

## 2024 ONLINE EVENTING SEMINAR

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### Key facts and figures on important rule changes, consideration for future rules revision, Risk Management, frangible devices and fitness and training of horses

The annual Eventing Seminar took place on 20 January attracting no less than 280 athletes, Officials, FEI Board Members, representatives of National Federations, and 4\* and 5\* Organising Committees from some 36 nations, who gathered online for the three-and-a-half hour meeting.

Proposed modifications to the competition format for Eventing at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games was at the top of the agenda followed by an update on preparations for Paris 2024, social license to operate, and other key topics.

Details on the proposals for LA28 were outlined in this [press release](#).

This report contains an overview of the presentations and discussions held in connection with the major rule changes for 2024, consideration for future rules revision, Risk Management, frangible devices, and fitness and training of horses.

The Seminar was moderated by David O'Connor (USA), Sydney 2000 Olympic Eventing Gold Medalist, FEI Eventing Committee Chair, Board Member and Level 3 Course Designer.

### 2024 Important Rule Changes / Recommendations

#### [Link to presentation](#)

David O'Connor presented the major changes to the [FEI Eventing Rules](#), which had come into effect on 1 January 2024. Although there hadn't been a full rule revision, certain modifications and clarifications had been made.

The key changes were as follows:

**Article 503.4 – Age of Horses.** The age of horses for CCI5\*-L level competitions and four-star level championships had been raised from eight to nine years. The success rate of eight-year olds vs nine-year olds had been studied and it had been established that the change would allow the horses to be better prepared for this level of competition.

**Article 513.10 - Conflict of Interest.** A clarification had been added whereby the FEI will review requests (on a case-by-case basis) from Officials to act as a Course Designer at a lower-level Event (i.e. below 4\* level) in a situation where they might otherwise have an actual or perceived conflict of interest.

**Article 515.4.3 - Course Designer reporting to the FEI.** A new provision has been introduced requiring that the Course Designer be responsible for providing the Cross-Country related reports to FEI Headquarters within 10 days following the end of the Event. This would be helpful to speed up the data collection process related to risk management.

**Article 518.3 CCI4\*-S/L and CCI5\*-L additional requirements.** A clarification of the existing requirements has been included for horses having not completed the Cross Country test at an FEI Competition for a period of 13 consecutive months.

**549.4.1 Definition of Faults - Representing a frangible fence after a Disobedience.** A new provision specifying that reattempting an activated frangible fence element not correctly restored to its original condition will result in elimination.

**Article 552.1 Jumping Tests – Type of obstacles.** The article clarifies that the jumping cups must have a depth of minimum 20 mm and maximum 25 mm. This also applies for safety cups.

David O'Connor reminded the participants of the new Eventing Dressage tests ranging from CCI1\* to CCI5\* effective as of 1 January 2024. Currently, there were four options along a shorter version, compared to two per category as had been the case previously.

Medical Services Coverage at FEI Competitions: Further to progressive implementation the of Annex D, he reminded that the Medical requirements are now mandatory since 1 January 2023.

The presentation of the 2024 rule changes concluded with the recommendation to the Event Officials to engage an discussion with all Athletes involved in a Horse fall. Following any Horse Fall on Cross Country, a systematic educational interview/discussion will need to take place between the Athlete and the President or a Member of the Ground Jury and/or the Technical Delegate. The discussion will be recorded in the Judge and/or TD report in a special section.

## Consideration and discussion on future Rules revisions

[Link to presentation](#)

The seminar continued with a presentation by David O'Connor, Chris Bartle (GBR), coach and former Olympic Athlete, and Nick Burton (GBR), Level 4 Judge and Level 2 Steward. Potential proposals for future rule revisions were the topic of discussion.

Tired and exhausted horses, Officials' location and their proactive role during Cross Country, removal of Cross Country fences a after multiple Horse falls, and the Eventing Committee's recommendation for retroactive sanctions were the key areas raised during the presentation.

