

Session 7 - Endurance - Improvements and innovations to reshape Endurance

I – Summary

FEI Veterinary Director Göran Akerström opened the session with a focus on drug abuse, the new hyposensitivity protocol, the Equine Anti-Doping and Controlled Medication strategy for Endurance, post mortem results and injury reporting. The new post mortem protocol now includes forensic investigation which can identify pre-existing bone injury, injection marks and the time of the injection, nerve blocks and the type of substance used. The Veterinary Director also revealed that there are currently three ongoing horse abuse cases in Endurance based on post mortem findings.

Professor Timothy Parkin, member of FEI Veterinary Committee and the Endurance Temporary Committee and who heads up the research programme for the FEI's Global Endurance Injuries Study (GEIS), had earlier presented several parameters based on the GEIS evidence, which provided the scientific basis for the Endurance Temporary Committee's proposed rule changes.

Data shows that the risk of failure to qualify (FTQ) can be reduced by a number of factors: increased number of rides as a combination, longer out of competition periods, fewer rides in the previous 120 days, and more loops of similar length in a ride. Professor Parkin also advised that a lower heart rate on first presentation decreases the risk of FTQ at the next loop. Statistics show that a heart rate of greater than 64bpm at first presentation, especially during the second half of the ride, increased the risk of FTQ.

Proposed improvements and innovations to reshape Endurance, which form the basis of the Endurance Temporary Committee's proposed rules modifications, were presented.

Prior to presenting the Committee's 16 far-reaching proposals, Chair Dr Sarah Coombs referenced the fact that the Committee is also proposing more effective drug sanctions to include extending suspension on horses and to include owners, stating that there is never an excuse for horse abuse.

1. Qualification from 1* to Championships

Proposal:

Based on capped speeds and completion percentage for qualification up through the ranks from CEI 1* to Championships, with free speed only for those with a completion rate of 66% or over (as presented in Session 5).

Suggestions from the floor:

Discussed on Session 5

2. Course Design: loop length, loop number and distance between water points

Proposal:

Minimum loop length 20 km; minimum number of loops: 6 for 160km, 4 for 120km, 3 for 80km. A 5km distance between crew points and a max 10 km distance between water points.

Suggestions/comments from the floor:

More technical rides could reduce the speed.

3. Number of crew

Proposal:

Limit number of crew to three (3) in crew areas, reinforcing the responsibility of the athlete.

Suggestions/comments from the floor:

Create a series with One Horse, one rider and one groom only in order to get back to high level of Horsemanship.

4. The role of the Trainer

Proposal:

The registered trainer must be at least 18 years old. Substitution of the registered trainer of a horse taking part in an event not allowed after the date of Definite Entries. When a horse has a change of registered trainer, the Horse will not be permitted to compete for 30 days.

Suggestions/comments from the floor:

The Trainers can be replaced and no effective sanctions, this must be addressed and stopped.

5. Minimum rider weight

Proposal:

Reduce minimum rider weight to 70kg for senior rides of 2* and above (regardless of athlete's age).

Suggestions/comments from the floor:

The proposal of 70 kg means that riders will have to weigh approximately 66 kg. A European man will be easily above this and therefore will not be able to be competitive at top level. The ETC will look at the data to comfort this decision.

Reducing weight will promote higher speed.

No weight on Young Rider competitions.

6. Maximum number of starters

Proposal:

Maximum 200 starters per event subject to venue and appropriate ratio of competitors to Officials; maximum 400 starters per day subject to the same conditions.

Suggestions/comments from the floor:

FEI to consider staggered starts and possibly include in the final proposal.

7. Criteria for test events

Proposal:

Ensure smooth running of all Championships test events are mandatory with requirement to match distance, course, panel of Officials, timing provider, data handling and heart rate monitoring.

8. Heart rate parameters and presentation times

Proposal:

GEIS evidence supports 60 bpm in presentation time of 15 minutes; for venues where for the last 3 years, the top 10 finishers have an average speed of 20kph or greater over the same distance, 60 bpm and 15 minutes for all vet gates, with presentation time of 20 minutes at the finish; for venues where for the last 3 years, the top 10 finishers have an average speed of less than 20 kph, the existing rules regarding heart rate and presentation times will apply. At the first vet gate after the halfway point in a ride, horses that present with heart rate greater than 64bpm at the first presentation will not have the opportunity to re-present and will be designated FTQ-ME.

Suggestions/comments from the floor:

The presentation time and the speed must be taken into consideration when changing the heart rates. 64 bpm is a good number but the 20 min is not.

9. Implementation of rules on the basis of Horse Welfare

Proposal:

Where a rule change is judged to have a clear potential benefit to horse welfare, the FEI Board should require changes to be made if there is a chance that this could make a positive difference.

Suggestions/comments from the floor:

To have a way to assess the emotional status of the Horse during veterinary inspections.

The FEI to make overnight stabling mandatory for all the events.

In order to avoid dangerous riding (which ultimately leads to CI and SI), the FEI should create a certificate of competency for athletes in order to enter in Endurance competitions.

The FEI coaching system for Endurance put in place by the FEI Solidarity Department includes teaching the skills of riding and good horsemanship.

#1 priority for Endurance Rule Changes should be prevent cheating, doping and corruption.

10. Targeted Mandatory Out of Competition Periods (currently referred to as Mandatory Rest Periods)

Proposal:

Longer MOOCP to be applied: additional seven days for horses exceeding the average of 22kph over completed phases; additional 14 days for 2 consecutive FTQ-ME; 6 months following 3rd consecutive FTQ-GA with specific examination protocol before being permitted to start; MOOCPs specifically targeted to musculoskeletal or metabolic serious injury and no longer related directly to immediate invasive treatment.

Suggestions/comments received from the floor:

To conduct more studies on Mandatory Out Of Competition Period, before proposing any changes to the Rules.

11. Harness / Tack and Horse Abuse

Proposal:

Specific recommendations regarding permitted tack/equipment to bring Endurance in line with other disciplines.

12. Extension of period for reporting rule violations

Proposal:

Extend to 12 hours for making an objection and then 24 hours to provide evidence.

13. Increase sanctions for Horse Abuse

Proposal:

Increase sanctions for Horse Abuse in line with current review underway by the FEI Legal Department; suspensions to be served within the competitive season of those involved.

Increase sanctions for Banned Substances and Controlled Medications.

Stronger sanctions on Horses. To allow for a different and more stringent system in Endurance in order to be more effective.

14. Increase sanctions for removing a Horse from the field of play

Proposal:

Six months suspension plus 80 penalty points for first infraction.

15. Visible blood

Proposal:

Horses in competition that have free-flowing blood from an injury or from an orifice should be examined by a panel of three veterinarians who will report their findings to the President of the Ground Jury. These horses would be designated FTQ.

II – AOB - Further comments received

Equine Treating Veterinarians should be created and they should conduct in depth post mortem examinations. Create a timeline after a post mortem when a death has been caused by a SI.

Experienced people need to be doing the post mortem exams because horse abuse is often hard to detect.

Ensure that sponsors do not overstep their boundaries (i.e. selection of timing providers, Officials, etc.) they have the right to actually choose.

To create regulation in case of an abandon/cancellation of an event, which should be applicable to all disciplines.