



May 20, 2019

To Who It May Concern:

The United States Equestrian Federation is the U.S. Olympic Committee recognized National Governing Body for the Olympic sport of equestrian in the United States. This letter is written in support of equestrian athletes that are balancing their sporting ambitions with achieving their educational goals.

For equestrian athletes, there are many challenges and benefits that sometimes go unrecognized. Like all athletes, equestrian athletes must follow a personal training regime that ensures they are “*fit to train and compete*”. While the training needs of equestrians differ from those of a marathon runner or football athlete, they are most certainly athletes. Symmetry, balance, agility, flexibility, strength, endurance, motor ability, nutrition and injury prevention are all physiological aspects an equestrian athlete must address. Equestrian athletes with a number of horses can spend all day, every day, training and competing in one form or another.

Equestrian athletes have an additional challenge that other athletes do not, and that is they are working with another living being, their horse. A successful equestrian athlete must be a sports psychologist to the horse as well as the first responder when it comes to the training and development of that horse. Equestrian is not a sport that an athlete can “pick up and put down”, it requires commitment and focus. Successful equestrian athletes are not only exceptional athletes, but they must also be able to develop and initiate a business plan that delivers horses for them to train and compete. It takes many years to progress a horse from the beginner level through to the podium at the international level. Commitment and dedication are essential if an equestrian athlete is to succeed.

Like all sports, there is a Pathway in equestrian sport. Where equestrian sport may differ from most sports is that the Pathway is very flexible and is very much linked to the horse. An athlete may be competing at the Olympic level one week and the next week be competing at the lower levels of the sport, developing a young horse. The principles of Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) apply, but assigning age groups to the various LTAD levels within equestrian is impossible. There have been Equestrian Olympic medalists in their early 20s through to their late 50s. It is therefore impossible to say that an equestrian athlete in education should achieve certain levels of results at certain stages of their academic educational progression.

Additionally, the Pathways differ in each of the equestrian disciplines. There will be some equestrian athletes, still in education, competing at the very highest international levels of the sport, some who are progressing up the Pathway and some who are “ticking over” while they complete their studies. Competition starts at the national level and there are youth championships, both national and international, that are often targets for athletes under 21 years of age. There are also competitions recognized by the International Federation, often overlapping with national competition and athletes will aim to move up the “grades” (levels of difficulty) and ultimately represent the U.S. on the



international stage (there are also various levels of Team competition). Athletes can be competing at multiple levels if they have multiple horses. In recognition of the Pathway and the achievements of athletes, additional letters of support are made available to athletes as they reach significant and noteworthy levels of performance.

The Federation appreciates the support educational organizations and institutions provide to athletes and we hope that equestrian athletes will be treated on equal footing with athletes from, perhaps better understood sports.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Murray S. Kessler', written in a cursive style.

Murray S. Kessler
President