

ARENA FOOTING/DESIGN

Building A Riding Ring Is Never Easy



The base is the most important phase. It requires a precise grading strategy, the right material and good supervision

By Robert Jolicoeur

I recently visited a nice farm on the East Coast. They built a new indoor arena and an outdoor sand ring. Unfortunately, the owner is not completely satisfied with the work done by the contractor – perhaps with good reason. The contractor is displeased that the client is not satisfied with the work. Everyone in this tale is unhappy.

Footing is one of the most important ingredients in the development of horses in training, and for the safety of the rider. With good reason, today's trainers and

riders are becoming more and more demanding.

I have specialized in footing for more than 20 years and have supervised the construction of over 200 rings including the equestrian venue for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. Building a riding ring is never easy. You have to depend on materials that can vary from year to year. Sand from the same pit can be very different just 50 feet in any direction. With the turnover of employees at a construction company, you lose experienced people. Even weather is a factor when building a ring.

There are many footing products on the market – some are very good, and some are not. You will have to watch the claims that are made by manufacturers. As they say, *caveat emptor!* I always feel you should probably go with a product and concept that has been well tested. The cost of materials is very important – it is better to choose local materials instead of shipping tons of sand from across the country. You will need a good contractor, so shop around; the contractor should be someone who understands the importance of footing. Most of all, if you find a contractor

claiming to be a specialist in footing, can he back up the claim? It might cost more, but you may need a specialist to oversee the project. You need someone who can make the final approvals before the project is called "finished". It may cost more in the short term, but it will save you money in the long term. There maybe some fine tuning to be done, which is normal. It is better to get the job done right the first time.

Building a sand ring is one thing, the maintenance of it is another. Footing changes after time and with use. Steps will be necessary to keep it in

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Horses experience a lot of stress Especially when they are performing at a high level. Good footing will Reduce injuries.

top shape, so you have to be prepared for this.

Sand rings are just one option; if the space is available, I prefer grass fields for jumpers.

So, what makes good footing? You need a good concept, a good product and that the footing be properly constructed. Moreover, the ring will need to be the right size, and located in the right place. It also requires time. You need a schedule that does not rush the project to completion. A rushed schedule may yield something less than expected. If all the ingredients to good footing are present, then you should have a riding surface for training that is safe and pleasurable to ride upon – though getting there may be less of a pleasure.

What about that farm I just visited?

Well, part of the footing will have to be redone. There are solutions to correct the problems, but who is going to pay for it? If you want to build a ring, do your homework, or it may cost you. Getting the footing right is perhaps the single most important element to ensure safety and proper training of your horses. And without that, what good is everything else? I wish you all safe riding!



Establishing a maintenance program is essential

Robert Jolicoeur is President of International Equestrian Design, a Landscape Architecture firm based in Montreal. Mr. Jolicoeur has over 25 years experience in equestrian projects of all types and sizes. He has played a key role in the development of equestrian sport in North America. He is the Chairman of List of International Footing Experts (LIFE) and he is considered one of North America's top arena and footing experts.

International Equestrian Design is a landscape architecture firm specializing in equestrian design and planning. IED has established itself as a leader in the field by planning a wide range of projects from private equestrian facilities to the equestrian venues for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, and the 1999 Pam Am Games in Winnipeg.

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