

HIS & HERS

with L.A. Sokolowski

SOLID AS A ROCK: Max Amaya & Stonehenge Stables

The prehistoric circle known as Stonehenge has been called the most mysterious place on Earth, but in the grand prix world there's no mystery behind who has built one of the leading show jumping training programs in America. At his Stonehenge Farm facilities in Colts Neck, NJ and Wellington, FL, Max Amaya still focuses as intently as when he opened in 2006 on traditional equitation principles that build foundations as enduring as any Neolithic monument. Powerhouse paired with Sarah Becker and B&B Saddlery's "once in a lifetime" Irish Sport Horse, Church Road (aka Goldie) this grandson of an Argentine Cavalry rider started his international tutelage under such North American greats as Mario Deslauriers, Joe Fargis, and Frank and Stacia Klein Madden of Beacon Hill Stables. Today, the Nations Cup and Pan American Games veteran holds the record as the highest-placed Argentine rider in World Equestrian Games (Aachen) history while guiding Stonehenge Stables award-winning students like Maddy Darst, Brianne Goutal, TJ O'Mara and Jessica Springsteen in building their own rock-solid riding careers.



Max Amaya and his dog, Poncho.
Photo by Jump Media



Max Amaya heading to the ring at the Winter Equestrian Festival with student, Raleigh Hiler. Photo by Jump Media

HERS: What do you remember about your first horse or pony?

HIS: I remember my first horse was an 11-year-old chestnut horse in Argentina. I loved him. His name was "No Problem." He used to jump in the children's jumpers, but he did have a stop to him. I often joked with my friends that there were more than "No Problems," there were a lot of problems! He was a pretty horse, and I would care for him partially myself. Every day after school, I would go and brush him and make sure he was clean. Now looking back a little bit with some memories that I have, I remember him always being extremely fat for the standards that I have today. I just remember him being round and very shiny, and probably I overfed him a lot!

HERS: What do you like best in a horse? What do you like best in a person?

HIS: To be quite honest, it goes hand-in-hand. I think what I like best in a horse is the same as what I like in a person, it's good character, honesty, and a good attitude to do their best. I think when you put all of that together, you can have a pretty good chance at succeeding at everything that you do. There will always be some horses and people that have more talent than others, but hard work, good attitude, honesty, and good character get you a long way.

HERS: Best pet you've ever had and why?

HIS: For sure by far is Poncho, my little dachshund. He's basically like a little human. He's very polite. He's quite correct. He's incredibly well-mannered. His eyes are so expressive. Every time you look at him, you can read through his eyes what he's feeling or trying to tell you.

HERS: Is there a job in your past that was never included on your résumé?

HIS: When I was 15 years old, my brother, Victor, and I got a big lesson from my father on what it was to work. He enlisted us with a newspaper street kiosk that was about a block and a half from our house. We did very, very early morning deliveries of this paper in the buildings around our area.

We would wake up at 3:30 in the morning. Victor and I would go down to this kiosk that was owned by an old man, and a truck would come and deliver all of the newspapers in separate sections. We would have to basically in one hour put all of the sections together – entertainment, sports, news, business, all of that together. We'd build a little trolley, and each one of us, in a separate direction, would go with a list and keys, and we'd go through the different buildings and go in the elevators and deliver the newspapers to different apartments.

By the time we were done, it was about 6:30 or 7 o'clock in the morning. We'd go back, get a shower, and get ready to get picked up to go to school.

We did that for about eight months, and by eight months, we were both crying that we didn't want to do it anymore. We were really, really exhausted, but once our dad taught us that lesson of hard work, he said, "Okay, you don't have to go anymore."

HERS: How old were you when you got your first paying job and what was it?

HIS: That was my first job when I was 15 years old. I don't remember what the pay was, but it wasn't a lot.

HERS: If you had to work outside the horse world what would you be doing?

HIS: Probably boating, maybe trying to be a yacht captain or something like that.

HERS: What is your favorite quote?

HIS: "The harder you work, the luckier you get."

HERS: Describe yourself in one word? What word might your friends choose?

HIS: Passionate. My friends would probably describe me as crazy! No, I think my friends like McLain [Ward] and the people that are very close to me would describe me as good company perhaps.

HERS: Something you feel is true that almost nobody agrees with you on.

HIS: It's not one that necessarily that everyone doesn't agree on, but it's one that a lot of people have a hard time believing. I do believe that with the right intentions and hard work, almost anything is possible. I do genuinely believe that, but not everybody does.

HERS: Share an instance where you faced and solved a difficult problem.

HIS: When I first opened my business, about two years into it, I went through a really hard financial stage. There were many days where I thought I couldn't make it. Like I said before, with hard work and perseverance and doing the right thing, we got out of it and built a healthy business.

HERS: Where do you see horse sport headed in this new decade?

HIS: I think technology is taking a huge step into the horse industry in many different ways. That will change a little bit the way that we perceive the sport and the way that we perceive horse training. I think as far as the sport, it's just getting developed into a much more high-tech activity. Show jumping is a lot more numbers and statistics and performance results. Not for good or bad, but it's becoming more of a performance-based, more competitive activity I think.

HERS: What has this pandemic experience taught you about yourself?

HIS: It definitely taught me about being patient. It has taught me about the value of self-caring and caring for others. You always care for the people that you know and that are close to you, but when they tell you that it's mandatory to wear a mask, the reason for that is caring for others. It has also given me some perspective on some things and the importance of spending time at home and moving at a little bit slower pace than we were. For the last decade or so, we were going at such a fast pace.

L.A. Sokolowski, the Original Equinista™, is winner for best feature article at the 2020 American Horse Publications Media Awards and recipient of both an AHP Spirit Award, and Syracuse Press Club Award for excellence in sportswriting. Suggest a guest for His & Hers at latheequinista@gmail.com.



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