

**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 OLYMPICS EVENTING COMPETITION**

### **The Course Dimensions**

On the morning of Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> August, before the competition started, the President asked me to look into the events involving the decision to shorten the course and the timing of its announcement. I have talked with those most concerned and I do not think there is any issue as to the facts. I do not express any opinion; there will be as many views as those who express them. The following, to the best of my knowledge, are the facts for those who want to make an opinion on them.

1. The Event Schedule provided for a course not longer than 5700 metres.
2. At the initial briefing in Hong Kong the TD (Guiseppe della Chiesa) announced that the course was of 4650 metres with 29 fences involving 39 jumping efforts and a time of 8 minutes. The time is a mathematical calculation of distance and speed, the reduction from 10 to 8 minutes indicates a shorter distance but not the number of obstacles nor the degree of difficulty of the course. A number of chefs and athletes said then and have been saying since that this decision should have been made known when it was made; not as late as the opening of the competition.
3. Although the timing of the announcement has been criticised, there is general consensus that the course as presented was right for the occasion both as to distance and difficulty. There will never be universal agreement, but the proof lay in the excellent sport on the day, when all the horses and athletes started and finished fit and well with an exciting and challenging ride that catered for all the skill levels presented at the Olympic Games.
4. There had been a very long build-up (over 2 years) accompanied by much stress and trepidation. This was also the case in earlier editions of the Games, notably Atlanta and Athens. But the climatic variability of Hong Kong with risks of high temperatures, very high humidity and typhoons made the stress greater than ever before. It was clear from the outset that much would depend on the skills of the athletes and the fitness of both horses and athletes.

5. The test event in August 2007 tended to confirm the concerns of those responsible, in particular of the TD. The competition was conducted over a shorter and easier track than the Olympic one. The conditions included high but not extreme temperatures, pouring rain and some soft going. Some horses completed the course in difficulties. The D box arrangements were not up to the conditions.

6. The concerns were further intensified at the European Eventing Championships at Pratoni (ITA) in September. This was a strong 3\* competition conducted in good (warm) conditions. It was clear that too many horses were not properly fit and not adequately prepared.

7. Against that background the TD began to consider shortening the HK course. The priority was to have a good competition not beyond the capabilities of the horses and athletes in the state of preparation which they would actually achieve for HK. Given all that was being said on the subject, the test event and the Euro championships did not give confidence that there would in every case be adequate preparation.

8. After discussion with the course designer (Michael Etherington-Smith), who was planning a full-length course, and the vet commission, the TD came to the conclusion that the success of the competition required a reduced scale of cross-country. There were many factors, including taking account of the criticisms of the Athens course as too easy. Those aware of this decision, (Feb/March 2008) were the TD himself, the Assistant TD, the course designer and the responsible members of the vet commission and the eventing department.

9. The TD had real concern about announcing this decision. The obvious supporting body, the eventing TC, which could have an expectation (but no right under the rules) of being involved, was ruled out because its membership included two national trainers. The issue therefore was whether to inform all the eventing NFs or none of them.

10. No-one was informed. The possibility of a secret leak cannot be ruled out but there is no evidence that anyone outside the inner group was aware and the reactions of the chefs at the opening meeting support that it was news to all. I note that the GBR chef is specific to me that before the meeting he did not know.

11. The initial reaction at the meeting was in some cases one of disappointment, and this accounts for some of the initial concerns from those who felt that the competition had become a sort of CIC designed for ease of getting everyone through. This mistaken concept was cleared up immediately the course was walked when its true difficulty and the degree of technical skill required to complete it was appreciated. That produced the usual variations of pre-competition comment – very technical, not enough long gallops etc; but an overwhelming acceptance that this was a right course for the conditions and the competition. There will never be one course accepted in full by everybody; this one had very good general acceptance and that assessment was proved in the competition.

12. On the day everyone excelled themselves. The athletes and horses were fit and well prepared. The competition throughout was very good; those who said it would not be decided by dressage scores were quite right. The vets pronounced the horse recovery rate exceptionally good in the light of their expectations. Neither horse nor rider was significantly affected. Even the weather was as ideal as could have been reasonably hoped for.

13. There was no concept of hiding information for the sake of doing so. The TDs made careful consideration of the effects of telling and not telling beforehand (of course, the exact dimensions of any course are not known until the GJ has walked and wheeled it). The decision not to tell was based on the TDs view of what was in the best interests of securing a successful competition and of the good of the sport.

14. There remain different opinions. I would expect every chef and trainer on learning the detail to prefer to have had the information earlier, and to say so quite forcibly.

15. There is a view that for some it affected the preparation and even selection, those are considerations of which the TD was well aware. The best answer is that it was the same for everybody; it has not been suggested to me that any result would have been altered.

16. The reaction on this occasion shows that the issue of transparency is very important. There would have been no complaints (at least of the present nature) if all had been informed earlier. On this occasion the interests of the sport were placed ahead of detailed preparation of the athletes. The light of hindsight shows that on this occasion the competitors rose above the concerns, not to say the fears, of the organizers. That is what is known now, not in the period February – August 2008.

15<sup>th</sup> August 2008

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