

Four Sacramento area hunter/jumper riders are working hard toward big league dreams.

The Sacramento Area Hunter Jumper Association was founded in 1987 by a small group of riders and trainers. Their purpose was to develop a local association dedicated to supporting, educating and introducing beginning and intermediate riders and horses to the horse show environment, and to provide a consistent framework for local shows.

SAHJA members have the opportunity to compete for year-end awards. Over the years SAHJA has continued to meet its goals by setting standards for shows and show judges similar to those of the US Equestrian organization.

Here are four young SAHJA stars who reflect well on the success of the association's mission.



Mariah Durand

Eleven year old Mariah aspires to ribbon this year during what would be a second trip to the National Pony Finals in Kentucky. She rides with her mom Hali Durand at Stardust Pony Dreams in Lincoln and with Kate Jutigar at Blackhound Equestrian in Castro Valley. She enjoys being a “junior trainer for my mom, helping with her green ponies and getting them ready for other kids.” Gaining a better understanding of her own rides – Posh Dressed to The Nines!, Ooh La La and The Best Day – is another of her horsemanship goals this year.

Mariah began competing on the SAHJA circuit leadline classes when she was 3-and-a-half years old. Her favorite show is the Brookside Warm-Up at the Brookside Show Park and its Disneyland Derby, a 2'0" Hunter Derby that's open to juniors and amateurs not currently showing above 2'6" fence height. (Large ponies excepted.) “It is a great way to build and maintain a personal relationship with your pony,” she comments.

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Not surprisingly, Mariah calls her mom her favorite teacher and says the most important lesson she's learned from her thus far "is to be mindful when I ride." She also admires Sonoma Valley Stables trainer Hope Glynn. "She gets to ride amazing horses and she is very talented and does such a great job," Mariah explains. "I have been able to hang out with Hope and her daughter Avery and they are so nice."

Along with show successes, Mariah has had first-hand experience with the scary aspects of horseownership. "Last year at Pony Finals, my pony Posh Dressed To The Nines! stepped off of the trailer with shipping fever and colic," she recounts. "My trainer and I took him to a vet right away and he was hospitalized for four days.

"We were so scared he wasn't going to be OK," she continues. "Luckily, we came a week ahead of time and when he recovered and was released from the hospital we were so relieved. Although he was a bit underweight, we were still able to compete. We had a very good round over fences and I was so happy!"



Hailey Klaff

Hailey has an ambitious goal sheet this year: placing well in several medals she is already qualified for, including the CPHA, PCHA and SAHJA Child Adult Medal. Fine-tuning her equitation on the flat and keeping a consistent eye over fences are her main focuses toward that end.

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Now 14, she first competed in a SAHJA show at the Starr Vaughn Equestrian Center in Elk Grove as a 3-year-old in leadline classes. "It was on a perfect pony named Jessie," she recalls. These days, her favorite SAHJA show is the Fall Festival. "The atmosphere is good because everyone is getting ready for medal finals and the spooky Fall Season jumps are fun to jump!"

She trains with Yasmin Emery Brownlie of Blue Water Farms in Rescue. "She has been one of my most important teachers because she has a clear way of explaining things," Hailey says. "Yasmin has shown me that hard work makes the difference between a good rider and a winning equitation rider."

Her mounts for this year are her own 17.1 hh gray Thoroughbred, Pacifica, and Caspian, a Holsteiner owned by her trainer. When they are not lessoning or showing, she loves to hack her horse on Blue Water's Grand Prix field. "It's green and beautiful and the horses seem to have fun when we ride there."

In addition to admiring her own trainer, Hailey looks up to several other riders. "I admire Jacob Pope because he won the Maclay Finals as a working student like I am. I admire Jacob's hard work and flawless equitation as well. I admire Bezie Madden because she holds herself to very high standards. I hope to emulate her work ethic and self-discipline and excellence. Meredith Michaels Beerbaum and I are built the same and I admire her ability to win despite her stature. I also appreciate her effective way of coursing in the Grand Prix and her textbook flat work."

Selling her first horse after realizing it wasn't suitable for her long-term goal of riding in the Maclay was a big challenge. "I overcame that disappointment after realizing that we sold her to the perfect family where they could successfully compete in the jumper ring."



Imani Mackani

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Beach riding is Imani's favorite free-time activity with her horses and ponies. As a student of Malinda Kregoski's Equine Unlimited, Inc. in Rescue, Imani and barn buddies typically go to the coast twice a year to ride on the sand and surrounding trails. "It's a lot of fun and helps both me and my pony create a more trusting bond," Imani relays. "He's not crazy about the ocean!"

Now that it's show season, Imani is focused on her goals: "Improving my overall position over the jumps by focusing mainly on my leg position and quieting my hands." Show aspirations include competing successfully in Large Rated Ponies, placing well in the upcoming SAHJA Pony and Mini Medal Finals, as well as the NorCal Pony Medal and Horse & Hound on Faunti and Fanny. On her new horse Cheers, the 13-year-old wants to start competing in the .80 jumpers and equitation.

Her first experience with the SAHJA circuit was walk/trot classes as a 9-year-old and since then the Let's Show competitions at Brookside have become favorites. "They have a lot of fun classes and still offer all the divisions," Imani says. "I like showing at Brookside because they have a pool and yummy Shirley Temples!"

As for influences, "My trainer Malinda has been my most important teacher. She has taught me literally everything I know about riding. She is my primary coach. She has helped me work on my mental toughness and makes sure I ride for other instructors as a way to help me get different perspectives. She has a dressage coach come to the barn to help us work on our flat work. She makes sure that I ride in as many clinics as possible."

Beezie Madden ranks high on Imani's list of most-admired equestrians.

"She's a great role model for girls and I love to watch her in Grand Prix. I love how her riding is very even and she always is in control, calm and collected."

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