

Dear colleagues in the FEI National Federations

Soon we will meet in Antwerp for the FEI General Assembly where a lot of important decisions regarding our sport must be made. One of them is the election of the new Chair of the Dressage Committee, and as you know, I am one of the candidates.

My passion for dressage has been with me for as long as I can remember, and I am very serious about applying for the Chair position, since I would love to be part of the future development, while still preserving respect for traditions. The best results we have achieved so far within the sport have been when all stakeholders sat down and found solutions through a common understanding, so that is without a doubt my wish and ambition for the future.

I am a retired professor of vascular surgery at the University of Copenhagen, but those of who have been in the game for a while probably know me as Deputy Chair of Group II since 2006 and Vice President of the EEF since its foundation in 2010. I am also a member of the FEI Solidarity Committee and several working groups within the FEI as well as chair of the Dressage WG in the EEF. In a national context, I have been elected/re-elected as President of the Danish Equestrian Federation for almost 20 years. In brief, I know how to exercise leadership among volunteers as well as employees.

Let me give you my take on a few of the most critical challenges the sport is currently facing:

Judging

One of the most important issues to keep focus on - if not the most important one - is judging. To make it 100 percent objective is probably impossible, and I am not in favor of a "code of points", because I fear that the judges would have to spend too much time with the computer instead of watching the performance in the arena. As I see it, there is only one solution: education, education, and education. If possible, the most well-renowned judges should play an even stronger role in education, talent work, evaluation, and classification (up as well as down) in a professional way. I don't see anyone else capable of doing it.

Horse welfare

This is an ongoing discussion, but I don't feel intimidated because of the focus we already have. We should take the lead and be proactive and not always be on the defensive. We must be able to confidently explain that what we do is 100 percent okay. Very often, the issue becomes very emotional, but we must support science so we can make decisions based on evidence and not emotions. In the future, I would also like to see that we have the same criteria for horse welfare across disciplines, otherwise it will become increasingly difficult for us to explain and defend. An example is the divergence regarding rules about blood during competitions.

Star level classification

For many years, the dominant criterium for classification has been prize money, and it still is. We need to speed up the implementation of other criteria to ensure quality for both horses and humans. This can only be done if all stakeholders agree to gather around the table and work on a solution together.

Popularity

Despite the fact that all of us here love dressage, we must acknowledge the fact that a lot of people find it tedious. Many improvements have been done, but we must do more. We are wearing masks, so why not also add a headset at bigger shows to include some good comments for the spectators. Adding comments on TV has proven a great success. This is just one example, and I believe we can be more creative without losing respect for tradition. The only limit is our imagination. For me, popularity is not only a question of shortening the tests, and I have come to understand that the short Grand Prix is not a success among the riders, which is unfortunate. Another ongoing issue is that of having 3 or 4 on the teams with drop score at the OG. This is for me no longer an option worth fighting for. In this case, I think we should pick our battles.

Some of you might know my son Andreas. I am aware that some believe that I have put my candidacy forward to support his work but let me assure you that this is absolutely not the case. I continue to engage myself in our sport because I

can't imagine not doing so, and I really hope that translates in this letter. I hope my points and observations resonate with you, and I hope for your support and vote at the FEI General Assembly.

Now, I will 'go fishing for votes'



See you in Antwerp.

Ulf Helgstrand
President
The Danish Equestrian Federation

Phone: 0045 28260865
E-mail: uh@rideforbund.dk