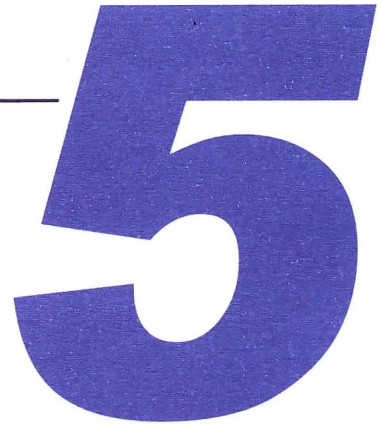




Olympische Moderne Vijfkamp | Militaire Vijfkamp | Nationale Sportmedaille



UIPM
Dr. Klaus Schormann, President
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Topic: the riding event in Modern Pentathlon

27 August 2008

Dear UIPM,

We are writing you to express our deep concern regarding the riding event in Modern Pentathlon, and its implications for the standing of our sport.

At the 2008 Olympics, the riding skills of - presumably the world's best - pentathletes have been on full display to the world through streaming video on the internet for the first time. For many of those who watched, it has been a shocking revelation. Next to the pictures, the stats tell the story: an average of 334 penalty points for men, and 120 for women.

Modern Pentathlon has been designed for the Olympic Games. Modern Pentathlon exists by the grace of the Olympic Games. Modern Pentathlon comes to the - albeit limited - limelight only at the Olympic Games. The expectations of billions of people watching the Olympic Games globally are that here, the world's highest sportive skills are on display. Moreover, Modern Pentathlon is in direct comparison with the five Olympic sports that make up its five events, importantly also Individual and Team Jumping as part of Equestrian - on 21 August, even on the same day.

Explanations offered that the 'modest' performance by most pentathletes in the riding event were due to the quality of the horses, the soil, the weather, the public, the lottery system - anything but the riders' skills at 1.20m - are not relevant. For both the trained and the untrained eye, such explanations only reaffirm a most unfortunate perception of incompetence.

As pentathletes, we know in advance that we will ride not the best showjumping horses. We know in advance that they are not our own horses, that they are drawn by a lottery system, and that we have only very limited time to get acquainted - not a small feat even for specialist showjumpers. We know in advance the height of the obstacles. We know in advance that riding is only one of five events in a taxing one-day program. We know in advance that it is hard, that there can and will be surprises.

But these points can never be an explanation for poor performance. It is precisely the other way around: they are important reasons to be extremely well prepared. They are important reasons for the UIPM to introduce strict regulation on the riding skills of athletes before they enter a 1.20m riding ring on a drawn horse in front of the eye of the world.

If the IOC has not already found enough ammunition to take our sport from the Olympic list, here is the final argument. And with streaming video on the internet, it is no longer only the IOC, but it is the court of public opinion that votes on our sport.

We feel it is vital for the future of Modern Pentathlon that the UIPM take appropriate measures in the form of additional regulation regarding the riding event.

What can be done? Please allow us to offer our own recent experience - only by way of example. The new Netherlands Pentathlon Federation has strong roots in the Equestrian sports. Last year, we created a Joint Committee together with the Royal Dutch Equestrian Federation KNHS (given the Dutch performance in Equestrian not the least), with the objective to recommend additional national regulation to the riding event in Modern Pentathlon in order to A) minimize the chance of embarrassments or grave injuries to horses and/or athletes, and B) improve the acceptance of our sport by and cooperation with the Equestrian sports to strengthen the classically weakest link in Modern Pentathlon: the riding event.





On the basis of their recommendations, we introduced straightforward but effective additional mandatory regulation in 2007, complementary to current UIPM rules, including a rigorous obstacle height promotion & degradation system for athletes. This system ensures that athletes can participate at 1.20m and earn the maximum of 1.200 points only after they have extensively proven in an externally judged, independent riding proficiency test, plus many competitions at slowly increasing obstacle height, that they have the riding skills required to enter a 1.20m arena on an unknown, drawn horse. Our obstacle height promotion & degradation system matches precisely with the obstacle height promotion system in the Equestrian world, and gives our athletes an important, positive incentive to improve their skills to earn additional pentathlon points.

Under our additional mandatory regulation, athletes are allowed to start with a maximum of 900 points at 0.90m – but only after they have passed an externally judged, independent riding proficiency test. Subsequently, only after they have proven their skills at 0.90m with a maximum of 100 penalty points, they are allowed to start with a maximum of 1.000 points at 1.00m. Once they have again proven their skills at 1.00m, they are allowed to start with a maximum of 1.100 points at 1.00m. If an athlete incurs too many penalty points, he or she falls back to the previous category. Only the best athletes, who have extensively proven their skills at all lower levels, are allowed to start with a maximum of 1.200 points at 1.20m.

Showjumpers who have already passed the almost identical obstacle height promotion & degradation system at KNHS receive a waiver and can enter horizontally in the matching category in Modern Pentathlon. We have also made body protectors, safety stirrups and other safety features mandatory to ensure that we have done everything in our power to make the riding event as safe as possible for horses and athletes. We have duly informed the UIPM of our draft and final additional regulations and understood that they would be evaluated by the UIPM Technical Committee.

Although we expected and initially received critique from our athletes ('you cannot compare riding in Modern Pentathlon with showjumping', 'you are trying to change us into showjumpers, but we are pentathletes', 'these rules favor the experienced riders over less experienced riders', 'in Modern Pentathlon, what counts is not the attractiveness of our riding skills but bravery and the fact that we come round', 'these regulations will make Modern Pentathlon even more difficult to participate in', 'I have proven more than enough in ten years of pentathlon', etcetera), we have in actual fact found that the number of athletes participating in the riding event has quadrupled, that athletes no longer prioritize the other four events when training in the hope of drawing a good horse if they made it to riding, that the quality of the riding skills has increased significantly, and that horse owners have become more willing to make good horses available for Modern Pentathlon. And most importantly, our Equestrian Federation no longer shuns Modern Pentathlon, but has instead recently proposed to promote (the riding event in) Modern Pentathlon to its members. Given the size, professionalism and commercial strength of the Equestrian sports, that would be a significant step for Modern Pentathlon.

As one of your member federations, we urgently request that the UIPM look into similar or better alternatives to improve the safety for horses and athletes, and to secure the standing and perceptions of our sport, particularly now that the wired world is putting Modern Pentathlon on full display to a global audience.

In the interest of our sport, and if appreciated, we also kindly offer to share our experience with this topic with the UIPM. There are also various other options, such as using positive instead of negative pentathlon points, thus taking away the false illusion that every athlete starts appropriately with the 1.200 pentathlon points becoming only the best of the best.

Please see our request not as critique, but as an urgent call for action with the best interests of Modern Pentathlon at heart.

Sincerely,

Bram Zuidema
President

Dr. Paul Bavelaar
Riding Director

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NOC*NSF
Ms Erica Terpstra, President

