

The 2009 League Footing Academy

The 2009 League Footing Academy was held at the Hardy Murphy Coliseum in Ardmore, OK this past January 16-17th. The educational sessions on Friday were led by industry professionals and leaders Phil Goostree and Chuck Dunn of D&G Barrel Productions. As producers of some of the largest and most prestigious barrel races in existence, they shared their expertise with respect to arena layout, preparation of the ground for safety and consistency throughout a competition, positioning of the tractors cleverly within the arena behind a barrier, and efficient and effective dragging techniques. These guys certainly have this down to a science and not only do they know how to do it right, they know how to do it most efficiently to keep the show going without unnecessary delays.

Phil and Chuck discussed proper techniques for ripping up an arena surface to prepare for the needed footing conditions for a barrel race. After firstly ripping “lengthways”, they then advise ripping again on a diagonal, but not across (perpendicular) to prevent turning up big clumps when the ground is extra hard. Clumps turn up in an arena as a result of inadequate moisture, they pointed out. Of great interest and value as well were their recommended techniques for preparing ground that is not ideal for running barrels, ground that isn’t tight enough to provide the needed support and safety. Their technique involves establishing an ideal clay base (~30’x40’) six inches under the footing around each barrel prior to the event with a clay product that will hold the horses up and endure the competition, yet not be too sticky or unforgiving to potentially endanger a horse or rider. These pads can even be left in an arena for future barrel events if they do not create a problem for subsequent events.

Their preferred tool for working the ground between runs is a modified Reveal 4-N-1 implement with an octagonal harrow attachment of their design and make. They also stressed the importance of tilling against the pattern, to fill dirt back in, and not away from the areas being dug out around the barrels. They also strongly recommend no less than a 75 hp front end assist tractor to properly handle the ripping, and no less than a 65-70 hp front end assist tractor for dragging between runs. This arena equipment was demonstrated in the Hardy Murphy Coliseum with additional narrative and instruction from Phil and Chuck later in the day.

On Saturday, Bob Kiser, Kiser Arena Consulting, further addressed the importance of providing the proper ground for each event and for the various classes within a show. Bob has traveled the world consulting and constructing arenas, and is additionally known for developing the Kiser Dragmaster. Bob discussed moisture, how to make and keep the footing as “tight” as needed for the various events, and the use of moisture meters to maintain consistency. Bob also addressed the “plasticity index” of soil mixtures (refers to its ability to thread or knead without crumbling, within its water holding range limits.) He informed everyone that generally a 70:30 or 60:40 ratio of a washed sand to clay works very well for most arenas, and maybe even a 75:25 ratio for barrel events with properly installed clay pads underneath the barrels, depending on the properties of the materials available.

Bob strongly advises facilities to stay away from using rotary type tillers and disks as they set a slick hard pan underneath the tilled layer, but to apply proper ripping practices instead. Because of the amount of sand required for cutting, he stressed providing and maintaining a separate pen for cutting events. Bob also discussed the importance of laser-leveling the base material when constructing an arena, the importance of maintaining a level arena for events, and establishing proper slope and drainage for outdoor arenas. After discussing that no facility should be content having “dead dirt”, he expressed the negatives of using the various synthetic (shredded or crumb rubber, “Nike footing”, etc.) products in arenas hosting reining and barrel racing events, etc. The

Kiser Dragmaster was then shown and demonstrated to the attendees in the Hardy Murphy Coliseum facilities.

On behalf of The League membership and those in attendance, a big thank you is extended to Tim Lynch, manager of the Hardy Murphy Coliseum (www.hardymurphycoliseum.bravehost.com), and Cathy and Lon Oyster with The League for organizing such a great event.

Respectfully submitted,

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