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Between Rounds With **JEREMY STEINBERG**

MY WISH LIST FOR 2019

Our columnist believes the FEI learned a good lesson from the 2018 WEG—and he has six more dreams for the new year.

I made a prediction in one of my columns a few years ago that the FEI World Equestrian Games would reach a critical breaking point. The Fédération Equestre Internationale had loaded far too much sport into a championship that no one venue's infrastructure could support, thus removing the intimacy and romance of the competition. Lo and behold, that is exactly what ended up happening with the 2018 FEI WEG in Tryon, North Carolina. The show broke (hurricane issues aside).

To the credit of the organizers who took on the task of the 2018 WEG when Bromont/Montreal realized it was going to be too much for them, they did far more to prepare in the short time than I thought possible.

Everyone I talked to about the WEG had a very different experience. Good or bad, fun or stressful, each had an opinion on how the show ran. Not many gave credit to the fact that the organizers even pulled the feat off given their late start in preparing such an event. If blame is going to be doled out it needs to be aimed at the FEI for creating the doomed machine that is the WEG.

Since there were no bids for the 2022 WEG, the FEI is now looking to create smaller, multi-disciplined competitions, spreading out the burden between a few different venues. The romance and joy of attending a WEG has been lost by trying to cover so much ground

that for rider and spectator alike the event has turned into a circus.

I'm looking forward to the future championships, and, for once the FEI is on the right track. By divvying up the disciplines, the events can be better enjoyed by all, organizing committees included.

The FEI's new direction for the WEG got me thinking about a new spin on the usual year-end review. I'm looking more to the future as a wish list of what I'd love to see in the year ahead. My utopian future would include but isn't limited to ...

WISH 1

I'd like to see more horses competed by riders who have actually done the training.

I am the first person to praise the effort and long-term commitment of someone who trains their own horse to the standard of the Grand Prix. Laura Graves and Verdades are a perfect example of dedication and devotion to the task and training, care and commitment needed to facilitate the mission. I don't love their piaffe and often question the judging of it. I could argue the same on many of Isabell Werth's horses, but in no way does that take away any of the credit due to riders who've accomplished the Grand Prix.

I'd love to see more riders dedicated to the process than the results."

Laura is a real hero in U.S. dressage. When you look back at the results of the major championships over the last decade you can see that horses ridden by the riders who trained them are, on average, more often achieving top placings and winning medals far more often than the trained horses that riders acquire in order to be on a team.

I'd love to see more riders dedicated to the process than the results. Each and every year before a major championship you see riders and sponsors purchasing horses in order to compete on the team. Although I know this will never change, I'd love to see the emphasis on making a team swing more in the direction of making a Grand Prix horse.

Why doesn't the U.S. Dressage Federation create an award for training instead of the many, many awards they are always creating for competing? It would be fairly simple: You make note of a horse's age at purchase and/or registration with USDF/U.S. Equestrian Federation and a rider/owner, so that if the horse makes it to Grand Prix there could be a "medal" given with a minimum score requirement and proof that the horse has been owned and ridden by the same rider up to that point. That would be a medal I would really encourage riders to work toward, as opposed to the other medals, which only reflect that they have competed at certain levels, horse training aside.

WISH 2

Not to beat the dead horse, but I cannot express strongly enough how much I would love to see a more structured rule book and judging guidelines. We need to create a platform for deductions and faults that could be more easily understood by the layman(woman) so that the sport stays modern.

In all other judged and biased sports, the judging system constantly evolves to keep up with the times, and it's about time dressage does the same. I don't know what it's going to take for the FEI, the national federations and the judges to finally make some change happen. Do we need a disaster, like getting booted from the Olympics, in order for everyone to get on the same page? Does the wake-up call need to be that big, or can we just come to our senses and agree that something needs to happen sooner than later?

There was little fight when the FEI made the ridiculous decision to remove the collective marks and further bind the judges' hands, which is not something that should be happening as we try to modernize a somewhat archaic system.

