

# Mounted Games

## and INSTRUCTION

### **Starting Games in an established club: Why? How?**

*Presenter: Geoff Brown, NY/UC Region*

# SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Explain **why games belong** in a mounted instruction program
- Address **specific issues that frequently arise** when introducing games
- Suggest **next steps**

# AUDIENCE

- People interested in **improving mounted instruction** in their club or region
- Mounted Games **enthusiasts** who want to spread the word about Games

NOT on the agenda  
today:

**How to win** in Mounted Games competition

# “Games” – what do we mean?

- Games includes both rally/gymkhana games **AND** lesson games
- Games includes both team games **AND** individual games

## Intent of Games in USPC:

“... to provide reinforcement of the riding skills taught in Pony Club in a more relaxed environment than the formal lesson in equitation.”

*USPC Handbook and Rules for Games Competition, 2003*

# Games and Pony Club....

- The Pony Club (UK) and the NZPC: Games in their syllabuses all the way from pre-D through C2/C3 level.
- NZPC says: “Games, both for instructional purposes and purely for fun, should still form a **MAJOR** part of the activities for Post-D riders.”

# Results...

## Testimonials by:

- **Two-star eventer:** *“I stayed on”*
- **Whipper-in:** *“I learned hunt field skills”*
- **Dressage team:** *“We don’t ride with our hands!”*

# Educational Benefits of Games

- **Games help teach things that don't fit into most mounted lessons** (*emergency dismount, jogging the horse, standing at a check, etc.*)
- **Games reinforce riding skills by using them** (*half-halts, bending and lateral movement, leg/seat/balance, etc.*)
- **Games help solve riding problems** (*“kick and steer”, “neck bending”, perching, inability to tell lead/diagonal, etc.*)

**PLUS...**

# Games helps with other instructional problems

- “Pretty” (versus **effective**) riding
- Difficulty learning in traditional lessons
- Need to ride other horses
- Unfit riders
- Injured riders/loss of confidence

# **The traditional Games skills – all useful additions!!**

- **Vaulting on/off** – *(or at least mounting fluidly from the ground)*
- **Handoffs** – *(develop confidence riding close to other equines)*
- **Dunking and Pickups** – *(balance, staying on)*

# Games ALSO helps in other areas...

- Games flattens the cost/performance curve
- Games increases competition opportunities
- Games builds teamwork and helps with social relationships
- Games makes PC more appealing to boys
- Games are FUN! *“Fun and friendship are part of Pony Club”*

**...and that's **WHY** you need  
games in your instructional  
program.**

**Now, **HOW** to do it...**

# **Approaches to adding Games to your instructional program:**

- **ALTERNATIVE #1:** Add games to traditional mounted lessons
- **ALTERNATIVE #2:** Hold separate Games sessions for interested members
- **ALTERNATIVE #3:** Do both.

# Games in Traditional Lessons

## Plusses:

- All members get some games benefits
- Makes lessons more fun
- Expose upper level members to teaching of games in lessons

## Minuses:

- Instructor should be comfortable with games
- Equipment and format limit options
- Some kids (*and moms?*) simply don't like games
- Games may challenge some mounts

# Separate Games sessions

## Benefits:

- **Can concentrate on specific Games benefits**
- **Facilitate (eventually) having Games team(s)**
- **Easier to deal with different Games skill levels**
- **Opportunity for PCers to instruct**

## Concerns:

- **Resource needs: time, instructor, facility, equipment**
- **“Games Kids” vs. Pony Clubbers: a risk?**

# **SOMEBODY has to initiate the process. Who will it be in YOUR club?**

- DC?
- Parent?
- Instructor?
- PCers?

**Their success is likely to depend on your club's culture. Don't overlook it!**

EXAMPLE: adding  
Games to a club's  
instructional program

# Lakeville Pony Club

A group of about ten people, including children and adults, are gathered in an indoor riding arena. Some are mounted on horses of various colors (brown, white, grey), while others are standing on the ground. They are dressed in riding attire, including helmets, jackets, and breeches. The arena has a wooden floor and a corrugated metal wall with several windows. In the foreground, there are three orange traffic cones and some white poles, suggesting a training or obstacle course setup.

