

## Setting the scene

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## Abstract

The challenge presented by the predicted climate in Hong Kong during the Olympic Games is well recognised. It has been scrutinized over the last 3 years to assess the problems presented to the performance horse. Virtual and test events have been successfully run and the competing horses carefully monitored. The results of work performed by the leading world experts in their field have been collated and will be discussed in detail. The object is to ensure best practice and to produce a successful Games.

## Introduction

This is the seventh Olympiad that I have been involved with and the excitement created never diminishes. When the Games were awarded to Beijing and Hong Kong was chosen as the Equestrian sports venue, the process of preparation began.

Every Olympic venue presents its own challenge for every sport. In Los Angeles we had concerns about smog and air quality, Seoul had climate and venue challenges, Barcelona had a storm that blew the fences down, Atlanta had heat and humidity problems, Sydney had long distance travel and quarantine issues, and Athens had air pollution and heat issues. Each venue has presented different challenges which we have analysed and dealt with successfully.

## The veterinary challenges in Hong Kong

The assessment of the Veterinary challenges presented fall into similar categories for each venue:

### *Export/Import issues and local disease status*

Dr Keith Watkins, Hong Kong Jockey Club, will tell you about the work done to facilitate the Export/Import of our horses and still protect the racehorse population in Hong Kong. He will discuss how the recent influenza outbreaks in Australia and Japan have resulted in changes in the protocol.

### *Transport issues*

Martin Atock will explain the arrangements for transporting the horses. At the test event this was the slickest transport of horses that I have seen and I have flown horses to major events on more than 60 occasions over 27 years.

### *Facilities*

Dr Chris Riggs, Hong Kong Jockey Club, and Head of Veterinary Services for the Olympics, will take you through an overview of the fantastic facilities that have been built for the 2008 Games.

### *Climate*

For competition in Hong Kong the major issues of concern for horses to be able to compete safely and to have good competition are the climate, heat, humidity and air quality.

The Veterinary Delegate to the 2008 Olympic Games, Professor Leo Jeffcott, instigated a review of the climatic challenge in 2005 and since that time has put a great deal of time and thought into the preparation for the Games. He has made many venue visits which have included virtual events, and the test event. His reports have been of huge value to all involved and we owe him a great debt. He will discuss the results of this lengthy project. His conclusions are of paramount importance to the success of the Games.

### **Good Luck Beijing - Hong Kong SAR 10th Anniversary Cup, August 2007**

Gratitude is expressed to the Organising Committee for running a very meaningful event. Not just to allow systems to be checked out and for Professor Jeffcott to run his high technology weather station, but for us to monitor horses competing in the prevailing climate. I felt that there was a huge advantage to pooling the information gained to produce best practice advice for all competing this year at the Games.

The FEI funded Dr David Marlin's monitoring of the environment and air quality in the working areas, to produce essential background information required for relevance assessment of the information obtained from the monitoring of the horses competing. The FEI and the HKJC provided funding for blood sample analysis. I am grateful to the long sighted Federations who pooled their information, thereby enabling Dr Catherine Kohn to analyse and produce general advice for the welfare and performance of all horses competing. This was not a research project and much of the individual information required careful interpretation, as the protocols used varied.

I am personally grateful to the Federations which participated for their support. I am well aware of the cost of sending horses and personnel to the test event and applaud their unselfish attitude to this project for the good of all. With so few horses per nation, I hoped this approach would show valuable trends.

### **Competition environment**

The Director of the FEI Veterinary Department, Dr Frits Sluyter, Director of the Olympic and Eventing Departments, Catrin Norinder, Professor Jeffcott and I have had very close contact with the Organising Committee, the Olympic Equestrian Company, the Hong Kong Jockey Club and the transporters, Peden Bloodstock. This communication has helped to refine issues of transport, quarantine, competition schedules, facilities, and specialist issues e.g. cooling, etc. In my opinion this has produced the best competition environment for the horses. I think that the horses are better catered for than the riders! I am sure that Mr Lam, CEO of the Olympic Equestrian Company, will put these matters into perspective in his presentation.

### **Conclusions**

What I hope to achieve today is a continuation of this good will and debate. I hope this will produce a consensus of '*best practice*' for competing in hot and humid conditions.

It has been one of my prime objectives during my short time as Chairman of the Veterinary Committee to increase debate and information flow. I hope today will help to achieve this.

I am particularly grateful to the Veterinary Department Drs Frits Sluyter, Lies De Backer and particularly to Alex Atock, Secretary FEI for their hard work in organising the meeting.

We owe a dept of gratitude to the sponsors of this meeting - **Peden Bloodstock and the International League Protection of Horses**, with whom we have worked closely over a number of years. I would like to thank Dr Andrew Higgins for driving the initiative and coordinating the day.

Finally, we would like to thank our President and Olympian, HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, for her support of this project.