

Minutes of the 1st FEI Freestyle Forum in Ankum (GER), February 1-2, 2005

by Katrina Wüst

On the first days of February 2005 a dream came true for FEI Dressage Chairman Mariette **Withages**: the 1st FEI Freestyle Forum took place, a "get together" of experts from all over the world: Top riders, trainers and judges, organizers, choreographers and composers, TV-broadcasters and a most knowledgeable and dressage loving auditorium - about 140 people from more than 20 nations, led through the discussions by TV-Presenter Carsten **Sostmeier** in a highly eloquent and competent manner.

Ulli **Kasselmann**, well known for being very experienced in organizing extraordinary events, has again satisfied every imaginable wish and turned the Forum into a perfect example of German hospitality which culminated in a reception of the Mayor of Osnabrück and an excellent official dinner afterwards.

Mariette Withages opened the Forum by welcoming everybody and expressing her gratitude to Ulli Kasselmann and his PSI-Organizing Team. She then gave a brief historical summary of freestyle, starting at its roots about 500 b.C., then mentioning the Horse Ballet during the time of Baroque and finally leading up to our days, when the "Kür" gave a new dimension to dressage, keeping it from becoming boring by making the audiences go wild.

Christoph **Hess**, the representative of the German NF, pointed out the importance of discussing the different aspects of freestyle tests and bringing different views and visions together. He furthermore expressed his wish to have more such Forums in the future.

Next to speak was Olympic judge Dr. Volker **Moritz** who gave a lecture about FEI Regulations for Freestyle in general:

He talked about creative freedom making it possible for the rider to emphasize the special advantages of his horse in accordance with the music, but: **"the correct schooling of the horse and the skill of the rider remain the relevant criteria."**

Dr. Moritz pointed out that the five artistic marks are more or less depending on the quality of the technical execution and explained how to find them:

Rhythm, energy and elasticity being a combination of the first two collective marks, harmony including the criteria of the 3rd and 4th collective mark of a standard dressage test.

An attractive choreography should be characterized by originality and may contain surprising moments without being overloaded or exaggerated. Important:

- well-combined movements, performed in a clearly defineable way
- imaginative lines, not too similar to the standard tests
- use of the arena as a whole
- dramatic structure

The mark for the degree of difficulty depends

a) on the fulfilment of the movements required. The rider can increase the degree of difficulty by:

- Appropriate repetition of single exercises
- Exceeding parts of the exercises (e.g. changes, piaffe steps...) without exaggeration
- Executing movements on difficult lines
- Clearly defined combinations of movements
- Demanding and difficult transitions
- Movements with the reins in one hand (maximum of four)

b) on the calculated risk. → Lack of quality in the execution of a freestyle test leads to deductions in the scoring.

Music as the most important artistic element is often found to be the most subjective aspect; nevertheless a good freestyle music has to satisfy objective criteria:

- The rhythm has to match the different gaits, movements and transitions
- A perfect correspondence of choreography and music is desired; the music should be congruent to the "weightiness" of the movements
- It is impressive, if crucial movements are related to their own musical themes
- The type of music should fit to the appearance of the rider/horse combination
- Background music without structure lacks imagination
- The choice of music is up to the rider. It is recommended to stay within one "genre"
- Dominant vocals are not appreciated
- Suitable entry music can give a good 1st impression and makes the competitor sure that the audio system is working properly
- The music should be structured up to the final salute, no endlessly continuing samples

All these criteria and recommendations will be found in the new FEI-Handbook, published at the end of this year. Furthermore, Dr. Moritz emphasized some FEI Freestyle-Rules:

- **A start in a Freestyle may only be granted, if at least 55% of the points had been achieved in the qualifying test.**
- **A rider must enter the arena within 20 seconds of the music starting. Exceeding 20 seconds will entail elimination.**
- **Under penalty of elimination, a rider's hat may not be removed, except for the halt at the first and final salute.**
- **In case of equality of points, the higher artistic mark determines the better placing.**

Dr. Moritz also explained the requirements for Freestyles, ranging from the Juniors'- up to the GP-level as well as the new FEI-Rules. They will be summarized at the end of these Minutes in "Conclusions/ Rules".

"Taste is not the thing we have to judge" (Stefan Krawczyk)

The well known choreographer described vividly the development of Freestyle music from the early 1970ies up to the present day with well created choreographies and perfectly matching music. He underlined that the music has to fit to the horse-rider combination, no matter if it is pop, classic or country music and if it meets the judges' taste.

Though an interpretation of the music by the rider is desired, it normally works the other way round: The music is composed matching the choreography designed beforehand.

Krawczyk pointed out that it is nevertheless very difficult for the competitors to show a good Freestyle test because their riding has to be more accurate than in a standard test due to the exact timing of the music which does not allow any delays. This aspect was clearly demonstrated by showing a video of German team rider Hubertus **Schmidt** with 'Wansuela Suerte' in a Kür.

Practical Demonstrations:

Embedded into the lectures were two practical demonstrations, of which the first one was showing extracts on lower levels: Sanneke **Rothenberger** and her pony "Domino Dancing", well presented by German National Pony-Trainer Conny **Endres**. Tom **Berg** and Lukas **Fischer** executed movements on Junior-Level, Stefan **Köberle** and EC medalist Benjamin **Werndl** on Young Riders' level, all four presented by Holger **Schmezer**, German National Trainer.