The idea that the members of the Ground Jury should not only be sitting in Control during the Cross Country test, especially at Events widely attended by the public, was discussed at length. It was proposed, where possible, that one Jury member should be at the Riders' tent whereas others should be placed at strategic points along the Cross Country course..

It would help the Jury to better evaluate whether the performance was acceptable to the audience and fair to the horse.

It was acknowledged that the perception of the sport was critical for its continuation. Images of struggling horses were not acceptable and, , the Ground Jury needed to take on a more proactive role. Pre-planning, ensuring smooth communication through rehearsal, and the use of spotters on Cross Country, such as Athletes or Officials not involved in the event, were some of the elements likely to support the Ground Jury while expanding its responsibilities. The time between spotting an exhausted horse, the decision to stop it and the action needed to be optimised.

## Risk management data

### [Link to presentation](#)

Next on the agenda was a presentation on the risk management data for the previous year made by David O'Connor and Geoff Sinclair (AUS), FEI Technical Delegate and Chair of the FEI Eventing Risk Management Steering Group (RMSG).

The presentation contained a section on the statistics highlights for 2023, followed by competition and starters numbers from 2022 to 2023, along with the key facts on falls and injuries over a 10-year period (2014-2023).

The **2023 statistics highlights** showed that the number of competitions had increased by 7.25% since 2019 with an increase of 1.73% in the number of starters. More competitions were being organised at fewer venues. The number of starters had remained stable at Two- and Three-star level, with an increase in One-Star and Four-Star competitions.

The total percentage of falls in relation to starters had remained stable at 5.44%.

It was noteworthy that the percentage of horse falls in relation to starters at Cross Country fences had decreased by 16.6% since 2019. Falls on Cross Country was the key focus for the FEI and trends were heading in the right direction. The reporting on the injuries and concussions had improved significantly over the years.

### **Competition and starters from 2022 to 2023**

In 2023 the number of competitions had increased by 3.1% compared to 2022 whereas the number of starters had decreased by 0.87%.

### **Falls 2014 – 2023**

The following key facts were highlighted:

The number of falls on the flat (non XC fence related, Dressage, Jumping, Warm-up) had decreased slightly passing from 27.73% in 2022 to 26.19% in 2023.

The average for the period was of 4.01 unseated athletes for every 100 starters (1 unseated athlete every 25 starters) and 1.33 horse falls for every 100 starters (1 horse fall every 75 starters).

The distribution of falls per competition format showed an established trend with a higher percentage of falls in Long format with an average of 4.92% for Short format and 6.39% for Long format for the 10-year period.

The 2023 figures for showed that the 4.28% of unseated athletes was just above the average of 4.02% for the period. The percentage of horse falls was at 1.16% and was well below the average of the period at 1.33%.

**The percentage of rotational horse falls, which generate a higher risk of injuries for horse and athlete, has decreased by 40%, from 0.20%, (0.20 horse fall every 100 starters (1 rotational horse fall every 506 starters) in 2014 to 0.12% (0.12 rotational horse fall every 100 starters (1 rotational horse fall every 851 starters) in 2023. Rotational falls have constantly been decreasing since 2014.**

### **Injury – statistics 2014 – 2023**

The participants were reminded that, as from 2019, the serious injury definition had been reviewed to "Serious injuries can be categorised as those that, in the opinion of the referring doctor, would require hospital admission for immediate treatment. Examples: major fractures (including all compound fractures, but excluding simple fractures of clavicle and wrist), crush injuries with suspicion of pneumothorax, ruptured spleen etc."

For 2023, 33 serious injuries had been reported. Out of the 25 rotational falls in 2023, 20% or five falls had led to a serious injury. Although, rotational falls had decreased overall, the effort to eliminate them would remain a big focus for the FEI.

A total of 16 concussions had been reported: 12 were linked to an additional injury classified as serious injury and four to a slight injury.

