

# BOOK REVIEW

## *Heads Up! Practical Sports Psychology for Riders, their Trainers and their Families*

by Janet Sasson Edgette, Psy.D.  
 New York: Doubleday Equestrian Library  
 1996, 220 pages

Janet Sasson Edgette, Psy.D., is a clinical and sports psychologist with a well-rounded background in counseling services including extensive work with hypnosis. Co-director of the Milton H. Erickson Institute of Philadelphia, her teaching expertise in the psychotherapeutic arena is broad and well-rounded. She also is a highly accomplished horsewoman, trainer and competitor as well as being an influential teacher in the equestrian arena. A serious rider for more than 30 years, she has written extensively about this field and, at one point, hosted "Horse Sense," a radio talk show. Her web site, [www.HeadsUpSport.com](http://www.HeadsUpSport.com), details some of her current endeavors.

Edgette manages to bridge psychotherapy and the world of competitive horsemanship effectively. Her expertise provides her with a special advantage in working with athletes to plan and prepare an individualized program effective in preparing the student, and parents or spouses, for the intense mental demands of training and competition.

The book is organized in three sections: for the rider, trainers and instructors, and for everyone, including families of the riders involved in competitive riding circuits. Written in a straightforward manner, *Heads Up!* addresses general ideas, gives practical advice and details ways in which individual differences are regarded as tools. Generously illustrated with everyday anecdotes it shows practical applications for the tips and techniques outlined using a building block style that allows readers to immediately apply techniques and methods and then come back again and again.

One chapter is devoted to the use of mental rehearsal work as a means of affecting change. Mental rehearsal allows the rider to practice with imagination and imagery what to do differently, and how to do it differently. The importance of learning to develop skills and then relying on "auto-pilot" is emphasized. Edgette claims that exercising the imagination and keeping it fit enhances the development of imagery to help this mental rehearsal. She states that about 98 percent of top athletes use some sort of imagery in their preparation. She also debunks some of the myths that often discourage the learning athlete from practicing and using this valuable tool.

Edgette provides clearly written, step-by-step exercises to increase and enhance skills. In one example, she explains the competitor needs to select "mental weapons ... to deflect negative thoughts or influences that try ... intrude ... at unwanted times." (p. 109) Then she shows how to do just that.

This book is interesting to a wide audience. First, it is interesting to horsemen, riders, trainers and sportsmen in general. But it also is interesting to psychotherapists who can see a fine example of the metaphorical uses of psychotherapeutic principles wrapped in a field seemingly miles from the therapy room. When I read this book, I was reminded of a time when I watched a master trainer teach a horse. As I watched, I kept thinking of what a fine example of hypnotic interspersal technique I was watching. That experience kept cropping up in my mind as I read *Heads Up!* Horses are sensitive animals that respond overtly and clearly to minimal cues. As they are so alert and attentive to the cues of those around them, principles of working with horses provide an example for psychotherapists who have clients sensitive to the minimal cues of the therapist.

*Heads Up!* while ostensibly written for those in the competitive show circuit, has a broader appeal. Using sports horsemanship as her vehicle, complex psychotherapeutic principles are clearly demonstrated. Edgette then carefully explains what she has done. The psychologically sophisticated reader can understand the ideas and principles demonstrated and the average horseman can use the ideas for training. Edgette has unique insights gained from her experiences and these have provided her with fertile field for the reader.

**Reviewed by:**  
 Roxanna Erickson Klein, Ph.D., R.N  
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