

## **Eventing Forum on Future of the Sport and Risk Management**

The FEI Eventing Risk Management Forum was held at Aintree (GBR), home of the Grand National, bringing together key members of the Eventing community to discuss the future of the sport in addition to the yearly risk management review. The Forum was led by David O'Connor (USA), Chair of the FEI Eventing Committee, together with Geoff Sinclair (AUS), Chair of the Eventing Risk Management Steering Group.

The main points of discussion included the future of Eventing, the internal structure of the sport, Risk Management, data and the use of statistics, the safety programme, Rule changes, Dressage tests, the importance of Athlete education, Cross Country specific items such as course design, the role of Officials on Cross Country day, Cross Country Performance Indicator.

A total of 145 participants from 29 countries (AUS, AUT, CAN, DEN, ESP, EST, FIN, FRA, GBR, GER, GUA, HKG, HUN, IND, IRL, ITA, JPN, NED, NOR, NZL, POL, POR, ROU, RSA, RUS, SUI, SWE, THA and USA) attended, including Level 3 Eventing Officials, National Safety Officers, NF Representatives, Athletes and Organisers, as well as invited speakers and guests (*see participants list – Annex 1*)

The vast majority of participants were delighted to be offered the chance on Saturday morning to walk the Aintree Grand National course with Andrew Tulloch, former clerk of the course at Aintree and a pivotal figure in promoting the safety and welfare of horses at Aintree and across the British horseracing industry.

All sessions of the Forum were live-streamed and are available to watch on [replay](#) on the [FEI website](#).



David O'Connor

A series of breakout sessions was also organised, with eight topics being discussed in smaller groups and the key findings were reported back to all delegates. Subjects discussed were medical coverage of Events; improvement and changes for Dressage tests; fitting and new designs for frangible devices; Cross Country course design, including new technology; statistics for the future (FEI and EquiRatings); the roles and responsibilities of Officials and performance management; Athletes' education and performance management in 2020; and what should Eventing look like in 10 years.

### **THE FUTURE OF EVENTING**

#### **What should eventing look like in 10 years?**

Participants and panellists joined in wide-ranging discussions on the future of Eventing beyond this year's Olympic Games in Tokyo, with the topics of safety and horse welfare as key factors throughout.

First of a stellar panel of external speakers, former Associated Press journalist Steve Wilson, who has covered 15 Olympic Games, explained that writing about equestrian sport can be intimidating for mainstream sports journalists. He has never covered equestrian and feels that the stereotype, of Eventing in particular, is still that of a "niche" sport that is expensive, for the privileged and has complicated rules. However, he admires the skill and courage involved and Eventing's longevity in the Olympic movement, and pointed out that if there were not some risk and excitement, as with downhill skiing and motorcycle racing, the audience would be reduced to the existing fan base.



Steve Wilson

He suggested that it will be key for Eventing to find ways of appealing more to the youth sector because that is what the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is focusing on with the introduction of sports like climbing, break-dancing and skateboarding.

FEI Eventing Committee Chair David O'Connor responded that the IOC's push for youth is particularly relevant, as Eventing Athletes tend to be older, due to the skillsets required for success, which take a long time to achieve. He highlighted problems of cost, that not all nations have a natural fan base and that the number of participants at CCI5\*-L, the sport's biggest entertainment commodity and sponsorship vehicle, is shrinking. The major factors on which Olympic sports are judged are cost, number of flags and media coverage. When the Cross Country is offsite, as it will be in Tokyo, the costs are of course increased.

FEI Communications Director Grania Willis explained that all sports are monitored by the IOC on a series wide-ranging parameters, including popularity and coverage across all media channels to calculate the distribution of revenue generated by the sale of broadcast rights. Equestrian sport was downgraded after London 2012, despite the huge media interest and sell-out crowds. Universality – the number of flags – is also a key requirement, but Equestrian is naturally limited, due to a limited quota of only 200 Athletes across the three Olympic disciplines. It is crucial to maximise media coverage across broadcast, digital and social channels and traditional print media and everyone can help on that.

The next guest speaker was Barry Johnson, independent Chair of the Equine Welfare Board for the British Horseracing industry. He reported that horse welfare has also become a hugely sensitive issue in racing. In the recent British election, two major political parties included regulation of the racing industry in their party manifestos. Although 70% of equine injuries occur in the field or stable, as far as the public is concerned they are all deemed to happen on the racecourse.



