

THE APPLICATION OF THE FEI RULES FOR THE WELFARE OF THE HORSE IN DRIVING SPORT IN CROATIA

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Abstract: The FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale) is the international governing body for equestrian sport which established the new rules and regulations regarding the driving sport and the welfare of the horse from the aspect of animals' well-being (*FEI, 2009ab*). The FEI rules are applied to the Olympic disciplines of Show Jumping, Dressage and Eventing as well as Endurance Riding, Vaulting, Driving and Reining. The purpose of this paper was to present the FEI rules for international combined driving events which are prescribed by the national Rules and Regulations of the Croatian Equestrian Federation (*HKS, 2007*). The welfare of the horse must be beyond the economic interest and the demands of breeders, trainers, riders, owners, organizers, sponsors or officials. Good horse management requires the highest standards of nutrition, health, sanitation and safety. During transportation, feeding, watering, ventilation, weather conditions and safety must be taken into consideration. All riding and training methods in all stages of driving sport must treat horses as living beings and must not include any techniques which are not approved by the FEI and are degrading for the horse or cause them injuries and pain. Championships in driving sport (Dressage, Marathon, Obstacle Cones Driving) in Croatia are organized according to the FEI rules and the Croatian representative qualified in the last two World Championships in two-horse team driving (*Baban et al., 2007, 2009*). However, regardless of the individual success of Croatian drivers on the international scene, the traditional attitude of other drivers towards horses is still at a low level regarding the rules for the welfare of the horse. The competence of the driver is essential in the interests of the horse and the emphasis is placed on the practical experience of drivers and scientific research. The FEI especially encourages all those who participate in driving sport to achieve the highest level of education in training and management of horses. For this reason, within the scientific project, the education and training on the international level have been provided for the judges, who spread their

acquired knowledge, through presentations at the seminars, to the other competitors in driving sport in Croatia. More time is needed for the full implementation of the FEI rules for the welfare of the horse at competitions in Croatia in order for all two-horse team drivers to understand that the welfare of their horses is more important than placement in competitions and money awards.

Key words: horses, welfare of the horses, FEI rules, driving sport, Croatia

Introduction

The FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale), the international governing body for equestrian sport, regards the welfare of the horse as a priority over all other competition rules. The Ethical Board was founded in 1990 when the first Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse was adopted. It was revised in 2003. Therefore, in some countries, the welfare of the horse was taken into account at the end of the 20th century, while it is still neglected by some other countries. The FEI always protects the welfare of the horse ignoring the competitive or commercial influences. All conditions of stabling, training and using the horse must be adapted to the horse as the most important living being, which is used as a sports requisite. The use of the horse must be suited to its physical and mental condition. Man must take care of each horse regardless of its breed, age or sex, whether it is used for breeding, recreation or sport (*Antunovic et al., 2007; Ivankovic et al., 2005, 2008*). It is very important to know the life of each horse and adapt one's work according to it. Man should take into consideration that the horse develops an attachment to younger persons. The horse used in sport must receive certain training in which a harmony between a horse and a man must be achieved. Use of the horse in riding sport, combined driving sport or vaulting, must fit its constitution, fitness and abilities. Fitness must be achieved without medication or other illegal aids.

The application of the FEI rules in Croatia

Lipizzan horses are mostly used in driving sport in Croatia, and are also well known in international equestrian sport (*Baban et al., 2006a, 2009; Čačić etakademik et al., 2007, Čačić, 2008a., Čačić 2008b*). Ways of horse leading, measurements, estimations, selections of stallions for breeding purposes, estimation of working capacity are conducted according to the international rules (*Levakovic et al., 2006; Baban et al., 2006b, 2008*) and respecting the national laws (The Law on Livestock Production, the Veterinary Law, the Animal Welfare Law, the Animal Protection Law). In the year 2007, at the World Championship in Warka (Poland), all two-in-drive competitions were driven successfully (*Baban et*

