

# 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 Andrew Slater, assistant trainer at Skyline Stables in Mokena, Illinois.

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

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

**ANDREW:** Growing up, my mom and I used to drive past a barn on our way to and from the grocery store. I remember always wanting to stop by and see the horses. So, when I was six years old my mom finally agreed, and signed me up for a summer camp. From then on my addiction to horses began!

**What made you decide to become a professional trainer?**

**ANDREW:** After college I got a corporate job, but I spent every day counting down the hours until I could go to the barn and ride. I always knew I wanted to be a horse trainer, but I had to try the corporate route first. After a year and a half of that, I decided I needed to be in the barn and around horses every day to be happy.

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

**ANDREW:** I have had the opportunity to work with several great trainers over the years. During high school, I used to spend my summers at Kalarama and got to watch Larry Hodge train. Before I decided to go professional, I had the opportunity to work as a caretaker for Tammy Devore and George Knight.

Once I finally made the jump to being a professional, Tom Thorpe and Bob Griffin of Northern Tradition Farm gave me an amazing opportunity, hiring me to help work horses and learn from them. From there, I went to work for Johanna Kapioltas and had the opportunity to work with several nice young horses and learned how to start a horse and get it prepared to enter the show ring.

Currently I am working for Kenny and Donna Smith at Skyline Stables and feel very blessed to have this amazing opportunity.

**Who are your role models/mentors? Why?**

**ANDREW:** My biggest role model is Larry Hodge. For starters, because of how successful of a trainer he is, but more than just that because he took the time to teach me and still continues to give me advice and cheer me on.

Another role model I have is Kenny Smith. Over the past six months Kenny has given me countless opportunities to learn and work horses. Every day Kenny takes the time to teach me something new or helps me master something I've been working on.

**What is your favorite thing about being a trainer?**

**ANDREW:** My favorite part of being a horse trainer is simply being in a barn every day. It truly doesn't feel like I'm working. I consider myself to be so fortunate to do what I love and to be surrounded by such incredible animals every day.

**What is the hardest thing about being a trainer?**

**ANDREW:** The hardest part of being a horse trainer is figuring out what each individual horse needs to be their best. Horse trainers work so hard to get each horse to reach their full potential, but the challenge is remembering each horse is different and each one needs something specific to succeed.

Horses are like a puzzle, there are so many different pieces to them that need to be put together correctly in order to be complete, but there is nothing more satisfying than figuring a horse out and watching a rider "click" with them.



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

**ANDREW:** I would tell any young person who wants to be a trainer to figure out what aspect of the industry they are best at. There are so many areas in the horse industry from teaching riding lessons, to breeding and developing young horses, to preparing amateurs to ride their show horse. Each are equally important and dependent upon one another.

I'd also tell them to never give up, the process can be challenging and frustrating at times, but if you persevere it is completely worth it. Listen to every piece of advice any horse trainer gives you. Their method may not work for you for that horse, but always remember their advice because it is very likely you will come across a horse that that trainer's method will work on.

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

**ANDREW:** Currently, I think breeding is essential for our industry to focus on to ensure its success. The registry has reported that registrations each year have been on a steady decline. This is because lots of people have downsized or even stopped their breeding programs all together.

Without new inventory our industry won't survive. Every horse can have a job, whether they are a World's Grand Champion Five-Gaited horse or a beginner "up down" school horse, each are needed to make our industry thrive. Even if a person only raises one or two foals a year, it all adds up!