

ity contracts. He oversees forty plus venues each year from coast to coast - so Mike has seen it all.

USTRC team ropers don't give the ground much thought because Qualls pays close attention to it. "The arena dirt is just as important as those sponsor banners hanging on the fences. When I get there a few days prior to an event I have to work with what kind of ground is there. It can change from year to year according to the weather even if it's an indoor arena. More times than not you just need to water it, rip it up good and dress the top. You can add water during your event to keep the ground consistent."

"I'm excited to pass on what I've learned during my 19 years of ground preparation," says Qualls. "As a committee person for SAF, I welcome your input and discussions."

Extreme Bull Riding Commentator Don Gay

The eight world bull riding titles Donnie Gay collected in a storied career — one that began immediately after his high school graduation and ended in 1989 — are the most ever. Gay serves as the charismatic commentator for the Extreme Bull Riding events.

Gay says of rodeo dirt, "Being around the Mesquite Rodeo my whole life, we were one of the first to have a Reveal 4-N-1. When the new facility was built, it was the only piece of equipment we needed to keep the ground conditioned for all events. If it's good for the barrel racers, it's good for the bulls and bull riders. When you have a 2000 pound bull bucking and kicking, they need some good ground to hold them and keep them safe."

Pro Bull Riders "Dirt Guy" Randy Spraggins

Spraggins started out building tracks for tractor pull events 29 years ago and always wanted to be involved with rodeo. The company now handles dirt installation, maintenance and removal for approximately 150 events nationwide annually, including rodeos, motocross and monster trucks events, earning Spraggins the handle "The Dirt Guy."

"We started out doing tractor pull tracks - that's where the (company) name comes from. At some point we ventured off into 'The Dirt Guy' thing, and we've become an expert in arena installations."

"I contract out to the PBR as their dirt man. I go all over setting up the arenas for over thirty PBR events annually. I get a lot of phone calls requesting information about what I did to the ground here or there."

"We like firm, stable ground so the bulls can push off. They can perform better if they are sure footed. The bulls come out and feel the ground and that determines their performance."

"We like 3-4 inches of sand on top

but the layers must blend. You can make most ground work with sand, water and a tool to work the ground. I like to work with the Eliminator Scarifier Rake because it's small and can be attached to a skid loader. I sometimes work in extremely small arenas."

"When I'm consulted on horse arenas, I recommend the Reveal 4-N-1 for it's all around simplicity. It has all the tools on it including water tanks."

"Dirt is the one thing that you can't do without," he said. "A rodeo is all done on dirt, and it's our job to help the bulls and the rodeo athletes perform to their best."

D&G Barrel Racing Producer Chuck Dunn

Chuck Dunn has been known as a top barrel racing ground preparation guru for some time now. He and partner, Phil Goostree started out with the Barrel Futures of America and now head up D&G Barrel Productions. "We have been doing this for over thirty years," informed Dunn.

"When we first started out with BFA, we used a box blade with rippers. A lot of folks have a chisel plow that does an okay job. You can go all the way up to the Reveal 4-N-1 that is specifically designed for arena work."

"I believe the Reveal 4-N-1 is the most valuable tool a producer can own, as far as preparing an arena for competition. I can take that one tool and rip the ground, pack it or level it. The 4-N-1 has ripper teeth on it and you can break up the hardpan. It does a good job of taking care of the sub-soil," continues Dunn.

"It should be a producers's goal to make the ground the same for the first horse as it is for the last horse," says Dunn. "That is virtually impossible but you should do your best to keep it consistent. Our theory is just go in and destroy whatever is down there. You just tear the hell out of it and put it back together the way you want it."

Better Barrel Races President Robin Hoffman

Better Barrel Races is an organization established in 2003, which is made up of independent producers, who have served the barrel racing community for years. The BBR combined effort is to better serve the barrel racer by cooperating in scheduling shows, putting forth a code of ethics for producers, providing a unified awards program you can work towards, and bringing a big added money finals to the central United States.

"Ground is the #1 critical factor to producing barrel racing events. And outside the contestants themselves it is the #2 biggest variable and hardest to manage. Having an experienced ground crew with the right equipment for the type of ground a facility has is the key element to producing a successful event," comments Hoffman. "The guys need an opportunity to get into a venue at least a day to a day and half in

front of the event to get ground conditioned to last over the course of a multi-day event. They need a little time to "get to know" what they are working with. Some arenas have concrete floors with dirt laid over the top, others are permanent dirt floors."

"A big concern we always have in the OKC coliseum is having enough dirt to work with and how much it rains on it before they bring it inside and lay it down on the concrete. On the other hand, indoor arenas with permanent dirt floors never get rained on, so it's very critical to get this type of ground ripped deep and well soaked to get the right amount of moisture down deep enough to hold for 500+ runs per day. Obviously tools that can apply some water as the ground is being maintained throughout the barrel race are a huge asset to maintaining that consistency."

"I constantly revel at the new arena records that are set from season to season and wonder how much faster times will be next year, or the year after or 5 years from now...I think the biggest reason we continue to see those new arena records is due to how far ground equipment has progressed in the past 15 years and how much more emphasis we as producers put on hiring experienced ground crews," says Hoffman.

"Sometimes it can even come down to how well guys on the crew work together! I can't stress strongly enough the importance of having an experienced ground crew, good equipment and enough prep time. I really hope venues will pay attention to the SAF guidelines as I have no doubt adding this element to the equation and having good ground to work with will allow those arena records to continue to be set."

SAF (Safe Arena Footing Committee) Founder Steve Thornton

Steve Thornton came up with the concept of SAF after 23 years of producing the ANHA ShootOut now staged in Waco, Texas. He realized early on how critical the ground is to barrel racers and is conscientious in his preparation for the event. Thornton was recently hired to help with the ground at the John Justin Arena in Fort Worth for the AQHA barrel race and pole bending.

"I have enjoyed talking to all of these people that are just as passionate about the ground as I am. I have learned a lot from Jim Brown and am committed to helping the WPRA and other events in achieving the best ground conditions possible," states Thornton. "With the tools and technology available there is no reason producers cannot maintain safe arena footing. Because of the versatility of the tool and the simplicity of operation, the Reveal 4-N-1 is the official tool for SAF."

"SAF is at your disposal to provide you with information on ground preparation. Jim Brown, Mike Qualls or I will be available to answer questions via phone or email. Jimmie Munroe, Chuck Dunn and

Randy Spraggins can give you specifics on any one arena. Between the people involved with SAF they have been in most every arena in the nation," says Thornton.

"With over 200 years of collective experience, SAF is available to assist you. When you sign up to put on a professional rodeo, you should provide world champion footing if you want to attract world champion caliber contestants," says Thornton.

"We invite you to get involved and work with SAF for the betterment of arena conditions everywhere, amateur to the professional level. We look forward to hearing from you."

Visit safearenafooting.com
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Mike Qualls 254-965-0353

*Thanks to the following for contributing information:
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Tex-Sand Equestrian Services

www.texasandequestrianservices.com

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www.wpra.com

United States Team Roping Championships - Mike Qualls

www.ustrc.com

Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association - Don Gay

www.prorodeo.com

D&G Barrel Racing Production - Chuck Dunn

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