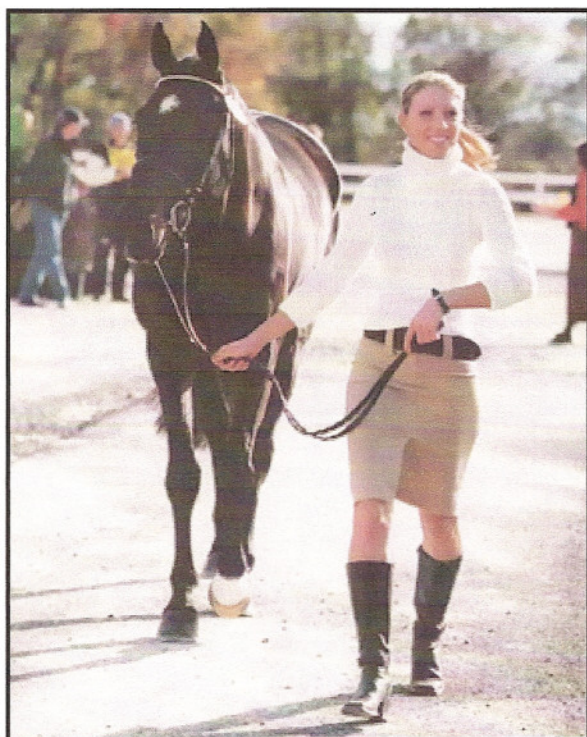


Profile

Disappointing Miss at 2004 Rolex Leads to Better Rider/Horse Relationship



"Joey is quite the character, full of himself and confident at a show. He has a normal attitude of an advanced horse. At the same time, he can curl his head up in your lap and wants to be pampered," Kristen says of her Rolex partner, Cavalier Royale

By Nancy Degutis

Kristen Schmolze knows how to make the proverbial lemons into lemonade, even in one of her most disappointing moments.

The New Jersey native had planned on making the 2004 Rolex with her Irish Sport Horse, Cavaldi. Then the former young rider ran out of time to prepare him for that year's feature. This year she is on track with her son of the Holsteiner stallion, Cavalier Royale, after the two have reaped the benefits of 12 months' delay to ready themselves.

Adversity was nothing new to Kristen. It taught her "when things go wrong, have an alternative plan. After the initial shock, go with your Plan B," said the winner of the 2004 Lionel Guerrand-Hermes Memorial award. But missing Rolex 2004, which was to be her debut at the four-star level, proved to be a mixed blessing. She just didn't realize it at the time.

Last year's shortcoming in preparation time leading up to Rolex hasn't been her only disappointment in three-day eventing, a sport she began at age 12. She had planned on riding through college and was on the verge of entering Rollins (Fla.) College for what she hoped would be a degree in the law or investigative detective fields. Then, two months before her entrance into college, she contracted mononucleosis. She rethought her

goals for her life while she was recovering and decided that it was riding, not tracking down the bad guys, which was her passion. Another year she had lost one season on a young horse she was preparing for competition and had to lay him up, awaiting his recovery.

All seemed to doom her to not riding at higher levels for a while. Then "I didn't see myself doing advanced but I did more and more as I was moving up through intermediate. When I saw Rolex the first time in 1999 and after doing my first two-star at Radnor—that's when I think I knew I was really hooked," said Kristen, 22. She had moved on as an under-21 and did so well that she was the U.S. Eventing Association's Young Rider of the Year in 2003, the same year she received the U.S. Equestrian Team Foundation's \$5,000 Amanda Wright grant to further her training.

Yet watching the hopes of making the 2004 Rolex, the epitome of her desire in her competition career up to then, slip away "was a disappointment," said Kristen after months of anticipation for herself and her horse, known as "Joey." Her plan then had been to make spring shows that year to ready Joey, but she could see it wasn't going to happen.

"I was trying hard to make sure everything was going to work by getting to the shows (to give her then-nine-year-old horse more upper level experience) before Rolex, but I ran out of time. I didn't want to rush with Joey and when I made that decision, not to push him too quickly, it was a bit of a relief. It took weight off my shoulders and took the pressure off," said Kristen, the winner of the 2003 U.S. Equestrian Team Foundation's Markham Trophy for young riders.

She didn't shed tears over her disappointment. While she couldn't ride at Rolex, she went to the Lexington (Ky.) show site to watch the event and walk the famed cross country course of this country's only four-star show.

Facing the 2005 version, "I am pretty excited about it. I think the relationship between me and Joey has grown that much more over the past year and I feel he ready for it. He is a year older and lot more mature." With competing less in 2004 and concentrating more on giving her 15.1-hand gelding lots of training, the result is one that "makes me feel pretty good."

She did that by using the time to strengthen her partnership with her dark bay. Without the rush of having to ready him for the four-star, she had the chance to pick shows where she could hone his skills, and work with her longtime trainer, Marilyn Payne. Payne had sent her pupil two winters earlier to Florida to further Kristen's progress. The young woman worked with eventing trainers and Olympians Stephen Bradley and Denny Emerson to get another view of the sport.

She was to take what she learned from Payne, Emerson and Bradley to help school Joey over the summer at home with things like control issues she had encountered since she imported him from abroad. Satisfied that they made progress, she ran him at the Over The Walls (Mass.) World Cup qualifier in August where he was sixth. That gave Kristen enough confidence in Joey to take him to the Blenheim (England) Horse Trials.

"I pulled him up about three-quarters of the way around because he was very, very wired before we went out and it was not a pleasant round. He got tired at the end but we could go home safe and work on things," said Kristen, now a professional training a small group of riders and their horses.



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All photos by Shannon K. Brinkman

With that experience behind her, she changed his endurance day warm up when she went to the Fair Hill (Md.) International three-star last year. It was to more than make up for a dressage test which "wasn't as good as it was the year before," she recalled. "He was tense in the ring. Then the atmosphere got to him a little bit" and his test reflected that.

But her consolation was on endurance when "we had the best cross country round ever, control wise. He was excellent, excellent," said Kristen, a veteran of the North American Young Riders Championships. She made it to the end almost delirious with his performance, only marred by what she called her rider error close to the finish. "I overshot a fence at the end and had to circle around." Still, she came off the course, "happier than I have come off most courses with him. It had to be one of his best rounds ever."

As she looked back at last year's results, she said "I think you could say was Joey's sophomore year. That gave us more time to know each other and we are coming out a lot stronger this year. I feel Joey has grown over 2004," said Kristen. It is evident he is truly her favorite and the one she saw could take her to Rolex.

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Now she is back on track, preparing Joey at her Aiken, S.C. base for the winter and early spring. She has worked with double Athens (Greece) Olympic medalist Kim Severson, the two-time Rolex winner, taking lessons from her.

"Kim has really helped me and Joey," said Kristen who rides for sponsors County Saddlery of Maryland, Ariat and Ulcer Gard, the ulcer preventive. Getting her gelding's exuberance under control has progressed to the point now where "he is listening to me."

Perhaps her Plan B that she has had in the back of her mind for all these years is paying big dividends. Or just call it her sticktoiveness. Ever since she made that critical decision to opt for eventing over college, "riding has been my passion. You have to have the desire—a real passion with lots of focus—for the sport," emphasized Kristen.



Kristen Schmolze has been working with both Marilyn Payne and Kim Severson, preparing for her Rolex debut

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