In 2023, 86.35% of falls had caused no injuries, 10.80% caused slight injuries and 2.85% had led to serious injuries.

The overall conclusion was that the relative risk factors for the different types of falls showed clearly that the risk of having a serious injury changed dramatically from the unseated athlete for whom, as an average of the period, the risk of having a serious injury is once every 72 falls to the rotational horse falls where the average risk of a serious injury is once every 5 falls.

## **Risk Management Studies Research Projects**

### **[Link to presentation](#)**

The presentation on the highlights and learning of the Risk Management Data statistics was followed by a discussion led by Geoff Sinclair on Risk Management Studies Research projects, and in particular [EquiRatings® Horse Form Index "HFI"](#).

HFI is a rating developed by the FEI with the support of EquiRatings®, which tracks the most recent cross-country results of a horse. It is available for all horses competing at FEI Eventing 3\*, 4\* & 5\*. HFI were not available for the lower level as the horse would not have enough results to present meaningful HFI.

The HFI has been developed for Athletes, Owners, National Federations to gauge horses' performance, track their progress and to enable more informed decisions prior to the competitions. The HFI also allows Officials to monitor horses entered at events and assess horses preparedness and performance during the Cross Country test.

HFI does not replace the MERs, which must be achieved according to the [FEI Eventing Rules 2024](#) (Article 520 – Minimum Eligibility Requirements for CIs and CIOs).

An explanation was given on the way the HFI was calculated along with the various HFI categories, ranging from A++ -(HFI Value 5 or above) and E (HFI Value below 0); the value goes up and down based on whether the horse had a clear, a single fault or multiple faults during recent XC runs. .

It was clarified that Officials appointed at an event through the FEI entry system for Three Star level competitions and above could view and download the full HFI list for that event directly in the entry system.

## **Frangible Devices**

The full presentation can be downloaded from [this page](#) (Annex VIII).

A presentation on the facts and statistics on frangible devices was made by Geoff Sinclair, Stuart Buntine (GBR), member of the FEI Eventing Risk Management Steering Group, a Level 3 Technical Delegate and Course Designer; David Vos (USA), member of the FEI Eventing Risk Management Steering Group, and Mats Björnetun (SWE), founder of [MIMsafe](#).

It was emphasised that frangible fences were having a significant positive effect on statistics and further improvement in designs must be pursued.

Work in progress on certain types of fences was discussed and it was agreed that new developments would need to be tested extensively before implementation in competition.

## **Instruction Manuals effective 1 January 2024**

The participants were informed that simple and easy to understand diagrams of frangible fences had been produced and were available as a Frangible Device Chart and 'One pagers' for use by officials, designers and builders [on this page](#). for reference Aim - to have.

The following important clarifications were made:

- As from 1 January 2024 **all** new fences must be built to new specifications.
- Existing fences can still be used **however** in many cases it would be simple and easy to refine the build so that they meet new specifications. It would be good if officials could ask for these alterations to be made, if possible, to bring fences into current specification.

It was concluded overall that the changes brought to the sport through the use of frangible fences were very positive. The importance of the confidence of the athletes in the process was highlighted and remaining with the specified building guidelines was key to achieve it.

## **Fitness and training of Horses / ensuring Athletes train for the level entered**

The full presentation can be downloaded from [this page](#) (Annex IX).

This topic of c the agenda was a lengthy presentation on the fitness and training of horses and ensuring that athletes train to the competition level for which they were entered. It

was made by Sam Watson (IRL), athlete and EquiRatings ® co-founder and Eric Winter (GBR), Level 4 Course Designer and Level 3 Technical Delegate.

### **The role and objective of fitness (from the Rider's perspective)**

The first part of the presentation dwelt on performance, soundness and the maintenance of good physical health, and management of micro and macro risks.