al., 2007). The same Croatian competitor has qualified for this year World Championship which will take place in Kecskemét (Hungary). However, few drivers from Croatia compete at the international level, and other drivers are not trained well enough because the notion of welfare is relatively new in the equine world. In countries that do not belong to “horse countries”, traditional attitude of drivers is still at a low level, especially their attitude towards the welfare of the horse. Since the FEI encourages all equestrian sport participants to achieve the highest level of education, apart from the research conducted within the scientific project, on the international level the education and training have been provided for the judges, who spread their acquired knowledge, through presentations at the seminars, to the other competitors in driving sport in Croatia. The FEI rules for international combined driving events in Croatia are fully implemented but more time is needed for the two-horse team drivers to apply fully all rules for the welfare of the horse. The reasons are mostly financial because the desire for money is stronger than the welfare of their horses. Judges and veterinary delegates are responsible for checking health and sport certificates of horses and competitors. The competitor and groom, who participate in competition, must have knowledge about horses and competitions, a suitable horse or horses trained for such competition, proper equipment fit for each horse, approved ancillary equipment and must not take forbidden medication. Horses for competitions must have adequate genetic predispositions, proper breeding conditions, must be trained according to the Animal Protection Act, without forbidden chemical substances and must be registered at the Croatian Equestrian Federation (CEF). However, in Croatia there is still no doping control in driving sport since the majority of drivers come from rural areas and such forbidden substances are financially unavailable. It is assumed that, for the time being, they do not use them and even do not know how to use them. Besides the above requirements, the horse must be of certain age for competitions. The prescribed age for combined driving is: for Croatian Championship and Croatia Cup horses must be 4 years old and over, for CAIO events and championships at least 6 years old (CEF, 2007).

The welfare of the horse according to the FEI rules

The welfare of the horse can be defined as happiness and health, which has a stronger connotation than subjective feelings, as well as feelings of an individual about its environment and interactions with it. In the course of history, the horse stabling was changing, while domestication and urbanization impose separation from the basic needs developed from inborn patterns of horse behavior. As long as requirements of the welfare of the horse regarding stabling are met, the fact is that the stable is unnatural environment for the horse. The result can be unnatural horse behavior and habits, which can result in self-injury (Antunovic *et al.*, 2007). The

well-being of the horse must have an advantage over all other demands at all stages during the preparation and training (*FEI, 2009a, Article 900*). Stabling, feeding and training must be in accordance with the Code of conduct for the welfare of the horse and must not compromise welfare. All treatments which could cause physical or mental suffering, in or out of competition will not be tolerated. Horses could only participate in training if their physical abilities and level of maturity are taken into account. They must not be exposed to any abuse or fear during training. Shoeing must be of a high standard, professionally done with adequate tools so that the risk of pain or injury can be avoided. Horses must be protected against injuries and other risks that can lead to the serious health problems during transportation. Vehicles must be safe, well ventilated and maintained, regularly disinfected and driven by competent drivers. Competent handlers must always be available to manage the horses. Every journey must be planned carefully and horses allowed regular breaks with access to food and water in accordance with FEI guidelines. Before competition is allowed, horses and competitors must be fit, competent and healthy. Fitness and competence of horses and competitors are required for participation in competition. Those horses which have symptoms of disease or lameness must not participate in competition if their health is at risk. In case of any doubt, a veterinarian must be asked for advice. Abuse of medication will not be tolerated. Before competition, the horse must achieve full recovery after any veterinary treatment. Doping is another abuse (use of prohibited substances). Doping is used to increase abilities of the horse; it is illegal but unfortunately often used. According to the FEI's policy, the meaning of competition is not doping of the horse in order to reach better results, but competition with normal abilities. The Equine Prohibited List has been published. During competition horses are regularly tested for substances which can influence their performance. 2,000 horses are tested annually and their urine and blood sent to the FEI's laboratory. The competitors (drivers and grooms) are also prohibited to take any medication – cough medicine, drops or ointments, except from the List of approved medication.

