



Para-Equestrian

Para-Equestrian sport in both Dressage and Driving has been steadily developing for the past 25 years and is available and practiced by equestrians with a wide variety of disabilities. Indeed, PE Dressage has been a regular fixture at the Paralympic Games since 1996, while 2006 was host to the fifth Para-equestrian World Driving Championships. In the vein of creating opportunities for all people with disabilities to compete and achieve their goals in equestrian sport, athletes are classified according to the level of their disability/impairment so as to provide for meaningful competition. Para-Equestrian recently joined the ranks of the other 7 disciplines regulated by the FEI to become the 8th FEI discipline on 1 January 2006, with national and international competitions in both Dressage and Driving for individuals with a disability. A symbolic step forward, as this led to the FEI becoming the first International Federation to govern and regulate a sport for both able bodied and disabled athletes.

Some history

Para-equestrian sport is based on the principle that a disability should not impede one from competing and strives to provide and develop opportunities whereby athletes with disabilities can pursue their goals and achieve personal bests.

Dressage competitions for riders with disabilities started in Scandinavia and in Great Britain in the 1970s. In 1987, the first dressage World Championships were already being held in Sweden. As it often seems to be the case, exposure will lead to recognition, and in 1991, Para-equestrian sport was recognized by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). The IPC then appointed the International Paralympic Equestrian Committee (IPEC) to run competitions and develop equestrian sport for the disabled world-wide. This was done successfully followed by a first participation for PE Dressage at the Atlanta Paralympic Games in 1996. Para-equestrian Carriage Driving, also a world Championship sport, held its fifth world championships in September 2006.

In 2006, Para-equestrian moved from the International Paralympic Committee to the FEI, thus making Para-equestrian the eighth FEI discipline. The shift from the IPC to the FEI, the natural home for all equestrian sport, made the FEI the first International Federation to govern and regulate both a sport for able bodied and disabled athletes. Indeed, the FEI strives to foster the growth and excellence of international equestrian sport for all athletes.

Competition Venue

All rules and regulations with regards to competition venues and organization are governed by the same principles as are the other disciplines and thus refer to the General Regulations, the Statutes and the relevant discipline Rules. On top of these, the Generic Rules for Para-equestrian events lay out the specifications revolving around the organization of Para-equestrian events.

Rules for Para-equestrian dressage events and a supplement for Para-equestrian driving events are now

available on the FEI website, effective as of January 2006.

Classification

Before any Para Equestrian competitor can be eligible to compete at an international event, he or she must be assessed by PE accredited classifiers and must have been assigned to a Grade. All equestrian competitors should be classified within six to twelve months before competing. Once a rider's Profile and Grade are assigned, no change may be made to their classification unless there are significant changes in their impairment.

Amongst competitors with disabilities, there are many different types of impairments. To provide meaningful competition for such competitors it is necessary that competitors with similar levels of impairment can compete together. The "Profile System" fulfils this criterion. The system is used for classifying all FEI Para Equestrian competitors. The classification of impairment into easily recognised categories, and the grouping of these categories into Grades for competition facilitates this aim and ensures fair competition. The system for classification of impairment is simple and flexible enough to apply to all impairments. It is designed specifically for equestrian sport and is easily applicable to the rider or carriage driver.

The competitor's mobility, strength and coordination are assessed in order to establish their Profile. People with Profiles of similar functional ability level are grouped into four competition Grades. The competition test for each Grade is compatible with the functional ability of people with the same potential. All competitors with a disability who intend to enter national or international competitions must produce a certificate that states their full medical diagnosis.

There are five Grades for dressage and two for carriage driving. They range from Grade Ia for the most severely impaired dressage riders, to Grade IV for the least impaired. The competition within each

Grade can then be judged on the skill of that competitor on that horse regardless of the competitor's disability.

Classification is carried out either by an I.P.E.C. or NDSA accredited physical therapist or medical doctor, with knowledge of the Profile system. However, classification for visually impaired or blind riders must be carried out by an ophthalmologist or optical doctor; and by a psychologist for riders with mental impairment. (Please note that under current I.P.C. sanctions, riders with mental impairment may not qualify for international competition, see I.P.C. website at www.paralympics.org for more info).

The competitor will be given a copy of the assessment card. An IPEC-ID Card will be sent to the competitor. On this IPEC-ID Card is printed the Profile of Functional Ability, the Grade and the compensating aids allowed for that competitor to participate in Para Equestrian Competitions. If a compensating aid is outside the standard aids listed in the classification manual, a photograph of the aid may be attached to the IPEC-ID Card.

No competitor shall be permitted to compete wearing or using any prostheses or special equipment that has not been included in the classification procedure.

For more information on classification procedures, please refer to the Classification Manual, Equestrian Competition for Riders with Disabilities, First Edition January 2007 available on the FEI website at www.Horsesport.org

Equipment

All competitors must wear appropriate equipment and as stipulated in the classification manual, are only permitted the use of special equipment when this has been formally documented and approved.

Major Competitions

Dressage is the only Equestrian discipline that is included in the Paralympic Games. The Paralympic Games are the second largest sporting event in the world after the Olympic Games and are contested immediately after the Olympics in the same city and venues.

World Championships – PE Driving

The future

Given the very young nature of Para Equestrian, there are many achievements to date which mark a new beginning and new era in equestrian sport and Para Equestrian. Among these achievements are:

- First year of FEI management for the FEI's 8th Discipline
- Full integration of IPC officials into FEI officials' listings
- First FEI Para-Equestrian World Driving Championships held in Holland and a venue for 2008 is already set!
- First ever Combined FEI Dressage and Para Dressage competition held in Moorsele (BEL) and Sydney (AUS)
- For the first time ever, the 2010 World Equestrian Games will include Para Equestrian

events in Dressage and Driving. This is also the first time that all the FEI disciplines will be held in the same venue and during the same period.