### **How do we achieve these objectives?**

Ways to achieve these objectives were outlined and especially methods for athletes and horses to remain within a 'comfort zone' and avoiding exhaustion. This was the key point for the sport today and for the sport's future.

### **Why has "all out" fatigue and lack of fitness become a problem?**

An interesting overview of past Cross Country formats, and especially steeplechase, which had ensured that Eventing horses had a certain amount of galloping ability and fitness training, even from their first internationals at the age of six, was provided. The steeplechase had acted as a natural filter system, which had helped select suitable athletes and had instilled the understanding and skills associated with getting horses fit and managing their energy in a competition.

Since then, cross-country had become the 'max speed' phase rather than steeplechase. Many riders had shifted their choice of horse to one with less natural galloping properties and more natural jumping and dressage qualities.

### **How do we avoid the "all out" fatigue?**

It isn't really an Athlete's priority or focus to look at the big picture of the sport. They want to win and they will focus on what it takes to win. Risk tends not to be a high priority either, they rely on the people around them (coaches), and the rules (referees), to hold them back or prevent them from pushing too hard.

According to the presentation, while education and understanding about the bigger pictures of the sport and the macro and micro risks were helpful, the most efficient way to discourage athletes from riding their horses to all-out fatigue would be to penalise it on the scoresheet. This could be achieved through course design and by defining the type of errors that must be penalised.

### **The common pitfalls**

Some common pitfalls, which took into consideration speed, distance, intensity, height, and variables such as terrain and ground conditions, were discussed.

Some of the observations may appear basic, but in reality it meant that some horses could be suitable (and even excellent) at one level, but not have the required attributes for the fitness test at the next level. It could be scope (top spread), it could be mental strength (they shut down mentally after a certain point) or it could just be the cumulative effect of marginal increases in the physical tests that push them too far outside the comfort zone.

### **Change in mindset and Course Design for the future**

A discussion on the change of mindset and the course design for the future concluded the day.

It was emphasised that most athletes had experienced where the line was in terms of sacrificing too much natural gallop and stamina in exchange for more jump and movement.

Most top-level athletes were now searching for horses with more natural gallop able to compete successfully at the biggest and best events, perform well and be reliable at top level and remain at the top level of the sport for several successive seasons.

## **Course Design for the future**

### **Frangible devices**

The final presentation on the agenda, Course Design for the future, was given by Eric Winter, discussing the use of frangible devices and flags.

Deformable fences have a big role to play in the Course Design role and fitness of horses, fences must be jumped in an acceptable way that creates a good picture.

Videos of horses activating frangible fences were shown, activating a fence was felt as an acceptable picture for the sport, using deformable fences at the end of courses helped when horses were a bit tired especially at higher level competitions.

### **Flags**

Videos of flag penalties were also shown to discuss a possible way forward of penalising all flags that fell down. Combinations were expected to have accuracy and jump the intended line with forward movement and travel to fences. The penalties didn't need to be great; 2 to 3 penalties would be sufficient to make a difference; elite sports were won on small margins.

Horses don't stop like they used to, they locked on a line and were educated not to stop, horse falls were no longer acceptable therefore, to keep the sport interesting, all combinations should not jump clear. Small flag penalties could be a good way for the sport in the future.

Horses should be galloping in the open with variety of fences, using the terrain on the downslope on the upslope using the nature of the site. It was important that Course Designers could use the site within acceptable parameters allowing the sport to move forward in the next ten years in a healthy way, taking care of riders and horses and the sport as a whole.

This concept should be tested and studied in different environments to understand if this could be a positive move for Eventing. It was essential to take the time to evaluate it at all levels and not rush any changes. It was a philosophical thought process which would take place over the next two years before the next rule revision. A similar rule was implemented in Sweden and their learnings would be examined.

The sport pictures were important but improving them should not be done at the cost of the excitement of the sport.

**The participants acknowledged that the seminar had been very interesting and successful and appreciated the level and quality of the information provided.**