Session 6 – Optimising performance in a challenging climate

The importance of managing horses in hot and humid weather was highlighted from the start of the session. The FEI Veterinary Committee and Veterinary Department had initiated studies in this area and the objective of the session was to raise awareness and give guidelines to the NFs planning to compete at the FEI World Equestrian Games™ 2018 in Tryon, NC (USA) but also to increase the general knowledge of this topic.

Dr David Marlin introduced the history of the research, which had been initiated in connection with the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games. Dr Marlin explained the way climate was assessed and clarified that the Wet Bulb Global Temperature (WBGT) index was the only valid measurement used for competition horses. He showed ways to prepare and manage horses in hot and humid climates and highlighted the efficiency of various cooling techniques.

Dr Martha Misheff presented the clinical aspects of heat exhaustion and heat stroke, with heat stroke being the more severe and more dangerous of these two heat-induced conditions. The reassuring conclusion was that, if properly managed, most horses made a complete and rapid recovery after suffering from heat stroke.

Dr Peter Whitehead, the Chair of the FEI Medical Committee, provided practical advice for human athletes competing in hot climate. He emphasised the importance of preparation, including knowledge of the historical record of weather, acclimatisation, fitness, and clothing. He listed the necessary precautions and gave examples of good practices before and during travel.

The FEI Medical Committee was working on recommendations for allowing athletes to compete without jackets in hot conditions.