Any surgical procedure that threatens a competing welfare of the horse or the safety of other horses and/or competitors is forbidden. Abuse of the horse by using natural or artificial riding aids (whips) is not tolerated.

Mares are not allowed to compete after their fourth month of pregnancy or with a small foal. If discovered that a mare competed under either of these conditions, it will be disqualified from all events. Such decision will be brought by the Secretary General and the Judicial Committee (*FEI, 2009a, Article 900*).

Competition areas must be prepared in such a way as to minimize the risk of injury. Horses must be trained and competed on suitable and safe surfaces. When designing obstacles, safety of the horse must be kept in mind. All ground surfaces on which horses walk, train or compete must be designed and maintained to avoid risks of injury. A special attention must be paid to the preparation,

composition and maintenance of surfaces. In case of bad weather conditions competitions must not be held for safety reasons. After competing in hot or humid conditions, immediate cooling of horses must be provided. Stables must be safe, hygienic, comfortable, well ventilated and large enough for all horse breeds. Clean, good quality, appropriate food and accommodation as well as fresh water for drinking and washing must be available. All sites at the events must be monitored.

After competition, the horse must be fit to travel according to the FEI's guidelines. Proper attention must be paid to horses after competition even if their competition careers have ended. Veterinarians must be present during a competition. If the horse is injured or exhausted, the competitor must ask a veterinarian to check the horse.

If necessary, horses must be taken by ambulance to the nearest clinic for further examination and treatment. Injured horses must be given full care before transportation. They must be taken to regular checkups of injuries which occurred during competition. Ground surface conditions, frequency of competitions and any risk factors must be thoroughly examined in order to minimize injuries. If injuries are so severe that the horse must be euthanized by a veterinarian, it must be done as soon as possible to decrease suffering. The FEI encourages all equestrian sport participants to achieve the highest level of education. They are judges, competitors and spectators. Their responsibility lies in fair implementation of rules, behavior of the horse and respecting the rules regarding the welfare of the horse. The National Federation should establish proper control of respecting the welfare of the horse over all persons and bodies under its supervision. The national and international rules and regulations regarding the health and welfare of the horse should be respected, not only in national and international events but in training as well. The rules are continuously been revised to ensure such welfare.

Harness and carriage in driving sport

Harness which is used in competitions and training must be in accordance with the FEI's rules and regulations, adapted to each horse and in proper condition and must not be manipulated (*FEI, 2009a, Article 901*). Bridles, head protections and harness must fit, must not be too tight or cause blisters. Harness must not cause injuries, sufferings, intimidation, pain or permanent consequences.

Economic interests should not interfere with the welfare of the horse, whether they are nondeliberation, strong desire for victory, team pressure or material gain. Horse abuse is not allowed. It is the responsibility of the authorized persons to secure fair competition, orientated towards the welfare of the horse, and to respect the Animal Protection Act always bearing a sport horse in mind.

The definition of cruelty towards horses

Cruelty is defined as: “Excessive pressing of exhausted Horses, excessive use of a whip, an unacceptably severe, badly fitting, broken or damaged bit; badly fitting harness which might cause distress to the horse, damage to a vehicle which might cause injury to the Horse; or any other action, which, in the opinion of the Ground Jury, is clearly and unmistakably an act of cruelty.” (*FEI, 2009a, Article 927.1*).