One of USPC's older clubs (1956)

Traditional mounted lesson program (same instructor for 30 years)

25 members, UR to B, ages 7 - 20

Dressage and Eventing, *but No Games*

*... last year the club took a trip to the  
Rolex 3-day event ...*

*and they saw the Prince  
Philip Cup  
competition!!*

# After the PPC:

- The kids definitely wanted GAMES
- The instructor saw what games could do for the club
- Two immediate questions:
  1. Could we integrate games in the club's instructional program?
  2. Could we “do” Games in a club of “tall horses”?

# How Lakeville started...

- “Intro to Games” for Quiz preparation
- Decision to go ahead
- Building/obtaining equipment
  - Bending poles (*two lanes of five each*)
  - Batons (*3*)
  - Heavy plastic mugs (*6*)
  - Dead tennis balls (*10*)

# Actually DOING GAMES

**“Games Afternoon”** at Pony Club camp:

- Dismounted introduction (*including parents*)  
with drills (*passing baton, dunking ball*)
- Safety Check
- Mounted Games walk-thru:
  - Pole bending
  - Ride and Run
  - Mug Shuffle

# The decision to continue

- **Decided:** Separate Games sessions (instead of games in mounted lessons)
- **Decided:** Wait until after annual horse show (major fund raiser) and end of hunter paces and local horse trials before starting

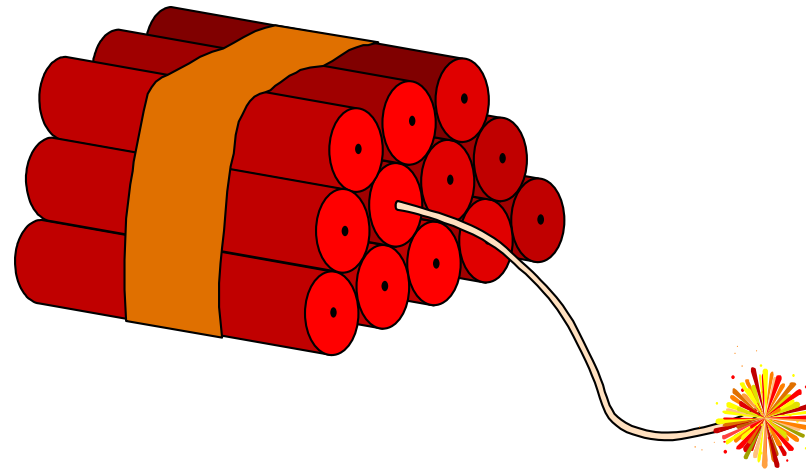
# Lakeville PC Games Sessions:

- Optional (*8 – 16 PCers attend so far*)
- 1 ½ hour, every two weeks, weather permitting
- Always start with Safety Check

# Games used at early sessions

- Pole bending
- Mug shuffle
- Ride and run
- Sword
- Rope race
- Ball and bucket
- Ball and cone (*not great*)
- Egg and spoon (*really unsuccessful!*)

**GREAT! What about**



**PROBLEMS**

*(and opportunities)*

# **PROBLEMS** and **OPPORTUNITIES:**

- Culture problems
- Horse problems
- Kid problems
- Facility problems
- Instructor problems
- Equipment problems
- Expectation problems
- More to come???

