



FEI™ HYBRID GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ANTWERP, BELGIUM 14-17 NOVEMBER 2021

Dear Delegates, Dear Guests, Ladies and gentlemen, Dear friends,

It's an absolute pleasure to stand here, before a live audience but also speaking directly to many delegates online for the first FEI hybrid General Assembly! So also big thanks to the BEL NF for hosting this GA.

As you know, we have been livestreaming the GA for several years now, but this edition is the FIRST hybrid General Assembly which effectively allows delegates unable to attend in person to take part virtually and cast their votes live.

So a BIG welcome to all National Federation delegates and representatives of our main stakeholders both here today in Antwerp and online – as well as all the interested parties around the world, following our discussions and decisions in real time on the livestream!

Communication, transparency and good governance have been really big topics in the sporting world for several years now, and I am sure you will all agree over these past 18 months, we have completely tested all the systems available.

From the onset - with the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 which affected every single industry, coupled with the outbreak of the neurological form of Equine Herpes Virus – I call it the pandemic in the pandemic – it has been a really tough ride!

We have had to adapt very quickly to an ever evolving status quo, and we have had to anticipate and pre-empt every possible situation, devising and implementing protocols to guarantee safe events and workplaces.

This has been draining and overwhelming at times – but as I stand here – I am proud and humbled by the strength of our community and our resilience in the face of adversity. We showed true resourcefulness, but especially WE showed a positive and proactive community that can move forward and embrace change.

And when I say WE – that's the operative word because WE did this TOGETHER. We all had different issues and challenges depending on our situation and our role in the industry - but WE came TOGETHER to find the solutions which would provide OUR community with the best possible outcome.

So, what have we learnt from these two pandemics?

- We have learnt that working together is vital.
- We have embraced flexibility and used our collective expertise to devise and implement mitigation measures.
- We have increased the rate of digitisation in all our processes.
- And we have focussed our attention on our Biosecurity systems – and the checks in place - so that we can ensure safe events and safeguard the welfare of our equine athletes.



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From a sporting perspective, 2021 was extraordinary.

- We had the first ever postponed Olympic and Paralympic Games
- We had World and continental Championships for all ages and across all the disciplines - including the first FEI Endurance World Championships since 2018; the first Vaulting and Driving Championships since 2019 and three European Championships in the Olympic disciplines organised in record time!
- We were welcomed back to Barcelona following a two year break for the Longines FEI Jumping Nations Cup Final
- And the list goes on!

We also had to contend with some high profile cancellations such as the FEI Jumping and Dressage World Cup Finals due to the EHV-1 outbreak but also cancellations linked to the uncertainty around Covid-19 measures, which continue to affect Organisers and National Federations.

For Tokyo, there were feelings of great enthusiasm in the build-up, but also real trepidation as we prepared for a Games like no other. We had to overcome a combination of sport specific and Games wide challenges - with biosecurity, qualifications and new formats coming on top of the sanitary restrictions, and let's not forget, the heat & humidity.

All of this created an overwhelming sense of unknown and complexity for the FEI and all the athletes and their entourage and yet we were successful in our endeavours and delivered really successful Games:

- We had a record number of nations take part in equestrian.
- We worked together for months in the build-up to educate and mitigate against the climatic conditions.
- We set up a comprehensive protocol for quarantine and horse transport.
- We achieved Clean Games for the third edition in succession, validating all the work that has gone into the FEI Clean Sport educational campaign over the years, the buy-in of our National Federations and the uptake of equine pre-arrival testing and elective testing to ensure our horses would compete clean at the Games.
- We enlisted the support of wonderful individuals to help with the Covid-19 measures so that our officials and delegations could actually get to Tokyo.
- And we increased our visibility and attracted new fans to the sport.

But we also recognised that further improvements need to be made to make them more successful and less stressful for our Athletes. And I am happy that we could decide yesterday how we are going to tackle the qualification vote later today but also already identified and heard many valuable suggestions regarding the review of the rules and MERs. And last but not least the agreement to initiate the discussions regarding LA2028 already in spring 2023.

I believe everybody has had the opportunity to say what they had to say yesterday so I will not abuse this stage to make any further statements regarding this topic.



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The stage has been set, the parameters are known, the risks identified and now it's up to you to decide.

Horse welfare is always given absolute priority in our sport and in this organisation. The tragic accident in Eventing, the unacceptable situation in Modern Pentathlon for which we are wrongly blamed are only some examples to remind us that people see us as THE governing body responsible for equestrian sport and for the welfare of our friend and partner the horse.

