



A positive outlook on things beyond her control makes the most of an unusual junior career final .

by Kim F. Miller

For all its privileges and pleasures, the horse life can be humbling, too. Through three years of going out for the North American Youth Championships Zone 10 teams, Sophia Siegel knows that first-hand. She's batting .300: good for baseball, but not so much in the horse world and especially when two of three at-bats disappeared without even getting a swing in.

Sophia represented the Zone 10 Junior team in 2017, and had earned a team spot for 2019 when an injury sidelined Eleganto VDL, aka "Elmo," shortly before leaving for New York. Another top mount, Classic Verite, aka "Charlie," also went on the injured reserve around the same time.

Happily, both were ready for a return to work early this year, and a relatively green mount, Barracuda, is coming along nicely.

With Charlie, Sophia was aiming to make the NAYC Young Riders (1.45M) team this summer. This time, the pandemic put paid to the plan. Originally slated for July, the Championships were cancelled fairly early in what became three-and-half months of show cancellations.

Sophia graduated high school in June and had high goals and hopes for what she could accomplish in her last junior year of showing. "It's a bummer, but it's OK," she says. "The show season is obviously not going to be what we expected." She sees an upside for her horses' mental health. "I don't think my horses have gone this long between showing. They've always been on the go and it's been nice to see them take a deep breath."

Sophia has enjoyed keeping her show horses fit, healthy and ready to return when the time comes.

Good Use of Extra Time

The time-off has given her more time for horsemanship pursuits beyond the show ring. One of those is a 2-year-old that lives at Branscomb Farm in Half Moon Bay. The dam is Suleika 525, Sophia's first NAYC prospect. The sire is Grand Prix jumper and elite Belgian Warmblood Jonkheer Z, who stands at Pomponio Ranch.

She's also had more time to volunteer with the Into The Light Horse Rescue and Sanctuary in Woodside. This rescue is a little different than others because most of its charges are young, typically between 2 and 5 or 6. Most originate from wild Mustang populations.

Highlights of her first year of helping at Into The Light include being the first person to sit on one youngster's back and helping others progress on their paths to being re-homed as safe, sane riding horses whenever possible. "It's not like starting a show horse," Sophia says. "They are much more chill because of the environment in which they are raised."

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