



# FROM THE GROUND UP

BY COURTNEY STEVENS, DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING, KISER ARENA SPECIALISTS

**A**t Kiser Arena Specialists, we focus on riding and training from the ground up, literally. Footing is the center of everything we do, and we have made it a science to concoct the right footing for every discipline, anywhere in the world. But, what about every factor from the ground up?

Many factors affect your riding environment. Is it hot, is it too cold, is it a dust bowl, is the footing safe, how's the lighting, is it easy to get in and out of the arena with horses and equipment, and finally, does it exhaust your physical and financial resources to maintain it all?

There is no doubt footing is the foundation for a great riding environment and should be high on the priority list when planning the budget and design for a new indoor or outdoor arena. Too many times footing is treated as an afterthought. Once the barn is built and the arena cover is up, it seems like a good idea to save money by cutting costs on footing. This can be a huge financial risk and jeopardize the entire riding experience while putting horses and riders at risk.

The truth is, the environment in your arena is affected by many factors that collectively define your experience in the saddle and your horse's performance. Footing is paramount and can make the difference between a safe ride and wreck. Let's explore some of the factors that can affect your footing and arena environment.

## FOOTING MATERIAL SELECTION

Material selection cannot be stressed enough for equine safety and performance. It is not as simple as "one size fits all" or even an umbrella design for each discipline. Not all sands, silts, and clays are created equally. Finally, it is difficult finding the textbook-perfect material in every region of the United States and world. Only an experienced footing professional can truly weigh the pros and cons of different footing materials and give educated advice. Skilled installation is another key which sets the tone for a successful arena.

### *Downfalls of cutting corners on material selection, design, and installation include:*

- increased risk factor for injury
- hindered equine performance
- issues that arise from poor material selection including dust, drainage problems, rock, and unsuitable consistency
- spend the money once to get it wrong; spend the money twice to fix it.

***Spoiler: Having to redo footing usually costs more the second time than it did the first!***

## ARENA MAINTENANCE

Having the right material is just one piece of the puzzle when creating a great riding environment; then you have to think about how to





maintain it. The true purpose of grooming footing is to replace, or reset, material to its original state as an even and consistent surface.

Have you ever ridden in an arena where your horse felt inconsistent in their footfalls or struggled in certain areas of the arena and felt great in others? What about a time when you had to pick and choose where the ground was safe to run down and stop? Worse yet, have you ever had a horse trip in a divot or lose traction and slip? These can all be the result of inconsistent or poor maintenance and impact the quality of your riding experience.

Arena maintenance needs vary depending on material type, riding discipline, amount of daily use, and weather. Having the right groomer to meet your needs is the best way to protect the investment in your arena. On the other hand, having an inadequate groomer is the fastest way to wreck a good riding surface.



## MOISTURE

Moisture is another key to controlling your riding environment for two major reasons. First, moisture is a major part of maintaining your footing. Imagine drudging through dry beach sand and how difficult and deep it can feel. Now picture walking along the water's edge where the sand feels secure beneath your feet. The same concept is true for arena footing. The right amount of water will give footing enough hold and support depending on the type of material and demands of the riding type.

Secondly, and maybe even more noticeable as an environmental factor, is dust control. Not only is dust uncomfortable and annoying, prolonged inhalation poses respiratory health risks to horse and rider that can range from low-grade aggravation to chronic respiratory tract issues. Water is the most cost effective form of dust control, and it may take more than you think to truly make a difference.

A common misconception with watering is that if the top of the surface looks wet, then you've done your job. In actuality, enough moisture needs to be applied to reach footing below the surface. Additives, like Hydrex™ moisture extender by Kiser Arena Specialists, make life much easier by helping water penetrate soil and stay in the ground longer, decreasing labor time and the amount of water it takes to maintain footing and control dust.

## AIRFLOW AND AIR QUALITY

Once the footing feels good, you will have more time in the saddle than on the tractor because you have the right equipment and moisture maintenance, but what if you are dripping sweat because the arena air is so stagnant?

Structural design, layout, and placement all affect natural airflow in covered arenas. These factors can also be limited by space, property layout and budget. Planning ahead for a well-designed building will pay off for your riding environment, and you won't have to live with the thought "I wish we had done it differently" if you get the right advice in the design stages.

A great way to increase air quality and airflow is with high-volume, low-speed fans, commonly referred to as HVLS fans. The idea here is to circulate a large volume of air at a comfortable speed. In the hot summer months, this can lower the perceived temperature increasing the usable hours in a day without putting you and your horses at risk of overheating. A surprising benefit to HVLS fans is how much they can help in the cold seasons as well. As warm air rises, and leaves you sitting stiff and frozen in the saddle, running large overhead fans in reverse pushes warm air trapped at the ceiling down to ground level creating a more comfortable environment.

Things to consider when shopping for HVLS fans include: warranty, motor design, energy efficiency, maintenance versus no maintenance, and a sturdy design to handle the naturally dirty environment in a riding arena. Expected cost can sometimes scare people away from exploring HVLS fans. However, when one 24' fan can easily accommodate a 100' by 150' riding arena, the initial investment is small in comparison to the benefits in your overall experience.

## RIDING ENVIRONMENT AS A WHOLE

Whether riding one horse in a private arena or running a full-time training facility, your environment is impacted by many factors that determine your riding experience and horses' safety and performance. A riding arena should be looked at with a holistic approach so you are able to craft the ideal environment- from the ground up. ♦

