



HAYES IS FOR HORSES.COM

## Horseplay

By Tim Hayes

**H**ave you ever gone to a public swimming pool and seen a sign that says: “NO DIVING, NO RUNNING, NO HORSEPLAY.” What is “horseplay”? With horses you might say its “Equine Roughhousing” or the way horses play with other horses. With humans it also means playful roughhousing. Why is it forbidden for humans? Often when we engage in horseplay someone gets hurt.

Horses play with each other physically. It is usually very fast and often very rough. It can involve running, biting, kicking, rearing and striking. Usually no horse gets seriously hurt. When humans engage in horseplay with other humans it is also physical and can be fast and rough. It can involve running, wrestling, pushing and hitting. Sometimes someone gets hurt. If however horses engage in horseplay with humans, not only can humans be seriously hurt, they can be unintentionally killed.

Play is an important part in the development of all animal species. In fact it is not only fun, it is often the way many animals, including humans, practice their survival skills i.e. killing for food, defending and protecting themselves and their families. When we watch dogs play with other dogs it is easy to see that if they weren't playing, they could be seriously hurt or killed. Roughhousing with our own dog is great fun. It is also easy to see that if we had not already established a relationship of love, trust and respect, our dogs' “pretend biting and growling” would be terrifying and possibly dangerous.

All play no matter who is playing requires rules. Without rules players get hurt. If you're playing go fetch with your dog, you throw the ball; your dog runs and brings it to you. The rule is no biting allowed when you take the ball from your dog's mouth. If you're roughhousing with your dog the rule is only “pretend biting” allowed. Playing with horses however is very different than playing with dogs or humans.

Horses are prey animals. Their survival depends primarily on running away from danger. They will fight only if they can't run away or escape. Their play (practicing their survival skills) is therefore made up of games of controlling the movement of each other. They use their physical prowess (biting, kicking, rearing, striking) to cause their playmate to move, not move or completely run away.

The horse that controls the movement of another horse is the winner of the horseplay. The winner wins increased standing in the pecking order of the herd with all its accompanying perks i.e. eats first etc. The loser gets to practice his survival skills i.e. running away before he gets kicked or bitten. His standing in the herd decreases i.e. eats last.

Horses love to play and do so constantly. Even when he loses a horse knows he can try again, play another day, win, and regain his leadership. In this respect horses are much like human teenagers; constantly challenging their leader (read: parent).

Although it can look extremely rough when horses play there are two primary reasons they rarely hurt each other seriously. First they are usually of equal size. A 1000lb horse that kicks another 1000lb horse produces a different result than if he kicks a 150lb human. (This is why Featherweight boxers don't fight Heavyweights). Second they always warn their playmate with one or more warnings before they strike. It usually goes something like this: Horse #1 says to Horse #2: “If you don't move I'm going to kick you but first I'll pin my ears, then I'll lift my leg, then I'll kick the air. If you still haven't moved I'll make contact and kick you.” Most horses move before physical contact is made.

Knowing how and why horses play is extremely helpful for humans. First and most important, we can keep from getting hurt by making rules that prevent our horse from playing with us as if we were another horse whether we're on the ground or on their back. The rules must be no biting, kicking, bucking, rearing or striking allowed with any humans, anywhere, anytime. We do this with using the tools and techniques of Natural Horsemanship. This establishes us as the Alpha in our herd of two using communication instead of force, fear and intimidation.

Second we learn that sometimes what we think is “bad” or disrespectful behavior is actually our horse just wanting to play with us. Instead of punishment, which does not exist in the world of horses and therefore is always ineffective and counterproductive, we reestablish our leadership with groundwork, rules and boundaries.

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“Horseplay.” Painting by Joyce Hewitt Beck

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**Invitational.** It will be run this year on Oct. 3. Hirsch was the founder and first president of the **National Turf Writers Association** and wrote several books.

Many members of the racing world have fond memories of Joe Hirsch. Ogden Mills, chairman of the Jockey Club, said, "Joe was a great ambassador for our sport." Trainer Shug McGaughey commented that Hirsch "always made me sound a lot better in print." Jockey Richard Migliore called him "an icon" and said he enjoyed his passionate and articulate style. Everyone agreed that Joe Hirsch was a class act.

