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CAROLINE MILLER : WIN THE DAY

How hard work and heart taught her to take the reins

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Reputations precede us. Lincoln Southeast High School (LSE) is a place full of fascinating and talented students. However, are we narrow-minded in the way we view our peers? Do we limit them to what they are best known for, whether it be theater or academics or athletics? Do we thus limit ourselves? When taking a closer look at the familiar faces in the halls, we may learn new things about people we think we know.

LSE senior Caroline Miller is a talented individual. Some recognize her for her athletic ability, leading the LSE Girls' Varsity Tennis team to win state in 2019. Some recognize her for her academic achievements, with a high GPA and numerous AP classes. However, not many can say that they know much about Miller's real passion in life: equestrianism.

Miller competes in a form of horse riding called dressage. Dressage, according to Miller, is a form

of riding "based off engaging the horse's muscles in certain ways, like ice skating or gymnastics." The sport involves mastery, as the horse and its trainer must memorize a series of predetermined movements in front of a panel of judges. In order to train for competitions of dressage, Miller works with her horse, Daisy, nearly every day. She emphasized the importance of the relationship between the horse and trainer, "You don't really understand how important the relationship with a horse is until you are there working with them five to seven days a week."

Miller has been riding horses for the last ten years and her experience has taught her the hardship and fulfillment that comes with the sport.

"You get thrown off the horse multiple times or you have to work with them for two years and then you finally see the results and it's like I understand why I push through that

and the reward is so much better than all of that (hardship)," Miller said.

In addition to training with the horse, Miller noted the daily maintenance tasks required to gain trust and form a relationship with Daisy.

"A lot of it is grooming and bonding with your horse a bit. We have this thing called groundwork, where you work with a horse while you're on the ground, and so you're doing little exercises with them to help improve their well-being," Miller said.

While the training can be strenuous and intense, Miller ensures that there are good, fun days with Daisy as well.

"On Sundays, I want to give her easy days because it's important for her to always like her job," Miller said.

Miller, who has other pets, re-

flects on how the relationship with her horse is very different than that of her dogs.

"I think it's the same as to how important it can be, people love their dogs and have a really good relationship with them," Miller said. The difference, to her, is found in the training aspect.

"You don't give horses treats every time they do something good, so you have to have a relationship enough where the horse understands when they're being good based off of your actions and your feelings." Miller said.

Because of this, Miller sees her relationship with her horse as very meaningful.

"She's my teammate. Daisy's my teammate and I work with her all the time," Miller said.

Not only does Miller train with her own horse, she also gives riding lessons to younger kids. She began teaching a year ago when her own trainer was on maternity leave. For a while, she taught as many as ten lessons a week. At this point, she teaches four or five per week and each is an hour long. Miller's lessons have become a source of fun for her.

"It's very rewarding to have them (the students) set a goal and you can see their progress. You can just see how much they love horses and how fun they are on them and how horses can change people's lives," Miller said.

Overall, with training, maintenance and lessons combined, Miller is usually at the barn every day for five to six hours a day. This is in addition to school and tennis. With her increased workload at the barn this year, Miller had to learn the importance of communication with people in her life.

Chris Salem, the LSE tennis coach, who's known Miller for years, has seen how much her life has changed due to her involvement in horse riding.

"She's teaching a lot of lessons to young riders and she's taking it a little bit more seriously herself, so we've had to be flexible in terms of practice times. I'm more than happy to be flexible with people

when they have positive activities going on," Salem said.

Salem has seen Miller's dedication to her passions on and off the court, stating that "She's always one of the hardest workers in a group that I've experienced. She's not a complainer, she doesn't shy away from difficult situations." Though Miller has had to adjust her schedule to fit all of her activities, she is committed to staying involved through communication and commitment.

To Miller, all the hard work and dedication is worth it. She plans to continue her involvement in horse riding in the future. Her ultimate goal is to become a professional rider. She already has plans to become a working student for a horse trainer in Palmyra, Nebraska this summer.

Miller truly loves horse riding and she uses her passion to educate others. However, over the years, she has had to overcome many stereotypes that people have about equestrianism. She has also faced uninterested peers because her passion isn't mainstream or popular. Many students have interests or hobbies that go against the grain and Miller hopes that people learn to pursue their passions anyway.

"I've learned to not care what other people think about me and it makes life a lot easier. If it's what brings you joy and it's what makes you happy then that is so much more worth putting time and effort into rather than trying to satisfy what other people expect of you," Miller said.

Reputations have a way of limiting us as people. Miller is not simply a tennis player, a high achieving student or even a horse trainer. She is a multifaceted person with many interests and passions that she cares deeply about. She has dreams and hopes that people don't know of. We all do. Miller's passions make her who she is. Every face in the crowd has passions that make them who they are. These passions require heart and motivation. We are all more than what we are best known for. We all have stories worth sharing.