# Culture problems

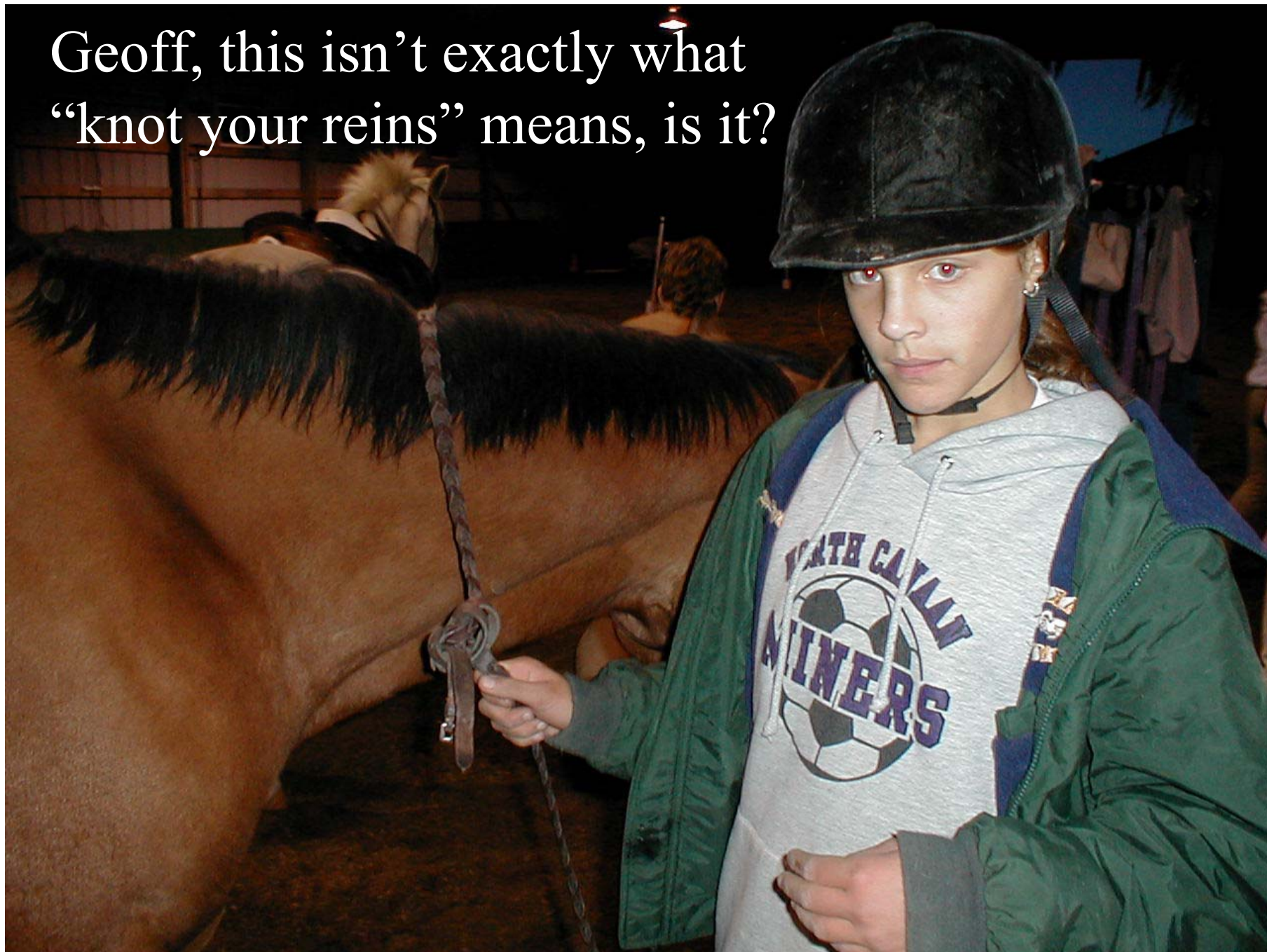
## OUR PROBLEMS

- No local “games culture”
- Taste for large/expensive mounts
- Age/rating not correlated with games skill
- Unfamiliarity with assumed basic knowledge

## OTHER POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- Possible resistance from parents

Geoff, this isn't exactly what  
"knot your reins" means, is it?



# Horse problems (*universal?*)

- **“Tall horses”**
- **Overmounted kids** – for Games, at least
- Horses that shy at equipment
- Horses disoriented by “new stuff”

**What's wrong with this picture?**



**About our tall horse problem:**

Think:

**Band-Aid**

# Band-Aid

- **B**egin to change the “tall horse” culture
- **A**dapt games to the available mounts
- **N**ever say it can't be done!
- **D**efer vaulting games
- **A**ssimilate riders from nearby clubs
- **I**dentify a games team
- **D**on't forget: **Games are FUN!!**



A tall horse  
and a D-1  
level rider



She can't  
quite  
reach that  
3'  
(USPC)  
flag



...but she  
CAN safely  
reach a 4'  
(MGA) flag.