I read an article with a quote from Christoph Hess about how to make the tests better show correct training and schooling, saying his ideal Grand Prix test would include *uberstreichen* in the extended trot and canter, as well as a stretching circle. Interesting. He went on to criticize the "shortened" Grand Prix test, which is something I've said time and time again is not a good solution. Removing things like the reinback and emphasizing the speed at which you can fit all the movements into a test does not promote good training and basics and leans toward advancing the genetics over the training.

One more point I've made before as well: They've tried the shortened Grand Prix in many forms over the last few decades, and it's always tossed out in the end when it doesn't quite do the trick. Why aren't we learning from the past? Albert Einstein is credited with saying, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results." I continually



João Paulo Dos Santos shows off one-handed tempi changes aboard Veleiro Do Top at the 2015 Pan American Games in Ontario. "As long as we're talking utopian realities," says columnist Jeremy Steinberg, "I'd love to see bonus points given on a per movement basis if you can perform them with the reins in one hand."

LINDSAY BERRETH PHOTO

find myself scratching my head at the FEI.

As long as we're talking utopian realities, I'd love to see bonus points given on a per movement basis if you can perform them with the reins in one hand. You'd still get your normal score for the movement, so if it is performed poorly, you get a poor score regardless, but in either event if you can perform any of the movements that way, you get an extra point per movement, an extra credit added to your score at the end. I know this will never come to fruition, but it would be an interesting exercise for us to practice on a daily basis.

WISH 3

I know the arguments for both sides of the much-maligned minimum score requirements to move up through the levels, but the arguments against just don't work for me anymore. We had quite the uproar earlier this year with a particular ride at a show on the West Coast that turned the internet, forums, magazines and inboxes ablaze with comments and criticism, all of which could have been avoided if we had such a system.

I was in favor of the requirements when they first passed and was ashamed of the USDF for backing down

It's still far too common to see poorly sitting riders on exceptional creatures."

based on the uproar of the masses. I give full credit to the grassroots campaign that accomplished the overturning, but they were shortsighted in their accounting and cut off their nose to spite their face.

I understand the other side—if you buy a horse of a given level, want to ride a certain level, only have a few shows a year you can afford and so on and so on, that it is your right to be able to show at whatever level you want. But that doesn't hold us to a high enough standard of horsemanship. It's not about what it is your inalienable right to do; it's about good horsemanship and putting our equine partners first.

I was raised around survivors of World War II who treated the horses as far more than tickets to medals or fame. The history of the warmblood horse through the second World War is incredible, and the love and respect those riders taught for the horse was something from another time.

Those of us exposed to horsemen of that background and generation were always taught the horse is first, and the mistakes are ours, so when I see a system that not only allows for but also encourages rider aspirations

over the well-being of the horse, I have to say no. I cannot sign on. We need a system with grades and levels you need to pass in order to compete at the new level.

WISH 4

I would love to see more instructors work on developing riders with independent seats and emphasize the importance of good equitation.

A good position is the foundation of good horsemanship and is where true equitation begins. It's still far too common to see poorly sitting riders on exceptional creatures. USDF made a good start last year by introducing adult equitation classes, but we need more trainers committing to the idea that their students' equitation needs to be the priority instead of the ribbon or the medal.

It is our (riders and trainers alike) responsibility to sit well enough on our horses to give them the help and support they need and deserve. It is also our responsibility (trainers and judges alike) to hold ourselves accountable for teaching a higher level of equitation, and in turn, holding the rider (amateur and professional alike) to a higher standard on what is good equitation.

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I saw a sign the other day that stated:
The 5 Golden Rules of Classical Dressage

- 1) It shall not be subjected to winning titles, trophies, ribbons or prizes.
- 2) It places no stress on the time it takes to develop the horse.
- 3) It may draw upon one or many of the classical dressage masters without influence of a fad.
- 4) It proves that work done correctly should improve the horse's physical health and well-being.
- 5) Any and every breed of horse is capable of excelling.

WISH 5

Denmark has done it. New Zealand has done it. So why can't the FEI come up with a unified thought on the noseband tightness rule?

