We need to talk!

**How to improve the Communication between
Riders, Trainers and Judges**

Situation: Some dissatisfaction among riders with judges

Reasons:
- Differences in ranking, marks, %
- Comparison with other competitors raises questions

Problems:
- Movements look different from different positions → understandable and acceptable
- Biases in judging → sometimes difficult to understand but often part of human nature
- Not all judges meet the same quality standards → in the long run not acceptable
- Not all riders share the same level of consciousness → a fact, but it should get better

**No two persons ever read the same book ... or watch the same horse
be it rider, trainer, judge or spectator ...**

Biases: *

Possible Biases in Judging

The Order Bias

The Conformity Bias

The Memory-Influenced Bias

The Reputation Bias

The Patriotism Bias

The Anchoring Effect

There are biases in assessments ...

since there is no objectivity, because every judgment is subject to preconception

Fair judging results of being free from influences as possible.

3

* For various kinds of biases see also the presentations of Inga Wolframm
For Anchoring Effect see Daniel Kahnemann/Amos Tversky

Biases in Judging:

Starting order bias: A draw according to the World Ranking List raises expectations that the most
successful (or better?) riders come at the end of the class.
Legal and understandable interest of organizers ↔ expectations of judges (and spectators!)
Judges have to realize that they might be biased by this starting order and remain fully aware of
where the problems lie.

Conformity bias - should not occur, but is growing when judges feel under pressure by the press or 'social'
media such as Facebook. Constructive criticism from journalists that have watched the class is
generally accepted; personal or inappropriate criticism, however, makes judges hide behind their
peer group to protect themselves.

Memory influenced bias - should not happen, however, it is impossible for human beings not to memorize
certain things, be it horses, riders, presentations or anything else. Can be positive for the rider
(if the judge has a poor quality presentation in mind), can be negative in the opposite case.
The judge has to try to 'switch off' his memory and to judge as impartial as possible.

Reputation bias: Closely connected with the conformity bias and starting order bias - the judge wants to
stay 'in line' with his colleagues and gives good marks to famous riders who he thinks they might
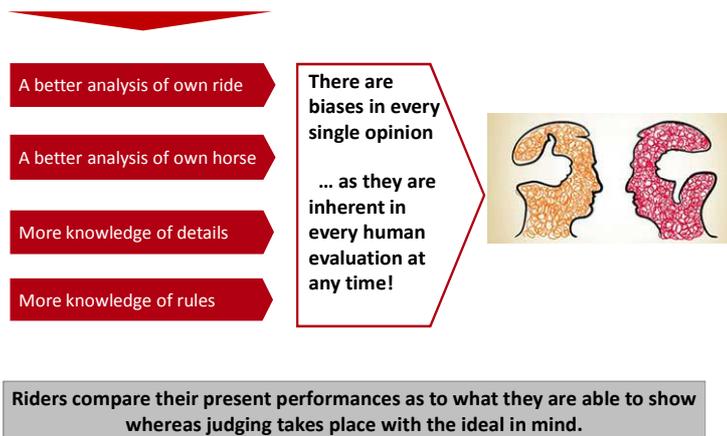deserve them.

All these kinds of biases are HUMAN elements and happen to all of us. E.g. also to spectators who leave the
arena for a coffee because they 'know' beforehand that the next three competitors will not be interesting …
However, it is part of the judges responsibility towards the athletes to reflect these biases and deal with
them the fairest possible way.

Patriotism bias: Totally unacceptable! Has nothing to do with psychological phenomena that are
common to all of us, but is a mere nationalistic attitude.

Anchoring effect is a cognitive bias for an individual to rely too heavily on an initial piece of informa-
tion offered (known as the 'anchor') when making decisions. E.g. after many high marks for parts of
a test, a judge has the feeling to penalize a resistance appropriately when going down to a 6 instead
of to a 3 or 4. Or a horse with nothing but 6 in the trot work might get maximum a 7 for a real good
walk pirouette instead of a higher mark. Judges should always be aware of this phenomena!

How Riders better assess their own performances?

A better analysis of own ride

A better analysis of own horse

More knowledge of details

More knowledge of rules

There are biases in every single opinion

… as they are inherent in every human evaluation at any time!

Riders compare their present performances as to what they are able to show whereas judging takes place with the ideal in mind.

Why is Communication often so difficult?

Riders often do not wish to talk to the judges
  … because in some countries it is not appreciated to address a judge
  … because they do not wish to risk being marked down the next time
  … because the trainer does not want it
  … because they are too frustrated and angry by the low marks they got

Judges often do not wish to talk to the riders
  … because they are insecure in regards to their own judging
  … because they do not know what to say
  … because they feel they have made a mistake and are afraid to be misunderstood when they explain it

Position of Stakeholders within our Sport:

Rider: Wants to win
                Sometimes monetary interest (horse selling)
                Should often show more ability to self criticism

Trainer: Often needs short term results
                Is under pressure of the owners
                Has often monetary interests

Judges: Dominant factor (by deciding the ranking) but also weakest link of the chain
                → in the centre of expectation of all other stakeholders:
                Riders/Trainers expect judges to give appropriate, possibly good marks
                Organizers want happy + satisfied riders, trainers, sponsors
                Media need interesting stories, see their task more in criticising judges than in plaudit

                Not always well enough trained - due to global spread of the sport, not all judges are
                trained on the same level

                The judge has to bear the biggest pressure in the whole group and his problem is:
                He does not have anyone else to blame.

What can be done to help our sport?

We all should try to keep the parties together, make them talk with each other

Trainers should strengthen the judges' authority (when possible)

If riders and trainers too often question the judgment of experienced judges, the whole sport is questioned.

And this gives food to parts of the public who want 'wrong sensations' and spread fake news about dressage.

What could be a Solution?

Facilitate mutual understanding between rider, trainer and judge

It should become a normal situation that riders, trainers and judges talk

→Enable discussions for riders who do not understand their marks

→Enable discussions for riders who have a valid reason to complain

→Establish a 'Kiss & Cry Corner'

→Rider + his trainer on one side, relevant judge accompanied by Foreign Judge or President of GJ should meet

→2 + 2 discussion with sheets and video material

→Judge has the obligation to explain his/her marks (Codex!)

→ Exchanging opinions can be a win-win situation for both sides

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