# Some games with no mounting:

- Pole bending
- Ride and run\*
- Mug shuffle
- Sword race
- Various flag races (use MGA flags or raised cones)
- Ball (or potato) and bucket (spare balls/potatoes on a barrel)
- Egg and spoon (spare golf balls on a barrel)

\* = no equipment required

# Kid problems

## PROBLEMS WE SAW

- **Learning issues** (riding in a group lesson vs. performing on your own)/fear
- **Self-control issues** (gallop in a game = gallop anytime?)
- **Skill level mismatch**

## OTHER POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- **Obese kids** (double-whammy for obese kids)
- **Threats to social structure**
- **TIME**

# Facility problems

## PROBLEM WE HAD

- Small indoor arena --  
**you CAN use one!!**

## POSSIBLE PROBLEM

- Interference from recreational riders, other lessons, etc. –  
***Solution: use creative scheduling***

# Pole bending end-to-end – using four poles



# Instructor Problems

## PROBLEMS WE HAD

- Instructors may be unfamiliar with Games  
*(Suggestion: ask the instructor for opinions about individual horses/riders and provide feedback.)*
- No one to teach games

## OTHER PROBLEMS

- Instructor could have own agenda (*e.g. selling tall horses*)

# Equipment problems

## PROBLEMS WE HAD

- Need for games equipment (*build it gradually*)

## TACK:

- Rubber reins don't knot (*“unbuckle” rule?*)
- Crops/spurs/running martingales

*Kids will gradually accumulate games tack*

## OTHER PROBLEMS

# Expectations problems: Desire versus Reality

- Unrealistic expectations = frustrated kids (*Games is definitely harder than it looks*)
- Consider: first-year dressage riders don't get to Nationals – and neither do first-year Games kids!
- Mounted Games rulebook vs. what is possible. *However, if you adapt the games too much, kids might get confused doing the real game later?*

# Starting to learn to vault on...



# Idea: try it without a saddle



**...and there's always next time!!**



# Lakeville PC's future in Mounted Games

- **Option #1:** Keep Games strictly as a supplementary activity
- **Option #2:** Add low-key friendly Games competitions with neighboring clubs
- **Option #3:** Build a powerhouse Games team
- **Option #4:** Support individual members in pursuing Games interests

# Lakeville's Current Plan:

- Continue Games sessions as weather and other activities permit
- Reach out to neighboring clubs
- Begin to acquire suitable mounts
- Attend Games clinics

# Who were the drivers here?

- The kids!!

AND

- The instructor!!
- (done with DC/parent support!!)

**Games are likely to succeed in this club!**

# YOUR NEXT STEPS...

1. Talk to people -- **TODAY!!**
2. Learn more (*see the “Games Resources” handout*)
3. Identify influencers in your club
4. Get buy-in
5. Get started!!

# ... views from a games session



# **Games for Mounted Lessons**

Some suggestions for Games to try as part of  
a Mounted Lesson program...

# Games that reinforce beginning skills:

- Transitions: *“Red Light/Green Light”* \*
- Mounting/dismounting/leading:  
*“Walk/trot/lead”* \*
- Turning: *“Ground-pole maze”*
- Reins in one hand: *“Pass the baton”*
- General control: *“Telephone”* \*
- Seat: *“Sit-a-buck”*

\* = no equipment required

# More challenging games:

- Leg/seat: “No hands”\*
- Faster/slower gaits: “Tortoise/Hare” \*
- Half-seat/quiet hands: “Egg & Spoon”
- Dismounting/leading: “Ride and Run”\*

\* = No equipment required

# Harder yet:

- Balance/control/confidence: “Side-saddle”  
race \*
- Precision/accuracy/teamwork: Drill team \*

\* = No equipment required

# When there are more riders than ponies...

- Changing riders pairs race\*
- Mounted versus unmounted competition at any game

\* = No equipment required

# Some Safety thoughts...

- Be sure to observe normal Pony Club safety procedures: safety checks, etc.
- Special attention:
  - NO spurs
  - Girth adjustment
- Knot reins and unbuckle, **EXCEPT rubber reins**
- Emphasize preparation and control, NOT speed

# ...about Position

- BALANCED POSITION is THE seat for Games.
- Most similar to a showjumping seat: a mixture of two-point and sitting deep, changing continually.

# Too young for Games?

- The Pony Club (UK) Syllabus and the PCNZ Syllabus include simple games at the pre-D level (**ages 6 – 9**)
- **Some sources have whole sections on games suitable for lead lines competition**

# A few games to avoid at first

- Balloon race
- Flag races (*more later on this*)
- Stepping stones
- Fish
- Pony Club
- Pony Express
- Windsor Castle

# Some views of a games session

