

ACCOMPLISHED HORSEBACK RIDER MARA ECKERT SHOWS DEDICATION TO HER SPORT

WRITTEN BY SYDNEY TATUM DESIGNED BY AUDREY BOWLES

Sophomore Mara Eckert, might be overlooked as an average high school student. But one might not suspect she is an accomplished horseback rider and has been recognized at regional and national level for her hard work.

Eckert made it to Nationals her first year, and has been awarded for her impressive knowledge on horses in question-based competitions.

Like any sport, Mara spends hours practicing and improving with her riding during the week. She mentioned that she spends a few hours around four days a week at her barn riding and taking care of the horses.

“I usually work on a lot of jumping and getting the technical part of it down and working on communication with the horses,” Eckert says. “When I’m not jumping I like to see what I can train them to do and refresh myself and make sure I’m riding my best.”

Additionally, Mara mentioned the coordination before competition days in order to feel prepared and ready to compete.

“Some days start as early as around five,” Eckert says. “It can be a lot. You are definitely scrambling sometimes”

Eckert’s work has also made an impact on her teammates, who have noticed her intense effort. One of them, Freshman Grace Nellis, pointed out Mara’s commitment.

“She is always very dedicated to her sport,” Nellis says. “She’s always been a great teammate, very helpful at shows where we all have to work together, and always puts the horse first in situations.”

Competitions are long days for Mara and her fellow competitors, yet she has done amazing in different categories. Even during her first year, she excelled and placed highly.



Pictured is Eckert standing with Pumba, a sixteen year-old paint horse gelding. She mentioned her daily ritual when going to the stable. “I get there and spend a good thirty-five, forty minutes getting my horse ready,” Mara says. “Then we usually have fifteen to thirty minute warm up before riding.”

“My first year of riding inner scholastically through the IEA I did dressage and that was my first year ever showing,” Eckert says. “I went all the way up to nationals that year and I placed fourth in my division out of the nation.”

In past years Mara has continued to succeed and work hard to feel accomplished after competing.

“This year I placed third in the regional level out of insane riders in intermediate,” Eckert says. “I also have a lot of wins on smaller levels that contribute to my confidence, and I learn a lot from them.”

Even though riding can be time consuming and exhausting some days, Mara still finds joy in working with her horses.

“Every time I ride and compete,” Eckert says. “No matter what I place or what happens, it’s definitely beneficial to me.”



PHOTOS COURTESY OF
MARA ECKERT

Here is Eckert practicing jumping with Markus. She no longer rides with him, but she still found the time with him valuable. "There's Marcus, he was a warmblood sport pony" Eckert says. "Marcus, he was the best."

Below is Eckert at Duzan Riding Academy with Penni. Mara has spent countless hours working with the horses, multiple times a week. "Penni is thorough-bred and we don't really know her age," Mara says. "We think she's in her late teens early twenties so she's pretty old but still a great companion."



Pictured is Mara with fourteen year-old Markus after a competition. Eckert placed multiple times in different categories with this sport horse, however the two don't ride together anymore. "His real name is Markus, but all of them have show names," Eckert says. "His was Zoappaloosa."