We must continue to scrutinize our field of play to ensure we always have the very safest conditions for our human and equine athlete. It was also a reminder that we must continue to educate the non-equestrian community about equestrian sport and our values as there is a lot of misinformation which exists out there and could threaten the integrity of the sport we love. The social licence to operate is probably becoming the most important priority on our "to do" list. The FEI Board will need to think how to tackle this but I also invite you to provide us with your input and suggestions.

Now back to the agenda for today – as you know, there are a number of important decisions to make, including updates to our Rules and Regulations as well as key elections.

We have presented and discussed the key changes during our Rules session yesterday, and you have all had the opportunity to provide feedback through the very transparent FEI Rules revision process.

Debate and consultation are key to a healthy and forward facing sport. This is what makes our strength and this is why the FEI is highly regarded from a governance perspective. We have very high standards in terms of how we want our sport to be managed, and reliable processes that underpin our decision making process.

When it comes to Reining, we have pursued every possible avenue to find a solution and I will admit that we are also disappointed that we could not reach an agreement with the NRHA. But it's maybe better like that and I am happy to hear that there are ideas circulating to create an international Reining association and as promised we will of course support this if initiated by our NFs.

From a financial perspective, the two pandemics and the loss of events and revenues have definitely impacted our bottom line. However, we were also very careful to cut costs (even though we were in an Olympic and Paralympic year) which coupled with a financial safety net put in place several years ago, meant that the FEI remains financially healthy and poised to tackle the future!

And this is something we have really thought about a lot in our 100th year. What do we want for our collective future, for the next generations? From sporting integrity, good governance and sustainability, how are we creating a positive legacy for the future?

One big initiative which began several years ago but really was elevated to priority status in 2021 is the recognition of grooms. This vital stakeholder group is our sporting safety net and an essential element in the welfare of our horses but also



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the logistics of our events. And yet... for a century they have remained a silent partner, without a voice in the decision making process – and without the necessary standards to meet their needs.

At the online Sports Forum earlier this year we addressed this topic, and it was really encouraging to see the enthusiasm within the community. We have set up the Grooms Working Group, headed by Frank Kemperman, and we have liaised extensively regarding the governance systems that need to be put in place.

It is my real ambition that this time next year, the International Grooms Association will be here with us at the GA to voice their opinions and set the wheels in motion for a new future outlook for grooms.

FEI Solidarity is an important tool when it comes to planning ahead and looking forward - and we have made a real difference around the world since the introduction of FEI Solidarity in 2011.

In 2021 – there were far fewer courses as expected due to the travel restrictions – but we were able to distribute just over CHF 1 million through the newly created FEI Covid-19 Relief Fund for National Federations that have been severely impacted by the ongoing pandemic.

And one of the other highlights for 2021, was the recent FEI Solidarity Course for FEI Secretary Generals and Administrators at FEI HQ, where we welcomed 17 participants from 10 NFs and shared insights into all our processes whilst discussing the big challenges in our collective future.

So on that note, I would like to thank...

The FEI Board, the FEI Committees, each and every National Federation and Representative Association, the Organisers, the Officials, the Athletes, the Owners, the Grooms and their extended support teams, the FEI Headquarters, our sponsors and Top Partner Longines (represented here by Matthieu Baumgartner and Urs Schiendorfer).

I also want to thank everyone that contributed to the wellbeing of our sport during this difficult period. And I want to thank the very dedicated and hardworking staff of the FEI under the leadership of our Secretary General. The staff has been outstanding in these period of pandemics and worked tirelessly and for this they deserve our appreciation.

Although the circumstances were not ideal, working together and seeing the solidarity across all the different stakeholders has really helped strengthen our cross community collaboration and realise the depth and strength of our industry.

From the Calendar Task Forces representing all the stakeholder groups that contributed to a large number of emergency resolutions supported by the broader community, to the inspiring solidarity shown during the EHV-1 crisis, when help came from so many quarters and took so many different forms, it's been awe-inspiring.



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So many thanks to all of you for your dedication and your generosity. I look forward to continue to work with you to strengthen our community. We can agree to disagree, we can have intense debates but once a vote has been taken and decision was made, we need to move on - Together – and this is exactly the word used to update the Olympic motto:

Faster, Higher, Stronger, Together!

And now before we move on to the order of the day, let's take a moment to reflect and remember the important individuals we lost since the online GA 2020. Individuals that have shaped our sport – at local, national, regional and international level - and will be dearly missed.

[Moment of remembrance \(pdf\)](#)