

## 28 *How to organize your first stable competition*

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This chapter is meant to help you to organize your first stable competition, if you are too remotely situated to get help from a vaulting association, and if your (and the other clubs) are so young that international rules can not yet be made applicable to your vaulting situation. Where national guidelines for vaulting are in existence, there will also be guidance as to how you may modify those rules. Until then you might have to improvise.

### *Use of the horse*

It is stated in the International Rules how often a horse may be used per competition day – and you should stick to that, taking into account that your stable competitions will not be all canter performance. Keep in mind that you'll do great damage to this sport if the spectators see that you are overworking your animal. I know that the temptation may be great: if there are only one or two competitions per year, and of course all vaulters of the clubs want to enter as many events as possible – but each club only has one horse. There is only *one* solution: limit the entries. Don't make the horse suffer. And take hot summer temperatures into account.

### *Other rules*

For all other rules, which you may state in your invitation (which should be approved by your provincial association, if there is one) keep in mind that they should help us to get this sport going, rather than making it difficult. We want as many people involved as possible, as many young vaulters encouraged

to participate. Speak to the other invited clubs and write the rules to suit your needs.

## *Judging*

Try to look as professional as possible to build up good credibility. Don't invite judges who might favour your own club. If your association has a list of certified judges, contact them first. In the international rules such judges must be paid for their services – this is often impossible for us in small stable competitions. Ask them if they'd volunteer – then make their day as agreeable as possible (coffee service and nice social contacts!) so they'll come back for you! If you have to improvise with older vaulters or trainers of the respective clubs, let them judge together, always two from different clubs, to ensure impartiality.

## *Entry fees*

In international competitions no entry fees may be charged, and the same should apply for provincial or national competitions. But for the time being, with no sponsors in sight for this 'new' sport in our country, we often can't get around charging some fee for our stable competitions. We have to pay for the extra day for the use of the horse, we have to pay ring time, rent the decoration for the ring, pay for the ribbons, and the list goes on. We feel that it is important to keep the costs as low as possible, to guarantee high participation. Get your vaulters and helpers to volunteer, make it a work-party event.

## *Helpers*

- Before the event you need a show secretary or a group of people, who collect the entrance fees, write the time table, get the whole thing into a sequence which works for the vaulters as well as the horses in terms of breaks between events. You must order ribbons and organize prizes.

The helpers you will need during the competition are the following:

- You need the judges, as mentioned above. The main judge needs a bell, with which s/he gives the signal to start or to stop (in case of unforeseen circumstances). Have scrap paper and pens ready for the judges, and offer them the score sheets in the correct order. Especially when the judges do not know the vaulters, it can be total chaos if the sequence of the forms gets shuffled.
- The judges need writing assistants, as they never take their eyes off the vaulters. Those assistants (one per judging table) must be familiar with the format of the forms, so the filling in may happen fast and efficiently. The assistants do *not* watch the vaulters. They only listen and write – so *do* give them a break by making this job two shifts.
- You need a timer: this person must have a back-up stop watch in case of problems, and he must be aware of the rules. When to start timing, how to stop and restart the time in case of falls. Refer to the rule book for all this.
- Very important helpers are one or two score calculators (so they can cross check or take turns) – their fingers should be nimble and their figures must be correct. It is a very embarrassing situation to collect your prizes and ribbons back, because the average marks on the score sheets were computed wrongly. . . . There should be backup batteries for the calculator machine, which should be the type that prints out the results, so the paper can be tacked onto the score sheets. The people for this job should be awake enough to spot obvious mistakes without the use of a computer – such as an average coming out lower than all the numbers, which were averaged! The more often you present ribbons in between classes, the more the calculators must be on their toes. Seat the calculators in a quiet back room, so they can concentrate, and let nobody but the runners enter.