I read a few different studies on "the effects of noseband tightness on dressage horses" and find it sadly funny that we need science to tell us that tight nosebands are creating sores and discomfort in our horses. Don't get me wrong; I do not advocate for the no-noseband look or nosebands so loose they are rendered useless.

Nosebands serve a purpose. We know there will be moments when the horse looks to avoid bit pressure by moving the bit, the mouth or the tongue. Dressage is supposed to be a precision sport and art, and in theory, light. If we hope for our horses to achieve this lightness through our precise and invisible aids, our horses cannot be in avoidance mode in the wrong moment.

The noseband is to help steady the bit and mouth so that more subtle and exact rein aids can be used. A regular cavesson, whether combined with a flash or alone on a double bridle, helps to steady the horse's jaw and limit the ability to open the mouth to a point where the tongue can be drawn up into the guttural pouch. If this happens, all the bit pressure lands on the bars of the mouth, and now the

mouth has no buffer—i.e. the tongue does not lessen the severe action applied to the bars.

Combine the flash attachment to a regular cavesson, and you now also add the effect of a bit steadier, so the horse has less ability to move the bit up and down the bars and tongue and length of mouth. The flash attachment holds the bit steady and has no real purpose in limiting mouth movement as, if fitted properly, it is attached to the noseband higher than a drop noseband and at an angle. Drop nosebands, being set lower down on the cartilage of the horse's nose, work to steady the bit in the same sense as the flash attachment with the added effect of limiting the ability to open the mouth, this time working on softer cartilage versus the heavier nasal bone under the regular cavesson. In that event, the drop noseband doesn't need to be as snugly fitted to be effective, nor should it, as it can limit the horse's air intake.

In any event, we need the noseband rule, and we need different rules for different noseband types. This doesn't need a scientific study, although the science is always good as a backup. It needs common sense horsemanship.

I was happy to see some of the noseband rules in other countries address that it is not on the side of the face that the tightness needs to be checked but on the bridge of the nose or the like. Depending on the shape of the horse's head, the noseband could be completely loose on the side and extremely tight on the top. Not rocket science here.

JEREMY STEINBERG

Grand Prix trainer and competitor Jeremy Steinberg was the U.S. Equestrian Federation national dressage youth coach from 2010 to 2014. The 1996 FEI North American Young Riders Championships individual dressage gold medalist, he is a former U.S. Dressage Federation Junior/Young Rider Clinic Series clinician. He credits much of his dressage education to the late Dietrich von Hopffgarten, his longtime friend and mentor. Today Steinberg runs a boutique-style training business in Aiken, South Carolina, and travels the country giving clinics. Learn more at steinbergdressage.com.

WISH 6

We should admit that ear bonnets are not fly protection but noise protection and now part of the "uniform."

I am all for the bonnets, and there are times these devices work to keep the flies and gnats off horses' ears, but they also have a very strong muffling capacity. I'm more than happy to use them if

needed to help horses deal with noise. We use sheepskin pads under our saddles to help with impact on horses' backs, although a lot of people now just like the look, i.e. the saddle pads that come with the sheepskin roll sticking out of the saddle but with no actual sheepskin under the saddle, and the same goes for the fly bonnets.

They're becoming way more trend and style, part of the outfit and uniform, than practical fly protection, so why not call them such? Stylized ear muffs for horses. I'm happy they are allowed, but don't pretend they're not affecting what our horses hear. The jumpers have used ear plugs for years, legally and without argument. They work and help our animals handle stressful environments without drugs.

It would be amazing if someday, in my utopian reality, the FEI creates a more universal view of drug rules, bit, noseband, spur, whip, length of ride times and so on. Why can a reiner use a bit that is deemed abusive in dressage? Aren't reining horses the same as dressage horses when it comes to being a horse? I get the difference in disciplines, but if the aim is to protect horses, *all* horses need the same protection.

Being a realist and dreaming of utopia don't always go hand-in-hand, but without the dream there can be no change. The future is what we make it, and we should work toward our ideals. 🐾



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