

Session 6 – Competition Formats for Olympic Games and FEI World Equestrian Games

I – Olympic Games

The FEI Secretary General introduced the panellists before turning the floor over to the Moderator, who outlined the main topics that would be addressed: popularisation of the sport, universality, and the drop score.

Popularisation of the Sport

Charles Balchin, Head of IMG Productions, gave a short presentation emphasising the importance of television coverage in reaching a wider audience. From a broadcaster's perspective, the sport must have a short program with predictable start and end times, be easy to understand, provide drama and entertainment and tell a story. He provided examples of several major sports that had dramatically increased their broadcast figures and reached younger audiences by changing their format and including short clips of pre- and post-competition interviews, half-time updates, etc. He concluded by highlighting that the uniqueness of equestrian sport provided the FEI with an amazing opportunity to make the sport more attractive to broadcasters.

Francesco Ricci Bitti, President of ASOIF, underlined the importance of attracting younger audiences; the product needed to be short and simple to appeal to people who had less time to watch. He encouraged the audience to seize this opportunity to make the sport more attractive in accordance with the evolution of the market, but to do so for the sake of the sport itself, not just for the Olympic Games.

Before turning the floor over to the more specific topics of the day, the FEI President briefly explained why the FEI had undertaken the path towards change and asked the audience to answer the fundamental question of whether change was needed. The consensus among the participants was that change was necessary.

The Moderator emphasised that the purpose of today's session was to discuss the proposals put forward and that no decisions would be taken at this time; he then opened the floor to the debate on the topics of universality and the drop score.

Universality: number of athletes per team and number of individuals per NOC

To set the stage for the debate, the Chair of the Jumping Committee summarised the major pillars of the IOC's Olympic Agenda 2020 and how they related to the FEI:

- Gender equality: No other sport came close to equestrian sport on this issue.
- Popularisation of the sport and appeal to youth: The FEI Olympic campaign for Rio 2016 was a good place to start; the importance of television and social media in reaching a wider and younger audience must not be overlooked. Shorter, simpler competition formats would help in this regard as they were more appealing to TV broadcasters than the current formats.

- **Universality:** This is something the FEI could control through simple math; if more flags needed to be represented but the overall quota could not be increased, the solution was to reduce the number of athletes per nation. The FEI therefore proposed teams of three and maximum one individual per nation.

A number of national federations expressed concern that having teams of three would decrease the importance of the sport and that increasing the number of flags would sacrifice excellence for the sake of universality. Several delegates countered this position, stating that for many NFs the opportunity to participate in the Olympics had a significant impact on the development of the sport and that it was a fundamental role of the FEI to encourage development. More nations participating at the Olympics meant more TV coverage, which led to more government support for NFs and more sponsors, all of which were needed to develop the sport.

Of equal concern for some NFs was the restriction to limit individuals to one per NF, as this could hinder development and the NF's ability to eventually qualify a team.

The panel responded that experience had shown that the quality of the sport had increased around the world over the years and would continue to do so leading up to 2020. None of the Committees had as yet taken a final decision on the ratio of teams to individuals or on the number of individuals per NF.

Proposals for consideration by the Technical Committees:

- Reconsider the number of athletes per team, the number of teams in relation to the number of individuals and the number of individuals per nation.
- Reconsider the structure of Olympic Group F, where Africa is grouped with the Middle East, when discussing the Olympic qualification procedures.
- Consider linking the Nations Cup series to Olympic qualification.

Drop Score

The FEI Director of Jumping explained the background to the drop score, which was introduced for the Nations Cup in 1929 to avoid teams being eliminated; it was never intended to give any team an advantage over another. Given the evolution of the sport since the early days, the original intention of the drop score was now obsolete.

A number of NFs and riders were in favour of maintaining teams of four with and held the view that removing the drop score did not support horse welfare and would not enhance the presentation of the sport, which could be done through technology. Other delegates viewed the removal of the drop score as a logical step which supported the FEI's policy on transparency and was the right move to maintain equestrian's position in the Olympic programme and to promote the sport globally.