- You need runners, at least as many as you have judges' tables. Each runner stands next to the table (but far enough away not to overhear the judges) and receives the score sheet, as soon as the judges have filled in the marks. The runner then carries it to the calculators, while the next runner takes up his position next to the table. During the competition nobody except the runners may approach the judges.
- You need a whipper-in: this person is positioned at the entrance of the ring and keeps the records of who is in the ring and who gets ready to go next. The children vaulting on the same horse will run in groups (you specified this on the time table you worked out), and the whipper-in keeps track of vaulters dropping out or groupings being changed for any reasons. Vaulters or teams who are more than three minutes late should not be allowed to start, because they play havoc with your scheduling. If the competition runs significantly faster or slower than predicted, the whipper-in should change the time table, which is tacked up to the wall at the entrance of the ring. This way the trainers of the teams and the vaulters can keep track themselves as well.
- Announcing and presentation of the ribbons: give the announcer a microphone if the announcement is not made from an announcer's booth. If you have an announcer for the whole event, also call out the name of the team entering the ring, the horse's name, the lunge and the vaulters. You have the choice of presenting the ribbons in between the individual classes or all at the very end. If you do it in between, the little people can go home early – which is very good in cold weather conditions! But keep in mind that the presentation depends on the way you spread the classes. In 'real' competitions all vaulters do the compulsories first, then the freestyle after an adequate break for the horses. But in those competitions you will see up to twenty horses march in at the end of the competition. If you are dealing with three clubs with one horse each, you must of course break up the canter classes and



intersperse them well with walk events to make the competition possible at all. Plan a generous lunch break for the horses and fill the time with a social event or a barrel competition for the vaulters.

- You need somebody at the sound table: this could be the announcer as well. If all vaulters hand in their individual tapes, this person must check as the tapes come in that they are clearly marked and stopped at the correct spot. Give the sound person a copy of the time table, so s/he can check off the names, and remind the whipper-in to inform this person in case of changes.

For our first stables competitions we have changed some of the rules to suit our own needs as well.

### *Age and performance grouping*

In fledgling vaulting clubs age groupings do not always make sense, as they assume that somebody who is fifteen years old has vaulted for several years. So if you have several older vaulters, who are nevertheless beginners, you might also group the events by 'beginner and advanced'. This might allow the beginners some advantages: state if you'll allow boosting of vaulters, and define the conditions clearly in the invitation. We have broken the walk and canter classes sometimes into 'beginner' and 'advanced' as well, which was simply a way to be able to hand out twice as many prizes. The judges should be aware of how you have planned to place, and this should be cleared with your Vaulting Association.

You may have beginning vaulters, who are able to do some exercises in canter, and would like to show this off. Introduce a 'transitional class' to your compulsories if this helps your purposes, that is, let the vaulters show the first block of compulsories (mount, seat, flag – with or without free hand – and mill) in canter, but the second block in walk. Keeping the entries for

compulsories separate from the freestyle gives the vaulters an additional flexibility of performance. As stated in our very early stable competitions, they can then choose to be in a canter class in compulsories, but still in walk for their individual freestyle.

We have left the size of the competing teams flexible as well. At the time our first competition was held, some clubs could simply not muster a team with eight vaulters plus an extra. Therefore we also left the maximum allowable time open: the clubs were expected to use the time according to the number of vaulters competing on one team. This worked very well.

In Appendix C I have included the forms we used for our first stable competitions. To simplify matters for the organizers, we combined the entry form with the score sheet, which is usually not done in 'real' competitions! But this served our needs very well, and saved a lot of paper work and photocopying. By now we are using internationally accepted rules, scores and score sheets, and you can find copies of those in the back of the international rule book. They should be used as soon as you can.

The time table is included, so you can compare how much certain groups and performances (whether in walk, trot or canter) will take — and this competition was right on the button and finished at exactly 4:00 pm. The pauses were adequate and both horses (there were only two clubs) had enough rest and walk periods in between performances.

Try to keep a record of the score sheets for your club and the association. In later competitions you will start to carry the scores forward, find out the best average vaulter of the year, or set up some tailor-made kind of medal award system. In the medal awards we have tried to adhere to commonly accepted rules straight away, so we can compare our rules with the rules in Europe and the United States.