Barry Johnson

The British Horse Racing Authority (BHA), the body responsible for the governance, administration and regulation of horseracing and the wider horseracing industry in Britain, leads on the development and growth of racing, and prioritises the health and welfare of the horses and jockeys involved in the sport. The BHA has spent £35 million on research and worked to minimise equine injuries and fatalities, including the use of padded hurdles, but horses' post-racing aftercare needs better tracking.

He said that the racing industry needed to speak as one, to communicate proactively rather than being reactively, to get accurate data and to collaborate with other elements of the equestrian world. People should stop saying "The horse loves it" and instead prove that what is being done is good for the horse.



Martin Fewell

BHA Communications Director Martin Fewell agreed that communicating anything to do with risk is difficult. The BHA is looking to engage fans and address reputational challenges, while keeping horses and racing central to British culture and tradition, celebrating horses as both champions and companions. This is against a background of changing public opinion. Since 2011, it has been thought less acceptable to use animals for sport, which is which is why it is important to challenge myths. "We need to communicate what we positively believe are the benefits to horses, to humans, to society, to economies and to rural communities", he said. Maintaining the trust of the community is crucial (see *Annex II*).

The breakout group tasked with discussing Eventing's future agreed that the sport needs to stay in the Olympics, and that a legacy should be left in the host city. Jonathan Holling (USA) said that Eventing will have to continue to evolve to stay in the Olympics and needs

simplification for spectators. The principle of “destination events” such as championships and 5-stars should be preserved. The FEI needs to be pro-active in explaining what the sport does to benefit horses, which aligns with the racing industry.

### **ATHLETE QUALIFICATION**

There was discussion about the current Athlete qualification system including categorisation. Statistics show clearly that the more qualifications an Athlete has, the more competent they are; to reflect this, the 2020 rule change allows a Category A Athlete (Categorisation: 15 MER results at the level they are competing) to compete in a CCI5\*-L with a new horse qualified for that level instead of being required to drop back to 4-star.

German Athlete Julia Krajewski suggested that some inexperienced young riders were rising too quickly through the levels and that uncategorised Athletes especially need a longer time at the lower levels. French coach Laurent Bousquet agreed and commented that the French national system of categorising and licensing Athletes is tougher than the FEI's.

Irish Judge David Lee reported that the EquiRatings system is used in Ireland to set additional national qualification criteria before allowing the Athlete to compete at a higher level. The FEI qualifications are used as a minimum, he said. Australian Technical Delegate and Course Designer Vince Roche said that in Australia there is strong support for making it increasingly difficult to upgrade and that negative downgrading is considered the strongest safety qualification.

Italian Athlete Vittoria Panizzon pointed out that some countries don't have enough qualifying opportunities, especially at long format, which can make the process too expensive and difficult. British Course Designer Mark Phillips said that if a young Athlete is good enough, they should be helped to go through the levels more quickly. William Fox-Pitt (GBR), Athlete Representative on the FEI Eventing Committee, agreed, but added that there is now a feeling that Athletes should not do Badminton or Burghley as their first 5-star.

It was concluded that the qualification system needed to be reviewed to strengthen the competence at the lower level, and that it should be linked to stronger coaching. It needed to be defined whether the responsibility for this lies with the FEI; the NF or the Athlete.

### **EVENT CATEGORISATION**

The possibility of a new 5-star short (CCI5\*-S) category was discussed. Australia's Paul Tapner reported that the Event Rider Masters (ERM) CCI4\*-S series would like to fit in with the current vision of the sport, but would like ERM competitions characterised as CCI5\*-S. This would feature more difficult Dressage and Jumping and retain a CCI4\*-S Cross Country. He commented that Burghley had not presented “pretty pictures” and that perhaps the CCI5\*-S could act as a filter.



British Course Designer and TD Mike Etherington-Smith presented the argument that CCI5\*-L is a unique level and that another format would dilute these events and confuse the message. From a marketing perspective, he said, it's cleaner to have a single 5\* competition and from a welfare angle it might not be in the best interests of the horse. Numbers of CCI5\*-L horses were down to 272 in 2019 from above 300.

Athletes differed in their views on the proposal, but Julia Krajewski commented it was sometimes difficult to find a CCI4\*-S that was challenging enough preparation for the top level, to which USA Course Designer Derek di Grazia responded that there was a worldwide problem of standardisation and until that was fixed, it was difficult to ensure the preparation of Athletes and Horses to move up.

It was concluded that the priority was to ensure the standardisation of the level as well as the correct preparation of Athletes and Horses.

