



The Mental Game; Vinton Karrasch

Holly Grayton

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Some people have all the skills, and American rider Vinton Karrasch is no exception. Watching Vinton ride is a lesson in many things, and when you look into his history it's no surprise why. Even though he had a late start to riding at age 14, he was started by a coaching legend of our time, Julie Winkel, and then moved on to none other than George Morris, had a stint in Europe and rode with Anne Kursinski.

But what you may not know is that Vinton has other skills. He developed a clicker training system that led him to John and Beezie Madden's soon-to-be great horse Judgement, and with his business partner at 'On Target Training' they cured him of his fear of open water. This propelled him further into the mental side of the sport, which is why he is of such interest to me particularly.

While working for Coral Reef Ranch some of you may have noticed Vinton and his wife Ann for a few reasons besides all of their successes. They were often seen working on their balance with a fitness coach, or seen with other famous equestrians such as the Maddens. They also successfully coached Coral Reef proprietors Genevieve and Gwendolyn Meyer for many years.

A unique note about Vinton is that he has had Dr Michael Lardon in his back pocket as a mental performance coach for years. Vinton admits, "I began looking into Sports psychology as I became unhappy with my inconsistent performances. It took me probably 15 years though to become 'fully committed to making a change'."

"If I had to pick one thing that has helped me it would be understanding the difference between result-oriented thinking and process-oriented thinking and how to use them. For me, result-oriented thinking causes stress and anxiety. Thoughts like 'I hope I do ok', and 'I hope I don't screw up' or 'I want to win' send me right into to mental state that leads to bad performances. Whereas on the process-oriented thinking side, 'I'm going to set a pace to fence 3 that will make the forward 5 strides easy', or 'after fence two I am going to get my horse back and then in front of my leg to fence three', puts me in a mindset for great success. Controlling my thinking towards 'how to' instead of the result I want has helped me tremendously."

When asked when and where is best to use his sport psychology information, Vinton explains, "For me there is not a special time for sports psychology. It has become a way of thinking that has become just what I do. No different than the position of my leg or the frame of my horse. I have worked on it over and over and over until it has become automatic, and automated."

"Dr. Michael Lardon was nice enough to take on my challenges and help me organize them, minimize them, and eliminate them. We still check in every few months. My wife Ann has been huge with my mental success. She helps me stay positive and mentally on the right path. Her support is amazing."



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Although sport psychology is a relatively new and underused topic in our sport, it's becoming a bigger and bigger tool for all athletes and Vinton's open attitude towards it has really opened the door for many young athletes to follow in his footsteps.

More on Dr Lardon: <http://drlardon.com/about-dr-lardon/>

Books Vinton suggests:

The Talent Code

Bounce