

FUTURE FORUM

The Up and Coming of Young Trainers

by Leeann Mione

This is another segment in a Saddle Horse Report series featuring the stories of young trainers from across the country. There isn't a school for horse training outside of the "school of hard knocks" so it's interesting to follow the paths taken by these young professionals as they pay their dues in their quest for making a successful career out of their passion for horses.

This week we are featuring Will and Brittany Harris, owners and trainers of Harris Riding Academy in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Give us a breakdown of where it all began for you.

How did you get involved in horses and at what age?

WILL: I started riding when I was five with Lisa Pyburn, in Eagleville, Tennessee. Both of my parents were involved with horses. Since my mother had a Saddlebred background she encouraged me in that direction. Brittany began riding Morgans around the age of 10 with Rick Davis down in Florida.

What made you decide to become a professional trainer?

WILL: Brittany and I both knew this would be our career together during college. We met at a barn in Hendersonville, Tennessee, and decided we really enjoyed teaching people to ride. I have been around Saddlebreds all my life and always wanted to be a part of the industry.

Have you worked under any other trainers? If so, who?

WILL: Brittany worked for Valarie Siemer and Anne Winograd at West Coast Morgans. I worked for Jimmy and Helen Robertson, Keith Harger, and had summer jobs with Bret Day and Nelson Green.

Who are your role models/mentors? Why?

WILL: We try to observe as much as we can at horse shows to see what works. I think we have both gained a lot of knowledge from watching who is successful and trying to apply it to our own program. Helen and Jimmy Robertson have been a big influence on me. They have always been great with pairing up junior exhibitors with horses and that is a big part of our business. Bob Brison, Mike Barlow, and Jeff Leech have also been a lot of help, especially with working young horses.

What is your favorite thing about being a trainer?

WILL: Personally, I enjoy working young horses, and especially a gaited horse. Brittany and I both take a lot of pride in matching up horses and riders in performance and academy.

What is the hardest thing about being a trainer?

WILL: Finding balance between the job and personal time with family is tough. We have two little boys and they enjoy being around the barn and horse shows, but it is important to take time away as well.



What advice do you have for the younger generation who have their eyes set on becoming horse trainers?

WILL: I would encourage any young person to get a really good education in business. If you want to be a horse trainer, odds are you have the desire to take part in every aspect of horse care, but a lot of times it is easy to overlook the business side of things. If your career is going to be sustainable, you have to find that specific thing you're good at and chase it. Secondly, you have to know how to make a living with it.

What do you think is essential for the industry to focus on to ensure its success?

WILL: Introducing more people to American Saddlebreds is very important, but I also think we need more professionals. When a young person or couple starts a barn, chances are they are going to have to introduce more people to the Saddlebred so they can survive as a business. There are plenty of areas in the United States that could be thriving spots for show horses if someone is willing to take the chance.