

United States Dressage Federation Region 7 FEI JR/YR Clinic with George Williams gives tomorrow's stars many tools.

by Cassidy Gallman

It seems like everyone these days is talking about the future of horse sports. There are thoughts, theories and hypotheses about what the future holds and what the future will look like. Well, Whitney Houston sang, "the kids are our future," and if she is correct then the future of dressage is here.



The Paddock Riding Club in Los Angeles recently hosted the USDF's FEI Junior and Young Rider Clinic for Region 7 (Hawaii, Nevada, and California). This year's clinician is George Williams, the U.S. Youth Dressage Coach and USDF President. The clinic spanned two days and consisted of lessons and theory sessions with the eight youth riders ranging from 14 to 21. The riders must apply and complete a detailed application to be chosen to participate in the clinic.

The purpose of this program is to assess the riders, to reaffirm the fundamentals, and to provide riders with tools they can use to accomplish their goals. Junior rider Maggie Evans recalled that, "Mr. Williams really emphasized that in order for my horse to go forward, he had to have steady contact with a clear bend. In order to do this we would start my ride on a circle in the walk, working on getting Apollo deep and round, and then continuing to do the same thing in the trot and canter before I would continue with the rest of my ride." Now, in the weeks since the clinic Maggie has been applying the same concept to her riding and there has been a clear improvement in the forward in all three gaits.

Fellow Junior Kate Mathews also learned two exercises to make her horse supple and

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balanced. One exercise was using the leg yield on a circle. This exercise can help bring the horse into the outside rein and leg. This also goes for transitioning from traver to renver on the circle line. It helps balance the horse and get him to start bending, flexing and giving around the rein and leg aids.



Another exercise is to use collection to extension exercises, for example; go forward a couple strides, come back a couple strides, go forward a couple strides, and so on. This exercise really helps with making sure that the rider's seat and half-halts are effective, as well as helping the horse gain more balance and put more weight on his hind legs. Lindsey Brewin, an accomplished Young Rider, also learned to use the leg yield in the walk to get her horse more sensitive off the leg before working on his piaffe/half-steps and to ride more assertively, especially in the trot in order to increase her horse's expression.

Lastly, the theory sessions helped to remind everyone to make sure they had established the basics of the training scale (rhythm, relaxation, connection, etc) and to remember this throughout their training.



Young Rider Sarah Yoffe-Sharp traveled the farthest distance from Northern California and gained invaluable insight with her mare Calanda in hopes of making their first North American Young Rider Team. "My mare and I learned so much - sometimes something being said in a new way can make quite a difference. George's insight on preventing my horse from counter-bending in the right canter pirouette through the use of a more inviting outside rein has made such a difference. This solution was counterintuitive and George's knowledge in pointing it out was invaluable. My mare has a tendency to carry some tension in the half-pass. George created an exercise playing off of the trot sequence in the Young Rider Team test, starting the

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circle and half-pass early in order to add a second shoulder-in on centerline as we finished the half-pass. This exercise helped my mare to bend and yield off of my inside leg, which has strengthened the sequence as a whole. Overall, the clinic with George was energizing and rewarding, and brought insights and understanding that I will carry forward with my enthusiastic mare in our training at home.”

While the overwhelming and obvious focus of this program was to provide the riders with the tools that they can use to accomplish their goals, it was clear as a spectator that this was a talented, professional and special group of youth riders. Each had aspirations to be on a North American Junior or Young Rider team or to one day compete on a U.S. Team. This goes to show that while there has been uncertainty and questions surrounding what the future of horse sports will look like, the answer may already be in our own backyard. Youth riders are the future of the sport and the future looks pretty bright.

Author Cassidy Gallman is USDF Region 7 Jr/YR coordinator.