Harness is considered unfit if it is badly manufactured, inadequate, repaired or manipulated in such a way as to cause pain and unease to the horse (*FEI, 2009a, Article 901*). If the collar is too small or too heavy it can make breathing difficult. Chains can cause serious injury of the rear legs and the difficulty in releasing the horse in case of an accident. Harness and carriages must not impede free movements of the horse. A minimum distance between the horse and a carriage must be 50 cm to allow the free movement of the horse. Pole length should extend to approximately the middle of the length of the necks when in draft, except when using a yoke (for horse singles). Pole straps must be of sufficient length to allow free movement of the horses. The horse yoke width must be 45 cm, and yokes must not be behind any part of the shoulder. A judge must check bits before, during and after the competition. Reins should fit the horse and must be attached without a belt which impedes the free intake of air (nosebands, attachments or ancillary equipment). The minimum thickness of a halter is 14 mm, for ponies 12 mm and for Haflinger horses 14 mm. Unacceptable roughness, inadequate, broken or damaged bits, mouth wounds, chronic injury of the oral cavity in the marathon are all signs of cruelty and it lead to disqualification. Sharp bits with the levers should be used only by experienced drivers, and horses with a nerve injury must not participate in competitions as it can cause pain, suffering and disorder of the entire organism of the horse. If an anesthetic is administered locally, the horse does not feel any pain, which is otherwise felt during hard work. Then, the horse does not have a sense of touch; in fact it has no other senses and has uncertain step. It is also humiliating for the animal to have hairs on lips, nostrils and ears cut.

Bitless bridles (hackamores) are not allowed when the horse is harnessed to a vehicle. Blinkers and ancillary equipment must not impede forward vision nor be as close to the eyes as to irritate them. Tails must not be tied to the harness or vehicle to prevent causing pain. Tongues must not be tied in any way. Tongue straps are not allowed in the FEI competitions. Leg control is obligatory before, during and after competition. Using whips or similar aids is allowed for the purpose of training and competition and no other use or abuses are tolerated.

Excessive use of a whip is not allowed (if horses are exhausted). Whipping heads or genitals of the horse for the purpose of punishment is forbidden under the Animal Protection Act. Each horse is unique in movements and its legs are

protected individually. Using a wire whip, besides infringing the welfare of the horse, is a criminal offence under the FEI's rules and regulations. Too tight bandages on legs stop the blood flow. Manipulations of leg protection (e.g. using beer bottle caps) cause higher leg lifting but pain as well. Wet bandages shrink and threaten the welfare of the horse.

Each time the horse has its leg over a pole, lead bar and shaft or when the horse falls on the ground, the competitor is responsible to stop immediately, put a groom down and make necessary repairs. Also, he must stop and repair the harness if asked by the judge or obstacle observer. Unfit equipment can cause injuries to the horse. Refusal to stop and correct the situation before leaving the obstacle is punished with the elimination (*FEI, 2009a, Article 945.7.1*). For exceeding the time limit, penalties, verbal warning and a yellow card are given by the judges. A second yellow card and disqualification are given for subsequent offences.

Serious cases of disqualification and severe sanctions are combinations of the yellow card and reporting to the appeal committee (iron wire, excessive use of a whip and bloody wounds), deliberate criminal offence, forbidden aids and manipulation. If aids which cause pain are used for no reason during training horses, they can cause suffering and damage as well. The first inspection must take place at all events before the beginning of competition A (driven dressage). The second inspection must take place in competition B (marathon) and in all events. The fitness of the horse is determined by clinical observation which includes: measuring the heart rate, the respiratory rate and the temperature. Lamé, injured and exhausted horses must be eliminated. Final observation before competition C (Obstacle Cones Driving) is obligatory at all events. The horse which is not presented before competing in competition C will be disqualified. For the violation of any of these rules, a verbal warning and a yellow card are given. A second yellow card and disqualification are given for subsequent offences.

