



American Endurance Ride Conference

June 25, 2013

Mr. John Long, Chief Executive Officer
United States Equestrian Federation
4047 Iron Works Parkway
Lexington, KY 40511

Dear Mr. Long,

As President of the American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC), and at the direction of our Board of Directors, this letter serves as a request that the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) submit a letter to the Federation Equestrian International (FEI) in regard to increasing concerns regarding Endurance at the international level; and specifically as support for the letters publically issued by Equestrian Federations of Belgium (October 2, 2012), France (October 12, 2012) and Switzerland (March 26, 2013).

We share the alarm voiced by the European federations of Belgium, France, and Switzerland in regard to profoundly disturbing evidence of deficiencies in horse welfare issues, including an increase in equine fatalities, orthopedic injuries and serious drug violations. We note that these letters have been widely circulated throughout world press, and that the reputation of the sport and all those federations involved is likely to become irreparably tainted if decisive action is not taken at once to resolve these issues.

The AERC prides itself on our motto, "To Finish is To Win," which illustrates our uncompromising bedrock principles that welfare of the horse must remain of paramount importance and never become subordinate to an attitude of "win at all costs." We are further disturbed that AERC's cornerstone principle of remaining a drug-free sport has in recent years deteriorated at the international level to the extent that FEI Endurance has the highest number of violations of anti-doping rules, specifically in regard to teams originating from the Middle East.

AERC remains very dismayed over an apparent unwillingness on the part of FEI to follow through with their own Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse as described repeatedly throughout the FEI's rules and schedules for every equestrian FEI discipline. May we draw your attention to the FEI Endurance Rules:

"800.1 Endurance Riding is a competition to test the competitor's ability to safely manage the stamina and fitness of the horse over an endurance course in a competition against the track, the distance, the climate, the terrain and the clock. Therefore, the most important responsibility of the Technical Delegate, the Ground Jury, the Stewards, the Veterinary Commission, the Chef d'Equipe, the Team Veterinarian, the Grooms and ultimately the Athlete is to ensure the health and welfare of the horse by diligent application of their skill together with a caring, knowledgeable attitude by the Athlete. To be successful, the competitor must have knowledge of pace and efficient and safe use of the horse across country."

We support these principles, in which the health and welfare of our equine athletes is held as primary importance. As such, it is of the highest priority that the rules previously set in place to support these values be consistently and strenuously upheld, regardless of the influence and financial sponsorship of one or more individuals involved as competitors, owners of vast racing stables, and/or as elected officials within the highest echelons of FEI.



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A failure to do so on the part of FEI threatens the integrity of the entire sport, but most especially endurance racing at its top international levels.

In addition to the above issues, AERC is alarmed about the increasing speed requirements in order to obtain a Certificate of Capability. It is understood that endurance events are a race, and therefore the winning horse and rider is by definition those who complete the course in the fastest elapsed time. However, we are dismayed that FEI endurance has evolved from its prototypical roots of challenging, technical courses requiring advanced horsemanship, strategy and judgment to a long distance flat race where horsemanship is subordinate to speed and speed alone.

While we understand the desire expressed by some individuals to make endurance a more spectator-friendly sport, such choices in course design and venues also encourage racing at unsafe speeds on the flat courses. It is therefore of little surprise that the incidence and types of injuries and fractures within FEI Endurance now approach those observed in traditional flat-track racing. Specifically in 2010, a peer-reviewed scientific journal, Equine Veterinary Education, documented musculoskeletal injury rates of one limb fracture per 236 FEI starts in the 2007-2008 European endurance season. Similar to the most common bone injuries seen in other racing disciplines, three-quarters of these endurance-horse fractures originated from the fetlock joint. **When examining injuries in AERC endurance starts from 2002 through 2012, we were able to verify only two horses sustaining fractures of the fetlock region despite more than 140,000 starts during that 11-year period.**

We note that articles in highly respected publications such as the New York Times detailing drug rule violations and catastrophic injuries within flat-track racing has resulted in increased scrutiny and negative perceptions by the public, animal welfare groups and governmental agencies. Additionally, the New York Times has even detailed official blatant partiality to certain Middle East nation teams at FEI's highest level (world) competitions. Should FEI fail to take decisive action to correct the current serious deficiencies within the federation and Endurance discipline, we cannot help but predict a similar fate for the entire sport of endurance.

It is therefore AERC's request that USEF add their strenuous support to those federations which have previously expressed their concern over the current state of horse welfare issues in the Endurance discipline. We look forward to working with you on this very important issue.

Sincerely,

Jan Stevens, President
American Endurance Ride Conference