### **RISK MANAGEMENT DATA AND USE OF STATISTICS**

David O' Connor said everyone should be congratulated on the continual growth of the sport, particularly in South East Asia and Oceania, and for the fact that, for the second year, every competition in the world (around 760) has been processed for [statistics](#).

Falls, including horse falls and rotational falls, are continuing to reduce, but there is still a marked difference in the ratio of falls at 5\* level, partly because there are fewer horses, but a more even progression should be the aim. The number of horse falls, both non-rotational and rotational, are at the lowest percentage ever, and the numbers clearly show that injuries are more likely with less experienced athletes and horses. There are a greater number of falls at international level compared to national perhaps due to psychological pressure. This is being tracked to establish if there is a trend and what can be done to reverse it (*see Annex IV*).



Geoff Sinclair

If a fence is jumping consistently badly on Cross Country, the Ground Jury, TD and CD should quickly discuss amending or removing it. Criteria for this include "near misses", two horse falls, more than three Athlete falls or deteriorating ground. It was acknowledged that it is hard under the pressure of a competition to make that decision.

It was agreed that better methods need to be used in tracking horse Falls, British TD and NSO Jonathan Clissold, commented that some fall statistics are badly described, with confused reporting of rotational and torsional falls when a horse twists and falls on its shoulder, which distorted the statistics.

The concept of take-off distance (TOD) related to speed was presented by US-based South African Aeronautical engineer Dave Vos. Footage of side view cameras at several competitions had been analysed which clearly demonstrated how close (safety distance) the horse could get to the fence without hitting it. The average Eventing horse takes approx. 0.18 seconds to initiate its jumping action and, to prevent contact with the fence, should take off at a distance of 1.8m, 1.35m and 0.9m from the fence for speeds of 600, 450 and 300mpm respectively. Ground lines and fence dressing help the horse judge the correct take-off point.

Professor Tim Parkin of the University of Glasgow, who has been working with the FEI on equine injury surveillance since 2013, said there were big gaps in the reporting of horse injuries in Eventing. The majority of injuries are wounds or lacerations, followed by contusions or haematoma. In National Hunt racing, the rate of tendon injuries is about 10 times that of Eventing, but the reporting system is much tighter.

Swedish team vet Staffan Lidbeck reported that there will be changes made to the system for reporting injuries in Sweden because it has similarly been concluded that it is not currently showing a true picture. The injuries reported are usually only connected with horse falls, and not with a horse pulling up lame, for example.

The reporting of horse injuries is difficult when they are dealt with subsequent to the competition. Injuries need categorising between slight, serious and career-ending. It was asked if there could be an anonymous system for reporting, as often there are commercial reasons for not declaring injuries.

It was concluded that it is vital that data on Horse Injuries is consistently collected to allow for a better understanding of the fall statistics in order to continue to improve Risk Management (*see Annex XII*).

The breakout group discussing statistics concluded that the NFs using EquiRatings find them good value, not only to prevent horse falls, but also for media, PR and coaching. The group agreed that there need to be improvements on statistics on Course Designers and also Dressage judging.

## **SAFETY PROGRAMME UPDATE**



Laurent Bousquet



Pierre Michelet

French duo Laurent Bousquet and FEI Course Designer Pierre Michelet reported on steps taken following two serious high-profile accidents in France last year, including a fatality. A first Safety meeting was organised in October with 70 people for discussions on safety divided in 4 working groups, rider, horse, sports format and obstacles.

A second meeting was organised in December where 40 participants attended, including athletes, officials, organisers, vets and coaches, a sky diving specialist, head-trauma specialist, owners and sponsors concluded that more care should be taken with the positioning of fences near warm-up areas and the quality of warm-up fences. There will be new national rules that competitors will only be allowed to tackle the direct route once and anyone scoring lower than 45% in Dressage will be eliminated. A risk management group has been set up with 9 members led by Laurent Bousquet (*see Annex VI*).

Geoff Sinclair (AUS), Chair of the FEI Risk Management Steering Group, reported on the outcome of the inquests into the deaths of two Australian young Athletes, Olivia Inglis and Caitlyn Fischer in 2016 which he said was a tough time for everyone and a very public exercise for the sport. The coroner made 31 recommendations to the Australian NF, many of which have been or are in the process of being implemented (*see Annex VII*). However, some recommendations are difficult or impractical, he said, including having a safety officer for every event, all courses being peer reviewed and “near-misses” collated and reported.

Meredith Chapman, who has been recruited as National Safety Manager for Equestrian Australia in line with the coroner’s recommendations, attended the Forum as a delegate.

