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Eight Things Alex Matz Has Learned From His Father, Michael Matz

by Nina Fedrizzi

It's been nearly two decades since Olympic silver medal-winning show jumper Michael Matz traded in his tall boots for a pair of racing trainer's binoculars. Although Michael has been the trainer behind such famous Thoroughbred names as 2006 Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro, and 2012 Belmont Stakes winner Union Rags, the name 'Matz' may be returning to the lips of show jumping aficionados very soon.

The majority of Michael's six children have been involved in equestrian sport in some way or another, and recently, Alex Matz, 20, has been making quite a splash in his first Summer Series at Spruce Meadows. With two third-place finishes in the U25 series aboard the nine-year-old Holstein gelding Cashew CR, Alex looks poised to embark on a show jumping legacy of his own. Here, he shares a handful of lessons he's learned from his famous father.

1. **Horses come first.**

I guess this is my dad's entire philosophy, no matter what discipline you're doing. He always says, 'Just use common sense,' because for him, thinking of the horse's needs first just comes naturally.

2. **Patience.**

Being patient with a horse is one of his biggest things. He doesn't get angry with them and he's careful not to overuse his horses.

3. **The small things matter...**

My dad is very detail-oriented, from how bandages have to go on to how the curb chain should go around the [bridle]. He is a person who believes that attention to detail really does make a difference.

4. **...And so does turnout.**

Presentation-wise, my dad believes that horses always need to look their best in terms of proper grooming and exercise. A healthy horse will have a good coat and a good physique. That's super critical to him.

5. **Follow a program.**

Whether it's in racing or show jumping, my dad says that there are a lot of amazing riders, but what separates the great from the very good is a good program. Whether that's how they choose to compete their horses, or what they do on a daily basis, having a strong program is essential to success.

6. **Each experience with a horse is a stepping stone.**

It's important to be aware of the situation you're in with a horse at all times, because one thing always leads to the next. Whether it's one fence leading to the next one on course, or one class leading to the next one in the progression of a show, horses are always learning. So whatever you do—the way you ride and or your form on the horse or whatever—it makes an impact.

7. **Horses aren't machines.**

It's important to take the time to build a bond with your horse because bonds instill confidence.

8. **You get out of the sport what you put into it.**

This is my dad's biggest motto. He's been at the very top and at the bottom and understands that this is a crazy sport. I think he believes that if you take your time and always do the right thing with the horse, your moment will come and you just have to be patient. If you know you're doing the right thing with your horses, success will follow eventually.

-Reporting and photography by Tori Repole. Featured photo, Michael Matz: Maryland Gov Pics via Wikimedia Commons.

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Written by Nina Fedrizzi

Nina Fedrizzi spends her days writing about horse sport, food, and travel. She began her career at Travel + Leisure and is a former editor at NF Style. When she's not tapping away on her MacBook, Nina can usually be found on a horse, sleuthing out the local pho, or refusing to unpack her carry-on. Watch her do all three on Instagram @ninafedrizzi.