Conclusion

The FEI requires from all participants in the international equestrian sport to comply with the FEI guidelines and take care of horses, which should be beyond economic interests and demands of breeders, trainers, riders, owners, organizers, sponsors or officials. This Code of Conduct for the welfare of the horse is widely implemented in the "horse countries" and must be amended due to modern principles in the equestrian sport. A special attention should be paid to new research because the FEI encourages and supports further studies on the welfare of the horse. The judges, competitors and spectators must behave according to the FEI guidelines. Their responsibility lies in fair competition, horse behavior and respecting the rules on the welfare of animals. Combined events in driving sport in Croatia (Dressage, Marathon, Obstacle Cones Driving) are organized according to

the FEI rules. However, traditional attitude of some drivers towards horses is still at the low level. Therefore, this year there have been several trainings at the international level, and acquired knowledge is continuously passed on to all competitors in driving sport through presentations at seminars and during competitions in Croatia. The FEI rules tend to be fully applied in Croatia but more time is needed for all two-horse team drivers to accept them. Sometimes, the desire for victory and prestige as well as financial gain is stronger than the welfare of their horses.

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Primena FEI pravilnika o dobrobiti konja u zaprežnim takmičenjima u Hrvatskoj

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Rezime

Međunarodna konjička organizacija (Fédération Equestre Internationale) je vodeća organizacija konjičkih sportova koja je propisala najnovija pravila vezana za zaprežni sport, kao i pravila vezana za odnos prema konjima s aspekta dobrobiti životinja (*FEI, 2009ab*). Pravila FEI-a se primenjuju na olimpijske discipline preskakanja prepona, dresurnog jahanja, svestrane upotrebljivosti konja (militari) kao i kod trka izdržljivosti, voltiziranja, zaprežnog sporta i reininga. Cilj ovog rada je da se prezentuju pravila FEI pravilnika koja su vezana za dobrobit konja u zaprežnom sportu, a koja su propisana i nacionalnim pravilnikom Hrvatskog konjičkog saveza (*HKS, 2007*). Briga o konju mora biti ispred ostvarivanja ekonomske dobiti i svih zahteva uzgajivača, trenera, vozača, vlasnika, organizatora, sponzora i ostalih zvaničnika. U držanju konja, treninzima i takmičenjima svakodnevno moraju biti obezbeđeni najviši standardi ishrane, zdravstvene higijene i sigurnost konja u cilju zdravlja i dobrobiti konja. Tokom prevoza konja mora se voditi računa o hranjenju, napajanju, zatim vremenu, ventilaciji i sigurnosti u transportu. Sve metode vožnje i treninzi u svim fazama zaprežnog sporta moraju voditi računa o konju kao živom biću i ne smeju sadržavati bilo koje tehnike propisane od strane FEI-a kao ponižavajuće za konja ili im prouzrokovati ozlede, a samim tim i bol. Utakmice prvenstva Hrvatske u

zaprežnom sportu (dresura, maraton, vožnja između čunjeva) organizuju se prema FEI pravilima, a hrvatski predstavnik se kvalifikovao i za poslednja dva svetska prvenstva u vožnji dvoprega (*Baban et al., 2007, 2009*). Međutim, bez obzira na pojedinačne uspehe hrvatskih vozača na međunarodnoj sceni, tradicionalan odnos ostalih vozača prema konjima još uvek je na niskom nivou, posebno vezano za pravila o dobrobiti konja. U interesu konja neophodna je stručnost vozača, a naglasak se stavlja na praktičnu obuku vozača u zaprežnom sportu i njihovom obrazovanju te na naučnim istraživanjima. FEI posebno podstiče sve koji su uključeni u konjički sport da na području svojih specijalnosti postignu najviši nivo obrazovanja u području stručnosti važnih za negu i upravljanje takmičarskim konjima. Upravo zbog toga je u okviru naučnog projekta sprovedena edukacija sudija na međunarodnom nivou, a stečena znanja se prenose i ostalim učesnicima zaprežnog sporta u Hrvatskoj prezentacijom na organizovanim seminarima. Za potpuno prihvatanje FEI pravila vezano za dobrobit konja na takmičenjima u Hrvatskoj će ipak biti potrebno još vremena, kako bi svi vozači dvoprega shvatili da je dobrobit njihovih konja važnija od ostvarivanja plasmana u utakmici, a samim tim i osvajanja novčane nagrade.

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