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# REDUCING THE DISCREPANCIES

**DAVID HUNT** DISCUSSES WITH **JANE KIDD** THE NEW APPROACH TO JUDGING BEING USED AT THE TOP LEVELS OF INTERNATIONAL DRESSAGE AND THE VALUE IF IT WERE TO BE SPREAD MORE WIDELY.

**F**or the past decade the 'great' minds of dressage have been searching for, devising and advocating ways of changing, or at least adapting, the judging system. There's a need for greater harmony of marks and less of the criticism that's bad for the image of the sport and, more directly, the riders.

Some ideas have been adopted; use of half marks, cutting all but the rider collective marks, increasing the number of judges at championships, extending and improving evaluation systems and judge training, and introducing technical aspects to the degree of difficulty mark in freestyles. Others have been tested at trial days and have not proved practical, more are on the table and especially important amongst these is the FEI Dressage Judging Working Group's (DJWG) report that has just been released.

## EDUCATION

"It's not the system that is wrong but the lack of education and the way that education is put across," says David Hunt (pictured top right), the British chairman of the FEI Judges' Supervisory Panel (JSP), a unit that was founded in 2011 after the first report. The

fear was that this radical step would threaten the judges. To the contrary, it has helped to give clarity and confidence to the judges and contributed towards the promising signs of marks getting closer and a more unified approach to the sport.

The JSP was formed to monitor judging with three of its members being appointed to operate at the major championships (Olympics, World, European and World Cup Finals) and some other international shows.

## THE CORRECTIONS

The judges follow the test in the arena, look at the video being taken live and refer to a computer monitor showing the scores. Replays of possible mistakes can be made instantly to support or show the error of a reaction by the panel.

The most well known duty of the JSP is to adjust the mark if a mistake has been made.

The JSP only makes adjustments to physical mistakes, such as the number of sequence changes, a change of leg in a canter pirouette or the number of steps in the piaffe.

The interesting outcome is that judges have welcomed it, as for example if a judge is unsure whether it was 13 or 15 one-time changes they can give ▶



SALUTING THE JUDGE AT C



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the competitor the benefit of the doubt with a higher mark knowing if they are wrong this will be corrected.

As David commented: "The judges are under huge pressure, they have to make snap decisions and when unsure about specifics they now know that they need not worry because the JSP will pick it up and correct any mistake."

#### THE DEBRIEF

The JSP's biggest influence on standards is in the debrief after the Grand Prix and Special. Led by the president of the Judges' Jury, the JSP brings videos and information and the judges their sheets. The videos are shown, often replayed, and then discrepancies and other controversies discussed. "The judges can watch replays of the videos, look at their sheets, discuss and come together to agree the correct mark. The judges make their own self-assessment. We do not say what is right or wrong, it's up to the judges to decide through provision of evidence and discussion," says David.

#### FACILITATOR NOT LECTURER

The essence of the JSP is that it's a facilitator, not a lecturer. Andrew Gardner a member of the Ground Jury at WEG 2018 said, "They [the JSP] bring positive challenges and make us open our minds."

Over the seven years this has been operating David commented: "We're beginning to see ever more clearly where the weaknesses lie. The marks are getting closer at the big championships. What we like to see is the judges are thinking on the same line."

David added: "If you could see the work the judges put into improving. They desperately want to get it right."

Evidence, discussion and a clearer outcome is also part of the seminars for 5\* judges which the trainers on the JSP have to attend.

The value of this system of evidence (the video plus

discussion), along with clearer agreement, is shown in establishing better relativity between marks. It's so easy for a judge to not want to be too hard on a rider and feel a 4 or 5 is a sufficient punishment for a poorly performed movement. Then, when a rider does the same movement close

to fulfilling the FEI directives, the judge is not sure enough to give the top marks.

By highlighting the situation with video replays and discussion, judges can work out for themselves whether a rider who made a good attempt at a movement was given sufficient rewards and the one that did it poorly was sufficiently penalised.

#### EXPANSION

Facilitating discussion, along with the consequent greater clarity and confidence for the judges, has led to many asking for the JSP to be part of more championships (Juniors and Young Riders) and more shows. The limiting factor is the expense, but some shows have used the principle less formally with one member watching the class and afterwards with videos being part of the debriefing.

The other limiting factor is finding sufficiently qualified

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members for the panel. The FEI job description states that all JSP members must be well respected and diplomatic, must be prepared to travel to events, follow the judges' codex and have integrity as well as communication skills. This is a tall order especially as the work is hard.

Apart from the shows, as the leader David says: "I am on the phone to the FEI office every other day, then there are the conference calls and emails. I love it, feel honoured and humble to do it."

### PROMOTION

Further demand is placed on the JSP as part of the judge promotion process as they're responsible for producing a long list of judges for the major championships. This entails extensive studying

of possible judges, mainly through the Judges' Dashboard, a web interface that judges and supervisory panels can use to obtain an overview of each judge's work history. Analytics, such as mean difference, standard-deviation of difference and number of differences larger than 5%, can be calculated. This has helped to ease out any subjective tendency in the making of promotions.

Currently those on the panel are Uwe Mechlem, Linda Zang, Mary Seefried, Henk van Bergen and their chairman David. They are all steeped in dressage, command respect and nurture an attitude towards the sport of mutual interest

and learning through self-assessment, rather than dictating what's right or wrong. When the time comes to find replacements, it will not be easy.

### THE DJWG'S REPORT

The value of the JSP has been recognised and in the just published FEI DJWG report it's proposed that it will evolve into a Judging Advisory Group and merge with the role held by the FEI Judge General, currently Stephen Clarke. It's also proposed that this group will develop a 'code of points' that re-formats and simplifies the guidelines in the FEI's Dressage Handbook.

### BRITISH INFLUENCE

The British do hold key roles in the dressage world. Apart from David and Stephen, Andrew Gardner is a member of the FEI Dressage Committee and Richard Davison was part of the team producing the DJWG report.

To conclude, it's reassuring to see that a completely new addition to international dressage has had surprising education effects. Far from being a police force or lecturer, under David Hunt's leadership, the JSP is clearly demonstrating how much can be learnt through providing evidence plus open discussion

JUDGES ON THE LONG SIDE OF THE ARENA HAVE ANOTHER VIEW OF SCORING MOVEMENTS AND THIS MAY LEAD TO DIFFERENT MARKS FROM THOSE ON THE SHORT SIDE. IN THE DJWG REPORT THERE ARE SUGGESTIONS FOR ALLEVIATING THESE DIFFERENCES

