

A graduation address by the rider-less Preakness horse, Bodexpress



Before the horses bolted out of the starting gate at Preakness, we may have been cheering for different horses. But as we watched Bodexpress throw his jockey (who was, thankfully, not injured) and run his own race around the track, I'm pretty sure we were all cheering him on.

His race was inspiring. So, I thought with graduation season well underway, maybe we should ask him to step up to the podium and share some of his inspiration. Here is what I imagine he might say if he could put his thoughts into words.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to the Class of 2019.

When I was preparing to give this speech, I asked my stablemate for some ideas, and he said, "Just remember to stop talking before you're horse." (Pause for laughter)

Seriously, though, I am happy to be here. Because the truth is that you are graduating today with an education that prepares you just as my years of running prepared me for the Preakness. And what I want to tell you today is: You're ready for your race—and it is, in fact, your race to run.

Sure, there will be days when you'll have a jockey on your back. He might have a plan and a prod. He might think it's his strategy, his training, and his vision that will take you to the winner's circle.

But you know what? The race is yours. You don't need a jockey. You know what's inside you. You know which way to go. Run around the other horses—or through them if you have to. Give it everything you've got. Keep your eye on the finish line. Just go.

People may try to grab your bridle to stop you. Other horses may get in your way. People may yell, “You’re going to be disqualified without your jockey!”

Ignore them. Obstacles have nothing to do with you.

Run because you love the feeling of the wind on your face.

Run because nothing feels better than pounding your hooves into the dirt of a dry track on a sunny day.

Run because you’ve been training for this your whole life.

Run because there’s a voice inside you that says this is your chance to perform, your story to write, your moment in the sun.

Here’s the truth—straight from this horse’s mouth: You won’t always cross the finish line first. Other people will come in ahead of you. But if you run the race you were meant to run, if you do it with heart and conviction and joy, you will discover you don’t need the winner’s circle. Because you will already have won.

As thoroughbred breeder Federico Tesio said, “A horse gallops with his lungs, perseveres with his heart, and wins with his character.” Even from where I stand, I know that’s true for people, too.

So, live life fully and well. Push yourself to succeed—and don’t let any horses or people define what that success means. Use the talents God gave you to do what you love, whatever makes you feel most completely yourself.

Today, you’re at the starting gate. Get ready to run!