

FEI Sports Forum, Day 2: Endurance

Setting the scene, FEI Secretary General Sabrina Ibáñez

Good morning Mr President, dear colleagues, dear friends,

As mentioned by the FEI President in his opening speech yesterday, this is the first time that an entire day has been dedicated to the future of a discipline.

I would like to take just a few minutes of your time to rewind the clock and take you through quickly where we come from and the measures that have been put into place by the FEI (and when I say the FEI, I mean the National Federations) to put the welfare of our Endurance equine athletes at the forefront of the discipline and to preserve the integrity of Endurance.

Endurance became an FEI discipline in 1982, however the first international Endurance Events were only included in the Calendar two years later, as the FEI Rules had not been finalised in 1982 and then in 1983 the FEI was concerned, and I quote from the General Assembly 1983 Minutes: "the use of any medication whatsoever in Endurance Events constitute a real danger to the horses involved", so another year was needed.

The first events therefore were only organised in 1984 - 7 events in total in 7 countries including the Open European Championship which took place in Florac 160km where the average speed of the winner was 14.9km per hour.

The discipline grew consistently, but then skyrocketed from 2008 to 2012:

The number of events jumped from 488 in 2008 to 911 events in 2012 (almost double in four years).

The number of NFs participating went up by 26%

Number of horses registered +60%

Number of Athletes registered +27%

Number of Starters +70%

To manage the growth and more importantly to safeguard the sport, an Endurance Round Table was established in 2013.

The 22 Round Table members gave their unanimous support for a Strategic Plan for Endurance and the Endurance Strategic Planning Group (ESPG) was born:

Its mission was "to create an environment in which athletes compete in a spirit of fair play according to the requirements of the FEI Clean Sport policies and where horses compete in partnership with human athletes, where at all times their welfare is paramount."

The initial Strategic Plan proposed:

- Increased testing;
- Injury research;
- Surveillance and reporting;

- Adherence to FEI rules;
- Creation of Independent Governance Advisors (IGAs);
- Discipline-specific Code of Conduct for Endurance;
- More technical course design to reduce speed and minimise injury risk;
- Robust rules enforcement by all officials on the field of play.

The ESPG's call to action was for:

- National Federations in every region of the world to take responsibility and provide leadership;
- Every single person involved in the sport to be self-disciplined, respect their horses and abide by the code of conduct for the welfare of the horse.

Among the rule changes approved at the General Assembly in 2013 in Montreux were:

- Compulsory horse re-inspection for 3* events
- Amendment to the Mandatory Rest Periods
- New qualification system for Championships
- Entries linked to the number of appointed officials

Also in November 2013, the FEI set up a consultancy agreement with the University of Glasgow to develop risk monitoring for FEI Endurance events, ultimately leading to the establishment of the Global Endurance Injury Study (known as GEIS).

The GEIS provides evidence-based information for regulatory changes to Endurance rides focused on minimising the risk of equine injury.

The FEI formalised the injuries research partnership with the University of Glasgow in 2015 and further extended the partnership in November 2017.

Going back to 2014, the ESPG final recommendations – 41 in total - were presented at the FEI Endurance Conference, which took place in Lausanne, as well as the FEI Sports Forum.

The ESPG recommendations formed the basis of new rules that came into effect on 1 August 2014, including:

- additional dope testing,
- injury surveillance and reporting,
- athlete penalties for equine injuries,
- introduction of Independent Governance Advisors (IGA),
- increased mandatory rest periods post FEI *and* National events,
- extended mandatory rest periods for consecutive lameness,
- other measures for increased responsibility and accountability of participants and officials,
- the introduction of steps to address any conflicts of interest,
- registration of Trainers,
- further restrictions on access to the field of play
- increased control in the Vet Gate and the Heart Rate Assessment Protocol.

The same year (2014), the FEI launched the FEI Sports App so that Endurance Officials could consult the entries at the event to which they are assigned, consult qualification, penalty points, suspension, qualification and rest period of horses.

In 2015, following numerous welfare issues and due to non-compliance of FEI rules and regulations, the FEI Board suspended the UAE National Federation.

In 2016, rules changes included increased penalty points for Catastrophic Injuries.

In 2016 we also saw the first Endurance Coach Education programmes. Since then 11 courses have been organised in places such as Bulgaria, Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Thailand and the UAE with 121 participants having attended a Level 1 course for Endurance coaches.

In 2017 the rule changes empowered the Technical Delegate and the Veterinary Commission to reduce the heart rate, presentation and hold times for welfare reasons.

Also in 2017, the FEI organised an Endurance forum in Vic (ESP) where the University of Glasgow presented the FEI funded Global Endurance Injuries Studies which updated the community on the epidemiological study based on Endurance data provided by the FEI to the University from 2010-2016.

The data analysed approximately 97,500 horse starts in over 5,800 events across all nine Regional Groups. At this same Forum we also had a presentation from EquiRatings on risk assessment.

Also during the Forum in Vic, Professor Chris Whitton shared valuable insights on bone fatigue as a major component of catastrophic injuries.

Then following the debate (and let's face it confusion) regarding the FEI Endurance rules during the General Assembly in Montevideo in 2017, a further Endurance Forum was organised, this time in Dubai in April 2018.

In addition to the findings of Chris Whitton's studies, results from the Equine Anti-Doping and Controlled Medication Programme (EADCMP) and post mortem examinations have given the FEI valuable information on the background to catastrophic injuries and the unethical, dangerous and illegal use of pharmaceutical substances during training and competition. So in 2018 the FEI introduced a new post mortem protocol to facilitate high quality examinations, making the completion of the report compulsory.

Also in 2018, the FEI increased intelligence-led anti-doping testing in targeted countries.

We also developed a protocol for the detection of hyposensitivity, which is the lack of sensitivity, as we know that horses with hyposensitive limbs are at substantially greater risk of injury. This ground-breaking protocol was voted in as part of the FEI Veterinary Regulations in force as of this year, 1 January 2019.

The main catalyst for the re-examination of the entire sport was probably the FEI World Equestrian Games in 2018. The shortcomings of the 2018 Championships highlighted some of the recurring problems that keep resurfacing with Endurance.

In order to address these issues, the FEI Board set up the Endurance Temporary Committee. These courageous persons seated in front of you today have spent a huge amount of their personal time to accomplish their mission.

They have minutely assessed the issues affecting the sport; they have reached out to and listened to our community and with that feedback in mind, they have carried out an in-depth review of the rules which will hopefully bring the sport back to where it should be: riding versus racing with horse welfare and horsemanship at its core.

It's not an easy task.

I am happy to introduce the Chair of the Endurance Temporary Committee Dr Sarah Coombs, FEI Endurance Vet and Event official, formerly Team Vet for Great Britain, Trustee of Global Equine Charity World Horse Welfare and Chair of its Veterinary Advisory Committee.

Sabrina Ibáñez

FEI Secretary General