Dr Peter Whitehead (GBR), former Chair of the FEI Medical Committee, updated delegates on FEI protective headgear regulations, and he was followed by Claire Williams of the British Equestrian Trade Association, who explained the process behind setting new international standards in head and body protection and ongoing work to prevent injury in rotational falls. Lelia Polini from KEP Italia explained the processes behind creating protective headgear (*see Annex VIII*) and Canadian National Safety Officer Rob Stevenson (CAN NSO) presented the issues of implementing standards for body vests in Canada (*see Annex IX*).

Peter Whitehead led a discussion group that suggested that each event should have a Chief Medical Officer, not necessarily a physician, but someone local who understands the sport and who can help provide medical cover in line with FEI rules and national legislation. Every competition must have a serious incident plan. There must be minimum skillsets on site in order to protect Athletes: medical staff must be able to perform such tasks as clearing airways, applying pelvic stabilisers and so on. The FEI will consider doing online training for CMOs and to help smaller federations with this.

## **CROSS COUNTRY COURSE DESIGN**

Dave Vos, FEI Frangible Device Working Group, presented the fascinating results of his research on the analysis of footage obtained through the video recording project, much of it using data from Burghley. This measured speed and trajectory when a fall occurred and/or a frangible device was triggered and showed examples of where ground dressing might have prevented the horse from getting too close to the fence. “We need to help the horse build depth perception”, he said. The statistics showed the figure of energy (measured in joules) at which a frangible device will be triggered and at which a rotational

fall could occur without frangible device. A new test using a kettlebell to better simulate the impact of a horse on a fence has been developed and the frangible device standard is being reviewed in line with this research (see Annex X).

British Course Designers Mike Etherington-Smith and Mark Phillips talked about the practical implications of the research regarding the use of ground lines as a measure to help a horse read a fence, although they warned that care needed to be taken not to have a system that results in the loss of Athlete skills (see Annex XI).



New FEI Eventing Cross Country Guide for Officials include the appropriate use of ground lines; not justifying a fence with a frangible device; giving horses time (2-3 strides) to understand the question; and using the MIM clip for a post-and-rail corner. Gate fences should not be angled and warm-up fences should be fully anchored, dressed and checked by the TD in advance. A new rule for 2020 is that spread fences should not have upright or vertical leading edges; there should be no sharp or square edges. It was reiterated that these guidelines must be followed with immediate effect.

Mike Etherington-Smith reported that CDs are working on the front rails of open corners being acceptable for the MIM system and, after some more work, this will go forward to the FEI Committee for approval. Lars Christensson (SWE), Course Designer and member of the FEI Eventing Committee, reported that in Sweden it is a rule that any fence without a frangible device has to have a ground-line in ratio to the height of the fence.

A discussion group headed by Dave Vos and Jonathan Clissold (GBR) on frangible devices took the unanimous view that the new standard needs to be approved and released as soon as possible, driven by the fact that it is an Olympic year and that organisers are keen to use the new standards. There was strong opinion that all FEI competitions should have the requirement to use frangible devices where appropriate. There was consensus that 11 penalties for triggering a device is the correct outcome. There needs to be more feedback from course builders to manufacturers. Course builders and TDs need training in what the device should look like when installed - practical videos would be useful to ensure correct fitting.

## **ROLE OF OFFICIALS ON CROSS COUNTRY DAY**

The FEI Eventing Committee is proposing to review the responsibilities of Officials in Eventing in line with the evolution of the sport. Proposals included giving the CD a stronger role on Cross Country day by utilising their experience in assisting the Ground Jury in stopping Athletes for Dangerous Riding and in adjusting fences where necessary. There has been debate about whether the current education system for Ground Jury members gives them sufficient confidence to review and ask for cross country course modifications. As a result, the Committee is suggesting the Ground Jury President should take more responsibility on Cross Country day with the CD, allowing the other two members to concentrate on the judging aspects of the Cross Country; this will necessitate separate education pathways for Ground Jury Presidents and members.

It was pointed out that this system could cause some difficulty if the President needed to be replaced at the last-minute, and that the more training everyone had, the better, but it was also agreed that the CD's expertise should be utilised more and that they needed to be involved in every decision related to the Cross Country.

A discussion group on Officials centred on the requirements of the role so that they can optimise their performance. More education and stricter examinations are improving this. The importance of respectful, honest discussion was emphasised and it was suggested that more positive messages should be published on social media and that



Mathias Otto-Erley

there should be better explanations to spectators as to what is the role of the Officials.