The majority of opposition to removing the drop score related to Eventing, as the drop score was closely tied to the format and directly affected the number of teams that could complete the competition. It was suggested that rather than increasing the number of flags at the Olympics, the FEI should broaden the base and use a mentoring system between stronger and weaker NFs to provide more qualification

opportunities. Several delegates supported reverting to the CIC format, with the cross country last, rather than the CCI format, if there were to be three riders per team.

The panel pointed out that there was no other team sport that had a drop score and asked the question if it was really right, as a matter of principle, for a team that had had a bad performance to receive a medal. If the FEI as a community set a target to agree on a basic principle such as teams of three with no drop score, each Committee needed to examine how this could be delivered for their discipline.

Proposals for consideration by the Technical Committees

- Retain the drop score at least in the first round (Jumping).
- Consider groups of four rather than groups of six (Dressage).
- Allow teams of four for Eventing (with a drop score) and teams of three for Dressage and Jumping (without drop score). If Eventing is to have teams of three, use the CIC format with the cross-country last.
- Hold a full debate on the format before deciding if the same format should be used for the Olympics and for the World Equestrian Games (general).

The Chair of the Para-Equestrian Committee emphasised that the Committee had discussed the issue of universality versus excellence and had come to the conclusion that the sport needed new nations participating and that the best riders would not be affected by reducing the number of riders per team from four to three.

In response to a comment about the issue of accreditation of reserve combinations as relates to substitutions, the FEI President stated that the IOC had confirmed that the reserve combinations could be used for substitutions as the intent of having teams of three with no drop score was to increase the number of flags. However, only substitutions for medical reasons had been discussed with the IOC as yet; it remained to be clarified whether substitutions could also be made for tactical reasons.

II – World Equestrian Games

New Formats – Non Olympic Disciplines

Vaulting

The Chair of the Vaulting Committee remarked that although Vaulting had no drop score and was therefore unaffected by the proposal to remove it, the Committee agreed on the importance of concentrating efforts on how to attract more public and youth to the sport, and would like to capitalise on the growth in media coverage following the success of Vaulting at the 2014 WEG.

Proposals for consideration by the Vaulting Committee:

- Consider removing compulsories from Championships, as these tests are not the most spectator or media friendly.

Reining:

The Chair of the Reining Committee felt that the concept of no drop score could be introduced for Reining as the number of flags at Championships was not an issue. The

Committee would further review the format of holding the Individual competition before the Team competition in view of concerns of horse welfare.

Driving:

The Chair of the Driving Committee stated that it was very important to harmonise the Non-Olympic disciplines with the future approved Olympic format and that all proposed changes were intended to serve all equestrian disciplines.

Endurance

Some NF delegates supported the proposed two day format, but were not in favour of removing the drop score. Others were of the opinion that the two day format would oblige athletes to choose between competing in the team or individual competition, which could cause problems for the NFs.

Some delegates were opposed to the entire proposal and felt that as Endurance was not an Olympic discipline it should not be forced to change its format as well.

The Chair of the Endurance Committee pointed out that Endurance belonged to the equestrian family and should investigate how to modernise itself as was being done by the other disciplines. The proposal had been put forward for discussion, and would be formally sent to NFs for comments before a final decision was taken on the format.

Proposals for consideration by the Endurance Committee:

- Hold a separate Endurance Forum to discuss the new format and rule changes, as well as how to attract more sponsorship.

Wrap-up

The FEI Secretary General wrapped up the session by thanking the panel and the audience for the fruitful discussions. The Technical Committees would consider the proposals put forward today and the consultation process would continue through the online discussion platform before the first draft of the rules was submitted to NFs for consultation on 15 July.

Panellists:

Charles Balchin (GBR), Head of Programmes, IMG Productions
John Madden (USA), FEI Chair Jumping Committee
Frank Kemperman (NED), FEI Chair Dressage Committee
Giuseppe de la Chiesa (ITA), FEI Chair Eventing Committee
Brian Sheahan (AUS), FEI Chair Endurance Committee
Karoly Fugli (HUN), FEI Chair Driving Committee
John Eccles (GBR), FEI Chair Vaulting Committee
Bob Thompson (CAN), FEI Chair Reining Committee
Ulf Wilken (SWE), FEI Chair Para Equestrian Committee

Moderator:

Tim Hadaway, FEI Director of Games and Championships