. Her will to learn,

her enthusiasm for steeplechasing, and her good sportsmanship made her a shoo-in.

Over the summer, Maggie attended the GSVH Cubbing Camp, which she highly recommends to anyone her age who wants to know about foxhunting. “I liked cubbing camp because the huntsman doesn't do all the work; they let [us] find the fox,” she says. Not only did the aspiring jockey learn a lot about riding to hounds, she made a number of new friends. She even got to ride with GSVH huntsman John Tabachka, and was allowed to say “Tally Ho!” when viewing a fox.

“Cubbing camp was fun because you got to gallop and jump a lot, and you learned about the hounds,” she adds. After someone made the mistake of calling a hound a “dog,” Maggie says she discovered, “You should NEVER call the hounds ‘dogs’! I learned that at the dinner they had for us the first night. I also learned what all the horn signals mean to the hounds and that you should never pass the field master ... [just like in racing].”

Maggie plans to put her new knowledge to use in the hunt field this fall, courtesy of the Foxchasing Scholarship.

Runners-Up

This year, Maryland's field of junior jockeys was so impressive that the Governor's Cup Committee had a hard time just choosing one Foxchasing Scholar.

So, for the first time in that organization's history, it awarded not one, but *two* runner-up awards. Thanks to this generous move, recipients Erin Bottner and Corinne Conley will also get a chance to sample some foxchasing this season. ■