The Team supported by the Ground Jury President, Members, TD, Course designer was the most important for the success of the competition.

The cross country course walk discussion between the Ground Jury and the Course designer as well as the post-event briefing and open communication between organisers and Ground Jury were essential.

### **NUMBER OF EFFORTS**

Course Designers are to propose to the FEI that efforts such as steps and ditches should not count in the overall total of efforts allowed on a Cross Country course. It was suggested that changes in format over the years have created a different sort of effort for the horse.

It was felt that a few more jumping efforts might help keep the course in balance if the terrain was flat. This would restore the essence of Cross Country : to re-introduce questions like sunken roads and coffins which have almost disappeared from the sport as they count as additional efforts, but are important for educating horses. More allowance for jumping efforts would give Course Designers the ability to have more variety and to make courses on flat ground more influential. Veterinary advice is that two extra efforts on a long route are less tiring than circling, as they do not raise the heart rate as much. British Course Designer Eric Winter added that the intensity of the site and the number of changes of direction are not always taken into account.

A discussion group on Cross Country design felt that lower-level competitions should include core elements, such as banks, water and corners. Educating horses for the next level has to be the key objective, which is why there should not be obstacles to catch horses out. Sub-standard courses must not be allowed; they must be up to height and technical difficulty. There was concern about the pressure on organisers from Athletes wanting an easy qualification and it was agreed that these pressures should not impact on course design.

### **RULE CHANGES**

To line up with other FEI disciplines, the "all-discipline" Yellow Card system has been differentiated with the introduction of an Eventing specific "Eventing recorded warnings". A two-month suspension will automatically be imposed on an athlete who receives three Eventing Recorded Warnings within 24 months.

The flag penalty rule was widely discussed. The concept of giving 15 penalties when a horse's point of shoulder has failed to pass between the extremities of the obstacle as flagged will stand, but it was felt that the issue of deciding when a flag penalty was 20 penalties, and therefore elimination if the fence was not re-taken was still a difficult call for the fence judges. Marilyn Payne (USA) said that if a Ground Jury member is still not sure after watching a video twice, the benefit should go to the Athlete. New technology is being looked at, but is not yet available due to technology issues and the different parameters needed for camera angles.

### **CROSS COUNTRY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR**

EquiRatings' Diarmuid Byrne and Sam Watson, who is also an Irish team member, explained their cross country performance indicator system, which provides an overall performance picture for a horse over several events beyond their MER and could be used to determine whether a horse's recent form rating is good enough to enter in an International Eventing competition. Using a sample of recent results can give a better view than a single result or MER; for instance, a horse might have the required MER, but it may only have had one clear Cross Country round in six or eight outings.

The idea is to make Athletes more responsible and to use a performance index to promote positive Cross Country riding. The tool is already available as a watch list to the Ground Jury President and TDs at higher level International competitions and is used by the Irish

NF to prevent upgrading before a combination is ready. The question is how to take it further to promote greater Athlete responsibility and better Cross Country performances, impact directly and indirectly the horse fall rates at International competitions and increase general awareness of risk management (*see Annex XIII*).



### **IMPROVEMENTS AND CHANGES FOR DRESSAGE TESTS**

A discussion group headed by British judges Nick Burton and Sandy Phillips agreed that tests need to reflect training for Cross Country and Jumping, with more interesting lines and more movements that improve and test suppleness, rather than be more technically difficult. The group suggested that there could be 'joker' at the end of the test: a higher-risk movement, such as tempi-changes, that the Athlete could choose to try for bonus points.

It was agreed that live scoring is very important for spectators, as is having the leader's score on the board as a comparison. Spectator judging could make it more inclusive, as used in ERM. Headphone commentary must not be negative, either about Athletes or Judges. TV interviewers should be briefed not to criticise judging or marks because it gives a bad impression. Judging differences of more than three marks on movements such as the flying change should be adjusted when relevant; uneven marking gives a bad impression and if a mistake has been made, it should be acknowledged and rectified.

### **ATHLETE EDUCATION**

A discussion group headed by Laurent Bousquet and William Fox-Pitt said coaches and Athletes need to have a long-term plan and goals. It is hoped to make a video for coaches, especially for those from smaller nations. It was suggested that a mentoring system could be looked at. The rider rep system needs to be more formal and the rider rep should have more of a presence, especially at the competitor briefing. There needs to be more variety of people used and the rider rep should be chosen before the event and should be part of the team. It was essential that their phone number is publicised. It was suggested that the rider rep walk the course with the CD and TD.



William Fox-Pitt