

Dressage 4 Kids Scholarship: USDF Trainer Instructor Certification Workshops 2020

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Through the generous scholarship of Dressage 4 Kids I was able to participate in the USDF Trainer Instructor Certification Workshops this past winter season in Wellington, FL. The knowledge and experience I gained was priceless. I'm incredibly thankful to the USDF for providing such educational opportunities and promoting dressage education in the United States. A general theme that I saw in all three workshops was the importance of the United States creating competent dressage trainers through certification. In Europe trainers have to become certified in order to train and teach, whereas here in the United States it's not a requirement. All of the workshop instructors stressed the importance of becoming certified especially because the USDF will look to make certification a future requirement for trainers in order to train and teach. There were three separate workshops including riding, lungeing, and teaching. Each of these workshops lasted two days and each focused on an aspect of the certification exam. I'll share my experience for the three workshops.

The first workshop I participated in was the riding workshop in January. The workshop took place at Hampton Green Farm and was instructed by Bill McMullin. The first day we attended a morning lecture at Bill McMullin's house. The lecture focused on the Training Pyramid, the gaits of the horse and common faults, and the assessment cycle when training the horse. The assessment cycle would apply to our riding sessions later in the workshop. The cycle consisted of several phases: Observe, Analyze, Plan, and Implement. The explanations of all of the phases of the cycle really helped me get a better understanding as to how to best go about a training session with any horse. After the lecture, we went back to Hampton Green to watch a couple of the participants' rides and then later in the day we went to two other farms so the other two

participants could ride their horses. I had a good ride on my horse and got some good feedback about possible exercises I could try. Our rides were broken into the phases of the training cycle. We had to make an initial observation about how our horse was during our warmup. Then we had to talk to the group and discuss what we saw and felt and come up with a plan to improve the horse. After we had to put our plan into action and ride for about twenty minutes or so and then come back to discuss how the ride went. On day two we all had to ride an unfamiliar horse and ride the same way we did the day prior using the assessment cycle. I personally struggled during my ride. Bill tried to help me out with some exercises to help create some change in the horse. I felt very defeated that day but it made me realize that I have much to learn and I could end up in a similar situation during testing day so I need to be able to make do.

Workshop two was the lungeing of the horse and rider (seat lesson). This workshop was headed by instructor Sarah Martin and took place at Laura Ashley's Farm in Loxahatchee. This workshop was conducted in a similar way and had a lecture session in the morning about the basics of lungeing and how to assess the horse. Laura Ashley kindly provided the horses for each of the participants for the day. We had to utilize the assessment cycle for the horse that we lunged. Sarah was very kind and gave helpful tips and instruction to all of us. She focused a little more on the concepts and basics rather than just training us for the exam, which was very helpful. For day two we had to give a seat lesson to one of Laura Ashley's students. I believe most of us were out of our comfort zone with giving a seat lesson, I know I was. Something I took away from this workshop was how important and helpful lungeing really can be. In the past I have used lungeing only as a means to exercise or burn off energy from a fresh horse. I learned that it can be used to improve the carriage of the horse without having the weight of the rider on the horse. I also saw how beneficial seat lessons can be. I gave a seat lesson but I also received a

seat lesson from one of the other participants. I think it's so important for riders to be able to focus on their own body position and balance in the saddle without having to focus on riding or training the horse. We all had evaluations privately with Sarah at the end of the day and she gave us advice about what we could improve on.

The last workshop was the teaching workshop. Lilo Fore was the instructor and it took place in White Fences. We had lecture in the morning and then both days we had to give a lesson to a volunteer horse and rider pair. I found this workshop very intimidating because I had never taught a lesson to someone before and almost all of the volunteer horse and rider pairs were FEI. Lilo was incredibly kind and she was able to help guide me through instructing my first lesson. I really appreciated her help and felt confident to try teaching on my own the next day. At the time I was upset with myself that I couldn't be as confident as the other participants but I now realize it will come with time and experience. Lilo made this workshop very inspiring. She shared many stories with us and was very supportive telling us that we can do it. A big take home message that Lilo gave us is that you need to be able to tell your student why you are having them do something. As she said, "See it, vocalize it, have the rider improve and have something to take away from the lesson." You need to be able to tell your student the reason behind why you are having them do a particular exercise so they can learn when to apply that exercise in the future and what its benefit will be, which is teaching. Lilo also emphasized the difference between teaching and coaching. With teaching you want the student to be able to walk away from the lesson having learned something whereas coaching is helping the rider better the horse for a temporary setting such as at a horse show, the coach won't go into depth about dressage concepts or theory.

I felt that these workshops prepared me well for when I decide to take the exam. The workshops also made me realize that I have much to learn. Since I have left Wellington, I have made sure to take on training opportunities working with young horses, lungeing horses, and schooling older school horses. I plan to practice teaching people as well. The workshops provided me with all of the tools I need for the exam but I need more practice before I decide to take it. I would recommend the workshops to other people whether they are thinking of becoming a trainer or not. The information you learn from the workshops is valuable and is necessary for anyone who wants to seriously be involved with dressage.