

***Grateful for the opportunity to become a better & more knowledgeable horseman.***

*by Kate Abajian*

The United States Hunter Jumper Association's Gold Star Clinic was overall an outstanding experience that I would highly recommend to anyone who has the desire to improve their riding and horsemanship. I cannot thank USHJA and the Emerging Rider Task Force enough for taking the time and energy to put together such an amazing learning experience.



For someone like myself, who wants to become a professional in the not-so-distant future, I found there was a valuable lesson to be learned during each mounted session, workshop and even the time we spent doing chores. I've spent most of the time showing in the equitation and hunter rings and have only competed in the jumpers for less than a year, this was a whole new experience for me. It's not every day that you get to learn from such a variety of accomplished horsemen and I made sure to take full advantage of it.

There was so much to take away from each of the workshops and I especially enjoyed the shoeing (with Bill Liggett) and veterinary workshops (with Geoff Vernon, DVM) as I got the opportunity to see more how the farrier selects a certain type of shoe for each horse and about the different types of x-rays and more ways to feel my horse for any abnormalities.

Another thing that I loved about this clinic was how the riders had to do everything themselves, there were no grooms to tack up the horse or muck out the stall. I really enjoyed doing all of the dirty work and it was fun to spend even more time with my horse and I could tell that he enjoyed it too.

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For the mounted sessions, I really enjoyed how lead clinician Richard Spooner made sure to take the time to assess each person and not only point out what needs improvement, but he also made sure to point out things that people were doing well. I really liked how Richard made such an emphasis on the importance of flatwork and always being an effective and active rider. I took away an even stronger understanding of flatwork and when or how to use certain aspects of it throughout the course.

### Flatwork In Action

On the gymnastics day, the flatwork we had been working on really came into play. We had to start on a one-to-one combination that had to be ridden into at the gallop in order to make it through as it was set so long and then immediately after we had to bring our flat work into play and collect our horses back up and bend them around our legs for the next line, which was a one-to-one that was set short. I found that exercise extremely helpful as it further emphasized for me how important it was just to let my horse go and not think about how fast we were going and then be able to apply my flatwork to slow him back down for the next line.



After all of the mounted sessions with Richard it was very helpful and exciting to have a chance to fully test out all that I had learned on the Nations Cup day. For me it was super exciting to be on 2008 Olympic gold medalist Will Simpson's team as he is such an accomplished rider and it was great to have an opportunity to learn from him as well. During my Nations Cup round I could feel myself applying my flatwork more than ever in between the jumps and I had my horse more bent around my leg and engaged. This all allowed me to have a fantastic round and go double clear. And I loved how, after each person finished their Nation's Cup round, Richard talked to them about what they need to improve, what they did well and the improvements they've already made since the first day. For someone like myself who always wants to know what they can improve, no matter how big or small, it was great to hear the immediate feedback.

## March 2018 - USHJA Gold Star Clinic: First Person

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Skills I've learned and further improved at this clinic have made a huge impact in my riding. I can feel myself using my leg more and applying my hands correctly, so much so that my trainers noticed the difference right away. And all that I've learned will not only help me in the jumper ring, but the equitation and hunter rings as well as I've already noticed a difference. I not only learned how to be a better rider at this clinic, I also learned how to be a better and more knowledgeable horseman, which I find to be just as important as being able to ride well.

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*Author Kate Abajian is a junior rider who trains with John Bragg's Bridgeport Farm. (For another report on the USHJA Gold Star clinic, see page 50.)*