

Fair Play and Equestrian Sport

The equestrian disciplines, in common with other sports, depend heavily for their credibility, public acceptance and ultimate survival upon their adherence to the sportsman's code of fair play. Behind this precept lies the premise that the best man, woman or team should win fairly and squarely, having competed under even and equitable conditions and under rules that are themselves fair, realistic, and applied with scrupulous competence and even-handedness. No result can be meaningful or valid if it has not achieved "on a level playing field."

Translating the abstract ideals of fair play into practice requires the collaboration of all those who participate in any way in the competition, i.e., not only the competitors, officials, organisers and federations, but also even the owners, trainers, spectators and media. Each of these groups has an important role to play in enhancing both the image and the reality of equestrian sport, by respecting the spirit of fair play as embodied in the rules and by insisting that the best interests of the sport and the welfare of the horse are placed above all else. Some additional considerations that especially concern particular groups are noted below:

- **Responsibilities of competitors, coaches and trainers**

The competitors themselves play a highly critical role in promoting and safeguarding fair play in their sport. For whatever the responsibilities or actions of others, in the end it is the competitors who can most directly influence whether or not the play is fair by understanding all the rules that govern their discipline, and by faithfully observing them even when nobody is watching.

High profile competitors must recognise how influential their example can be for others, and accept their responsibilities as role models. This applies to their actions both on and off the horse, and in the warm-up area as well as the competitive arena. Coaches and trainers can also help to promote fair play by setting a good example and by discouraging disrespect for the rules or acts of discourtesy by competitors under their supervision. Older advisers clearly exert as important an influence by their example as by their instruction.

- **Responsibilities of governing bodies
(national and international federations)**

The governing bodies of equestrian sport not only formulate the rules, but also qualify and license the officials, approve the dates and programs of the major competitions, and often act as the final level of judicial authority. They must make every effort to ensure that their rules are fair, based firmly on reality and applied accurately and consistently by officials of demonstrated competence and impartiality. They must also do everything they can to enhance and promote the quality of the disciplines and their attractiveness for spectators and competitors alike through a proactive use of their executive powers. Finally, they must recognise that neglect or disregard of the ideals of fair play reflects both on the sport and on the organisations responsible for its conduct.

- **Responsibilities of judges, stewards, veterinarians and all other officials**

Officials exercise exceptional authority, which in turn requires them to assume exceptional responsibilities. Their overall effectiveness, no matter what their particular duties, depends not only on their technical competence and intimate knowledge of the rules, but also on their maturity of judgement, self-control, flexibility and basic fairness and integrity. Beyond this, all officials must be scrupulously careful to guard against any appearance or actuality of interest. In all questionable cases it is always wiser to acknowledge a possible source of a conflict and stand aside rather than permit suspicions to gain strength.

- **Responsibilities of journalists and other media**

The media have their own standards of journalistic integrity, but have to work within the constraints imposed by editors, publishers and producers. Even so, they can make an important contribution to the public's appreciation of fair play through their reportage and commentary, and especially, by placing the events and incidents they cover into a fair and balanced perspective, and resisting the temptation to oversimplify or over-dramatise a story.

- **Responsibilities of spectators**

Spectators attend equestrian events for their own pleasure, and cannot be denied the right to express their own feelings. Nonetheless, basic fairness should dissuade them from attempting to influence the performances of the horses or the decisions of the judges. Audiences should carefully avoid acts that might upset the horses, such as untimely movement, applause or flash photography, especially in venues that bring them into close proximity to the competitors.

Though it is easy to more or less ignore the spectators and let them fend for themselves, it is important for them to be provided with program material and commentaries that help them not only to understand what is going on, but also to appreciate the skill and sportsmanship of all the competitors, and to applaud even if their hero or favourite team is not winning. Every time the spectators are neglected, a precious opportunity to invest in the future of the sport has been lost, no matter how well everything else has been handled.

Approved by FEI General Assembly
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