

**LEGAL NOTICE :**

*The facts recounted in the report below are provided in their entirety with the intent to inform all interested parties in a comprehensive and transparent manner. As a result, none of them should be quoted or referred to out of context without reference to any others which may reasonably be deemed necessary for a full understanding of the matter.*

## **BEIJING OLYMPIC GAMES EVENTING COMPETITION**

### **The Alteration to Fence 18**

1. There has been comment and rumour surrounding the cosmetic alteration to Fence 18 during the afternoon preceding the cross-country competition. This paper sets out the facts as they were observed or are known to the author.
2. The background circumstances include many aspects of eventing's present overriding concern with the safety of its competition. The incidence of fatalities and severe injuries incurred while riding cross-country has attracted international media attention. Eventing was under strong threat of exclusion from the Olympic Games before safety became a recognized issue. The injury list has intensified this particular pressure, so much so that simply not experiencing a death or severe injury is not enough, the discipline must show by its practices and procedures that it has done everything possible not only to produce a safe competition but also to have taken every precaution regardless of whether injury is a high degree of risk at any particular fence or not. And, of course, there is the very human element of requiring so far as practicable that every competitor not only experiences a good and safe competition but returns fit and well with the equine athletes in like condition, after experiencing a satisfying competition presented without any unnecessary peril.
3. The course was presented by the designer to the TDs and ground jury, approved, and then opened to the chefs and athletes who thereafter walked it and as is usual made their various comments. This is invariable procedure, and the TDs and GJ expect to receive comments and requests from chefs and athletes and to decide whether to make alterations. Four or five alterations were made on this basis to the course after it was opened.
4. In the afternoon preceding the competition the designer escorted the President, the two Vice-Presidents, the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of Sport (designate), the Director of Communications (Interim) and their party around the course. The course was explained with comments, appreciation and no suggestion of real concern until Fence 18 was reached.
5. Before the course had been opened, Fence 18 had been intensively discussed by the TDs with the designer and an alteration had been made (including placing a wooden

cobra in the line between A and B); contrary to the designer's intentions. However, the President's party concentrated on the size and locations of the boulders strewn under and in front of the approach to A and the line of boulders to the right of the rider's likely line between A and B.

6. The President, supported by her officials, suggested that the boulders in front of the fence presented a potential safety issue to a rider who might deviate from the lines on either side of the boulders and not make it over A. The boulders were not necessary to the purpose of the fence; they were there to direct athletes to either end of element A and not to attempt the centre. It was further suggested that a fall at A could bring a rider perilously close to the nearest boulder on the landing side of the element.

7. The designer said that the fence had been approved by the TD and GJ and there had been no complaint to them by any chef or rider. It was mentioned that there had been expressions of concern to the President. The designer, after a short discussion, said that he was prepared to agree to disagree and he immediately and without suggesting involvement of the TD or GJ gave telephoned directions that a crew was to remove the boulders and substitute foliage or other available material. The ED Sport telephoned the TD to tell him what was happening. The party then moved on down the course.

8. The TD arrived at the fence some time later to find the boulders gone and the replacement foliage on site. The alteration went further than that contemplated by the President; two boulders had been removed from the landing side.

9. There has never been any suggestion that the alteration affected the riding of the fence. At the evening chefs' meeting the TD noted the alteration and recommended that any rider who had not seen it should do so to avoid being faced by a differently appearing fence.

10. It would clearly have been preferable for the TD and GJ to have been involved not only in the matter of removal of the boulders but also of the selection and placing of the substitute material. The reason was of course the shortness of time and the need to make such an alteration as soon as possible so that the athletes had the best chance of seeing it.

11. There was no desire whatever to override experienced officials or to substitute uninformed judgment for theirs. The time issue is clear. Also important is that the officials, chefs and athletes made their assessments from the point of view of participation in the competition. For most, but not all, of them there was no problem. But from the different point of view of the President's perspective there was a clear problem of perception of unnecessary risk which could have manifested itself whether or not there was a mishap at that fence.

12. In those circumstances it was the duty of the President to make the point clear. It is unfortunate that the occasion, which, again, did not affect the riding of the fence, should have taken on such proportions. This was a literally wonderful competition which

has brought enormous credit to the sport and to the skills and planning brought to the Olympic Games by all involved.

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