On a personal note, I admired Joe Hirsch because he wrote eloquently and packed his articles with information. I met him for the first time in Saratoga when a restaurant owner led me to the table where Joe was sitting with Jimmy the Greek, introduced me and told them I was a writer. Joe said, "I'm a writer, too," in his droll, dry manner. Talk about understatement! He was the best in the business.

**- LOOKING AHEAD -**

Racing continues through the winter at Aqueduct and moves to Belmont Park April 29. It is not too early to start thinking about reservations for Belmont Stakes day and the Saratoga summer meet. In the meantime, keep an eye on three-year-olds in the Gotham March 7 and the Wood Memorial April 4. For racing information call 718-641-4700.

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Finally we discover that even though we can become our horses' leader, it doesn't mean that our horse won't want to play another time and try to win again. In fact by understanding that this is natural for horses we can come to expect it. This understanding helps us to become more forgiving, more confident and a better leader. Our relationship with any horse will always improve when we stop blaming or making them wrong for being and acting like a horse!

Natural horsemanship teaches us to look at play from the horses' point of view. Riding horses is not something horses consider play. If they did we would see them riding each other. Riding horses is "humanplay" invented by humans. Having a predator sitting on it's back is quite unnatural for the prey species of horse. If we want our horse to look to us as his leader in our herd of two, it's our responsibility to first show him we care about and understand his world. We do this by first playing with him on the ground before we get on his back. This allows both of us to create a friendship and a pecking order founded on love, trust, respect and not force and fear.

Understanding and knowledge of horses not only helps us both to be safer by eliminating bucking, kicking, rearing and striking from our mutual horseplay, it shows our horse that when we finally sit on his back, we're just playing the way humans like to play. Then riding truly becomes play for both of us that's safe and fun. ©TimHayes2009

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# US Show Jumping Riders Get to Know Horses; Attend Opening Ceremonies at 2009 Australian Youth Olympic Festival

By Joanie Morris

**T**he US show jumping riders had their first training session on their borrowed horses at the 2009 Australian Youth Olympic Festival in Sydney, Australia. The four riders all spent some time getting to know their borrowed horses and found both the horses and their Australian owners and riders very accommodating.

Each nation is invited to bring four athletes between the ages of 15-20 and the four promising young stars representing the US are: Mavis Spencer, 17, from Santa Monica, CA, Taylor Land, 16, from Atlanta, GA, Kylie Wright, 16, Sparks-Glencoe, MD, and Jennifer Waxman, 17, Chagrin Fall, OH

"I was really able to click with my horse through some exercises Dick and Francie set up for us," said Waxman, of her ride on Tom Robertson's Shekky Express under the watchful eye of US Chef d'Equipe Dick Carvin and his wife, Francie.

Temperatures soared as it is Australian summer, but Wright said her horse felt great despite the temperatures.

"My horse performed beyond expectation," she said of Pacific Wave. Pacific Wave's owner, Jack Maunder, had a first of his own - he was on hand to watch someone else ride his horse for the first time.

Land made a couple of simple changes to the equipment on Tom McDermott's Markovitch and got great results.

"We used less tack and more leg and the plan seemed to really work out," said Land.

Spencer's horse is less experienced than some of the others in the competition, but she has lots of confidence in Jeremy Inglis', Jencoyeh.

"He has the most conventional jump and such a level head," she said.

The riders all attended the opening ceremonies with 1500 athletes taking part from 31 different countries. The ceremonies were impressive and the athletes spent lots of time meeting each other beforehand which added to a truly international feel.

"It made us feel like we were really special," said Waxman. "We knew this was an experience of a lifetime."

"Even though we were all from different nations," said Spencer. "We all have the same conversations going on and are going through the same experiences."

Riders have limited time to get to know their new horses and training sessions start tomorrow morning, the First Individual Qualifier class will take place on Friday, January 16, followed by the Team Final on Saturday and the Individual final on Sunday.