

THE NEW FREESTYLE SYSTEM

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A new, innovative freestyle scoring system has been introduced in the FEI World Cup 2016/2017. Following the concept of Katrina Wüst, this system changed the way freestyles are scored, perceived and presented. Due to the support of riders, officials, fans and the media, a Code of Points for the freestyle degree of difficulty has been introduced that standardizes the judgement, provisional results can be published much faster, running scores can be displayed and journalists and commentators have additional material to generate excitement.

The system has been implemented by Daniel Göhlen and his Black Horse One Team in cooperation with Longines Timing under the supervision of the FEI.

Ideas

1. A catalogue of difficulties combined with a Code of Points to make the assessment of the degree of difficulty mark more equal, comparable and transparent, thereby bringing Freestyle performances to lose their supposed subjectivity, has been created.
2. Riders have the chance to mention and emphasize all their difficulties - also the hidden ones such as difficult transitions, combinations etc. beforehand.

Realization

Riders set up their floorplan with the help of the "FEI Floorplan Creator" application they can find on the FEI Website and transform their choreography accordingly into an individual testsheet. All difficult movements, transitions, combinations are defined, following the catalogue. The new scoring system automatically calculates the achievable degree of difficulty mark if everything is executed properly. Mistakes that occur, because a rider is overasking his risk will negatively influence the degree of difficulty mark. Apart from their intended floorplan, riders have the chance to implement up to 3 additional movements and "joker lines" as correction lines for badly

executed movements - which of course are not rewarded with a bonus in the degree of difficulty.

Judges will then give their mark as they are used to from standard tests - they only have to be informed by their secretaries about the difficulties a rider has implemented, e.g. whether he wants to show a double pirouette (technical mark as normal) or a difficult transition/combination. The judge will then decide, based on the execution, whether to accept this as a transition or combination or not.

A critical look back

The new freestyle judging system has been applied on all World Cup Qualifiers in the Western European League as well as at the Adequan Global Dressage Festival in Wellington, FL from the beginning of 2017.

These shows have been used efficiently by Daniel Göhlen and the Black Horse One Team to gain experience and to improve the system during its usage. Opinions from riders, judges, officials and show organizers have been gathered. Now that the World Cup season is coming to an end with the World Cup final in Omaha, end of March, it is time to look back on an exciting and successful season. In the following, experiences from riders, judges and officials are explained.

The Riders' side

At the very first shows, some riders were extremely precise at entering and following their floorplans, others did not always show what they had planned, e.g. leaving out movements or changing leads in an unforeseen way. That - of course - caused some confusion among the judges. The system respects these changes but of course being new to everybody, experience had to be gathered and these situations are significantly more stressful compared to a rider following his planned floorplan properly. The only drawback for riders that slightly leave their planned floorplans is that the degree of difficulty will not go up for the divergences. However, in the course of the World Cup Series, the floorplans became more and more precise as riders also got used to the system with the last Qualifiers running without any remarkably stressful situations.

Daniel Göhlen and the Black Horse One Team were present at all WC Qualifiers of the Western European League, assisting the riders to set up their choreography in the best possible way, showing them where they could gain additional bonus points and helping them to enter their floorplans online.

The great novelty, the Code of Points, which enabled the riders to define their difficulties was highly appreciated, bringing more clarity into the design of the freestyles. The fact that bonus points for the degree of difficulty are only given for a technical execution of 7 and better kept the riders in most cases from asking more than their horse could show. On the other hand, it was very encouraging that even some of the leading riders have - successfully - changed their floorplans,

explicitly in order to gain a higher degree of difficulty mark.

Altogether it was remarkable that Freestyle performances were more precisely ridden and on average more thoughts from the riders have been put into their freestyles. Transitions became more promptly shown, combinations were tighter to make them count, it was obvious that the riders - now aware of where they can gain a bonus - tried to execute their tests as accurately as possible. In this regard it was noteworthy that, at the 5* Judges Meeting in Amsterdam, both - the riders' as well as the trainers' representative - were very clear in their opinion that the Freestyle gives the rider the "freedom" to set up his choreography according to the strengths and weaknesses of his horse but, having done so, the rider should stick to it afterwards.

The Judges' and Secretaries' side

In the new system judges and scribes have the individual floorplans of all competitors on paper and on their computer. Movements are now in chronological order, judges do not have to "guess" what riders want to show; scribes do not need to search the appropriate box for each movement anymore and are not endangered to mix left and right or trot half passes with canter half passes.

In the very beginning it sometimes was hard for judges to fully adapt to the new system, especially when riders did not stick to what they planned. However, the more precise the riding was the easier the judging became. Still judges have to follow a set of rules, because there might always be situations in a Freestyle performance when the rider changes a line or a movement.

Some judges complained at the beginning that they lose the feeling for the emotion of the music or the artistic beauty of the whole performance. This happened when the judges followed the new system for the first times caused by the increase of information that judges have to deal with when the rider emphasizes all his difficulties. In the former system, many of these difficulties unfortunately remained overlooked or disregarded as it is nearly impossible to exactly remember all difficulties shown. The new system helps to increase the fairness towards the riders and - when the judge gets more accustomed to the new system and the riders stick to their floorplans - gives the judge even more time to focus on the music and on the artistic components.

In order to help the scribes and tippers to get accustomed with the system, Daniel Göhlen lead briefings where he gave technical instructions before the competitions. These briefings were always very welcome by all parties, the judges and their assistants. These meetings also spawned important discussions on how to handle freestyle specific questions independent of systems.

Advantages

The biggest improvement for more transparency in the judging of Freestyle is the automatically calculated degree of difficulty mark. Already within the first season, the degree of difficulty mark was generally the most consistent mark, sometimes with deviations of only 0.1 % or even less.

Thanks to the development efforts of the Black Horse One Team and Longines Timing, it was possible for the first time to show a running score during the Freestyle. This amazing tool has been used for the FEI World Cup Freestyles in Salzburg, London and Gothenburg and was very welcome by the spectators also on TV who thereby were able to follow the scoring closely and understand better where the rider gains or loses marks.

Commentators received a printed version of the floorplans beforehand to be able to announce particular difficulties and share interesting information with the audience - without a doubt a tool to "sell" our sport better.

Compared to the previous scoring system, results are processed 40 to 60 seconds quicker which normally allows the announcer to present the preliminary score right after each freestyle - a big advantage to make the sport faster and engage the audience even more.

Critical Outlook

There are certain points that need to be addressed in the future:

The judges commonly felt that the outcome of the average degree of difficulty mark was too high. At the moment, every rider starts with a basic degree of difficulty of 6.5. At the 5* Judges Meeting in Amsterdam in January 2017 it was collectively decided to lower the base degree of difficulty mark to 6.0 after the World Cup Finals.

The Code of Points has to be discussed within a group of experts and adjusted where necessary. Solutions have to be found how to handle deviations from the original floorplan: How many are allowed and how to deal with them in the future. Daniel Göhlen is requested to simplify the application in case of changes of choreography.

Riders will need to be schooled to work with the system independently, assign their floorplans online on the FEI webpage in advance, learn to enter new floorplans or change existing choreographies correctly. There is a manual available and assistance offered by the Black Horse Team.

Some judges asked to get the riders' floorplans in advance. A solution for the future needs to be discussed.

Conclusion

The majority of the parties involved was very pleased by the innovations of the new degree of difficulty system. The Black Horse One team is constantly working on improving and adjusting the system to further develop and improve it. Experiences of any kind and criticisms are welcome and will always be taken under consideration.