

USHJA Trainer Certification Program comes of age.

by Karen Healey

I am happy to report that our long-worked-on changes to the Trainer Certification Program were well received by a standing-room-only crowd at December's United States Hunter Jumper Association annual meeting. Going from one basic level to four levels of certification is the main difference in the program and several trainers commented that we "got it right." Which is not to say it's perfect, but the progress we've made, and the great reception to those changes, are a huge step forward.

Useful certification is also nicely in synch with the emphasis on sport integrity that is permeating every facet of our industry. That topic has been new USEF president Murray Kessler's clarion call from day-one and, appropriately, it's only going to get louder and more critical to our sport's growth.

The four levels of certification start with Basic, which is what's been in place since the TCP's inception. The next are Regional, National and Premiere, which correlate to the levels of USHJA/USEF hunter/jumper shows.

The Basic level continues to be education-based: studying the TCP manual, which is based on the American Forward Riding principles and general horsemanship practices. The criteria for the three new levels correlates to how many years you've been coaching riders and training horses as a professional. Accomplishments you've had as a rider do not count toward this, but can be listed on your USHJA trainer profile.

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Tuesday, 31 January 2017 21:19

For Regional certification, the requirement is seven years as a professional and verifiable success taking horses and/or riders to success at the 3' equitation or hunter ranks, or the 1.10M jumpers. Please note it's success in at least one of these disciplines, not all three. That's true at all levels of certification and allows for the specialization that is common in our profession.

The National level criteria requires 10 years and training riders and/or horses to success in at least one of the following divisions: 3' Hunters, 3'3" to 3'6" equitation, Green Ponies at a national competition, 1.2M jumpers and 1M pony jumpers.

Premiere level requires 15 years and student or horse success in 3'6" hunters, 3'6" and above equitation, green ponies at Premier shows, 1.4M jumpers and pony jumper at 1.1M.

There is an avenue for currently certified trainers to provide results that enable them to advance up the levels of certification. (See sidebar)

The USEF's show results database will be used to confirm reported results from 2007 on, and all new results from USEF shows are automatically refreshed on the trainer's TCP website page. If results prior to 2007 are required, they must be verifiable from horse show archives provided by the trainer.

Earning trainer certification is not mandatory at the moment, but it likely will become so in the future.

How & Why

The procedure to become certified involves submitting an application and resume, undergoing a background check and USOC Safe Sport training and completing a live TCP educational clinic or an online equivalent through www.equestriancoach.com. We want to have more live TCP clinics and it's easy to make a regular clinic, conducted by a TCP trainer, into a clinic that counts toward this educational component.

Three letters of recommendation and proof of liability insurance are additional requirements.

The process is meant to create standards in the profession, enable prospective customers to identify trainers best suited for their experience and goals and to promote continuing education. Forty hours of continuing education are required during the five-year period of certification.

There were a lot of questions asked and answered during the TCP session at the annual USHJA meeting. A few young pros asked if there is a way to skip the requirements involving how many years of coaching and training are needed for each level. There isn't, but keep in mind that results are posted on your TCP webpage. Even a trainer whose age limits them to the Basic level can showcase their students' and horses' accomplishments.

Some trainers who are also licensed officials asked if the Safe Sport and background checks that are required of them in that capacity can be used for the TCP requirements. The Safe Sport training can, but unfortunately the background checks cannot because they are conducted by a different company.

As I said, the new system isn't perfect and we welcome input and help on improving it. One weakness we really want to address is making TCP credentials valuable to trainers from a marketing standpoint. Trainer input and the automatically generated USEF results can make for a good business profile on the USHJA website, but we still need to find ways to drive people to the site.

I join TCP committee chairman Shelley Campf in thanking everybody for their patience over the last few years. We still have issues to iron out and improve and we welcome everybody's input and help with that.
