

Wellington Forum

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People

Youngest-ever Olympic equestrian to perform

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SPECIAL TO THE FORUM

Luíza Tavares de Almeida, 17, became the youngest-ever Olympic equestrian at age 16 when she competed with the Brazilian team in dressage at the 2008 Olympics. Almeida and her 8-year-old Lusitano Samba that she rode during the Olympics and the Pan American Games will be showcased at the Jim Brandon Equestrian Center, 7500 Forest Hill Blvd., Thursday for the second annual 2009 Lusitano Collection@ Auction, which also takes place Friday.

Almeida said she was amazed when she made the Brazilian Olympic team by competing in the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro. The team received the bronze medal and a spot to compete in the Olympics.

"I wasn't supposed to compete that day and had 24-hour notice to prepare," she said. "I was the last rider to ride; it was amazing and beyond words."

During her trip to the Olympics many of the other riders were at least 10 years older than her. But it didn't worry Almeida.

"I try to stay on the confident side," she said.

Almeida shows maturity during her competitions, but she

also is a typical teenager. She practices twice a day for about 1 to 1 ½ hours. Although she travels, practices and competes, Almeida said she leads a normal life. She attends school when possible, completes her studies and socializes with nonriding friends like any other teenager.

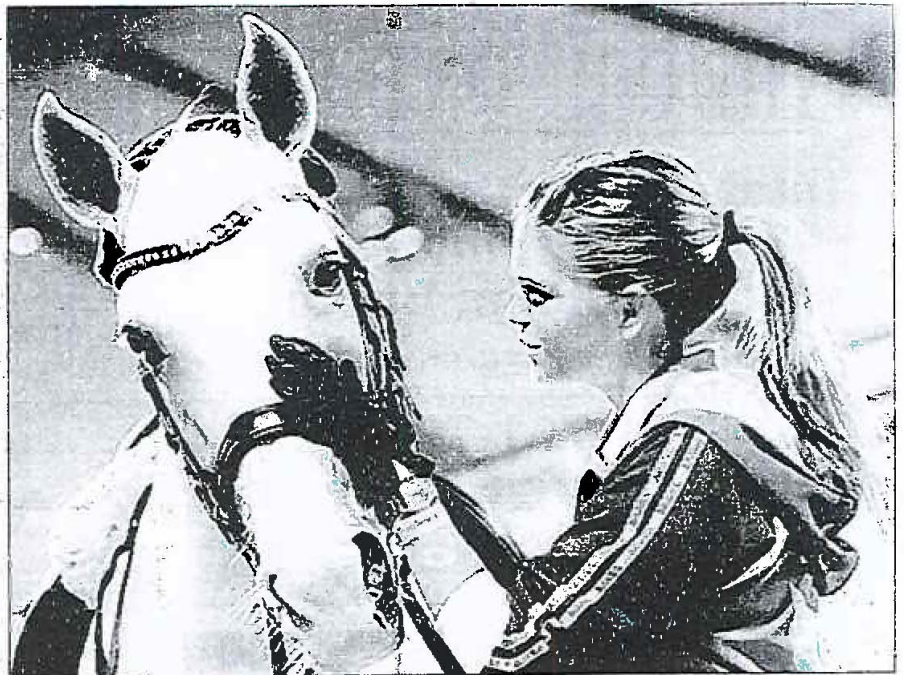
She has been competing for five years in dressage, but has been riding horses since she began jumping at age 2. Almeida and her horse Samba have a strong bond that has been developed over the years.

"We were both young when we started dressage; I was 12 and he was 3," she said. "We have grown together in dressage; I've been with him five years."

Almeida is competing in dressage during the Winter Equestrian Festival. It is her first visit to Florida and she said she has enjoyed competing in the United States.

"I enjoy the amount of competitors here," she said. "There are more competitors here in the USA than in Brazil and Europe."

Almeida said she is excited about her presentation during the 2009 Lusitano Collection@ Auction Thursday in which she will lead the Showcase Parade of Horses and perform her free-



OLYMPIAN: Luíza Tavares de Almeida, a 17-year-old Brazilian rider in the 2008 Olympics, rode a Lusitano. Submitted photo

style. Her father Manuel Tavares de Almeida is the founder of Coudelaria Rocas de Vouga Lusitanos, one of the partners of The Lusitano Collection@. A

portion of the proceeds from the auction will benefit the American Cancer Society and the Jim Brandon Equestrian Center. For information about The

2009 Lusitano Collection@ Auction, which is open to the public for a fee, visit www.lusitano-collection.com or call 866-540-8809.