The second part contained freestyle elements on Grand Prix Level with some very impressive highlights: Ann Kathrin **Linsenhoff** showing her most talented up-and-coming-horse 'Sterntaler-Unicef' and Louise **Nathorst** presenting 'Guinness' in an excellent condition. Top-Trainer Jan **Bemelmans** and Olympic Medalwinner Raffael **Soto**

made the Spanish riders **Mena** and **Rambla** demonstrate the highest collection of the Andalusian stallions and Fie **Skarsoe** from Denmark captivated the public with 'Monteverdi', the brilliant black son of 'Partout'.

"Try to listen with your eyes!"

The audience reacted with great enthusiasm to the presentation of the "Creative-Duo" Krawczyk/

Schulze-Rückkamp who underlined Monteverdi's three basic gaits musically with themes from classical-, musical style-, or soft pop music. While Hendrik Schulze-Rückkamp was slowing down and speeding up the music on the mixing desk, Stefan Krawczyk encouraged the spectators to 'listen with their eyes' and sharpen their senses for the accordance of music, gaits and the type of horse.

The "Board of Experts" answered to many questions

Many questions arose during these demonstrations, all of them having been answered in an open discussion by the "Board of Experts": Chairman Mariette **Withages** and Jan **Bemelmans**, Stephen **Clarke**, David **Hunt**, Heike **Kemmer**, Victor **Kerkhof**, Jürgen **Koschel**, Stefan **Krawczyk**, Ann Kathrin **Linsenhoff**, Johannes **Madaus-Brück**, Bernard **Maurel**, Dr. Volker **Moritz**, Dr. Dieter **Schüle**, Hubert **Schulze Hobeling**, Cees **Slings**, and Monica **Theodorescu**. Some questions have been answered as "Recommendations/ Information" for riders, trainers and judges, others as "Solutions/Rules", summed up at the end of these Minutes.

Questions and Answers → Recommendations/ Information:

Questions on Choreography:

- Steepness of the angle in half passes? → no restrictions, but the half pass should be executed with lightness and - as Mariette Withages emphasized - with **ease**. If the rider is overasking the horse's possibilities, the marks for the half pass itself but also for choreography and the degree of difficulty will go down.
- Walk pirouettes to both sides? → no rule up to now, but recommended to both sides to demonstrate the suppleness and "throughness" of the horse on both reins.
- What is a "sequence" of flying changes? → a series of 4 or less changes.
- Is the mark for a double pirouette scored out of the average of two marks for each single pirouette? → no, the weaker pirouette influences the scoring for the whole movement.
- Are 3 pirouettes allowed with some straight canter strides in between? → yes, but not recommended if all 3 pirouettes go into the same direction.
- Is a development from easier to more difficult movements desired? → Riders should present their "Business Card", that means create a super impression at the beginning, then go on with some more relaxed parts and get to an impressive finish.

Questions on Degree of Difficulty:

- How to find out the right degree of difficulty? → in the words of Stephen Clarke as a general statement:
"If a rider attempts something difficult and it works => high marks; if it is bad => low marks."
- 'Zig-zags' in trot? → raise the degree of difficulty if well performed to both sides.
- Degree of difficulty in 1 tempo changes? → Only 9 changes, shown once => rather low; 15 => normal;
- 19 => higher degree. Depending on the quality of execution!
- Changes on circle-line or serpentine? → high degree of difficulty.
- Direct transition from 2times changes to 1times on circle-line? → very high degree of difficulty.

- Exceeding parts of movements (e.g. changes/piaffe steps ...) → no limit, but if the quality goes down, if the horse gets laboured => lower marks for the movement itself, and for choreography and degree of difficulty.
- Reins in one hand + mistake? → lower marks for the movement itself and for the degree of difficulty.
- How difficult should a freestyle be for a rather unexperienced (Grand Prix) horse? → different opinions:
 - a) Not too easy, otherwise the rider needs a new freestyle the following year.
 - b) Easy, to give the horse confidence in the arena.

Questions on Music:

- Vocals accepted? → Yes, if they don't disturb, but add an accent to the performance.
- Transitions of pace not fitting in with musical transitions? → lower mark for the music.
- Music consisting of one theme? → Controversial discussion:
 - a) Difficult to recognize, important that the music is of the same type/genre and completely fits to all gaits, movements and to the appearance of horse/rider.
 - b) There must be a "Red Line" within the music, music chosen out of one theme (e.g. film music) can be an extra.
- Should we have an extra music expert judge the music? → Stephen Clarke: **"The artistic side has to be judged by people with high technical knowledge, and if we judges can't recognize the rhythm, should we be judging at all?"**

Miscellaneous:

- Should not a tie be broken by the higher technical mark - dressage is a sport first? → The tie is broken by the artistic marks, because freestyle is an artistic performance.
- When will the New Rules apply? → New FEI Rules since January 1st 2005, New Guidelines soon, Handbook at the end of this year.

Discussions:

There has been a long discussion about elimination. Mariette Withages pointed out that elimination might lead to a lot of difficulties, especially if the freestyle performance is broadcasted on TV. So the Dressage Committee tries hard to find a way to penalize without eliminating. One logical system for everything has to be found.

→ See: "Solutions/Rules"

Another important discussion was about canter pirouettes within two half-passes or coming from/leading to

e.g. either halt, walk or piaffe, which means: no pirouette as described in the rules.

How are they marked? Are there any deductions from the mark? What to do in case a mistake occurs in the pirouette? → See: "Solutions/Rules"

The same discussion was on piaffe pirouettes and passage half-passes. → See: "Solutions/Rules"

"Too many rules cannot be the way to permanent success" (Daniel Weiss)

Daniel **Weiss**, former German Champion in ice-skating gave a fascinating lecture of his sport. Iceskaters, like dressage riders, have to put a lot of effort into making their performances perfect. This happens with the help of a team of choreographers, musicians and trainers for dance as well as for fitness.

On the other hand Weiss came up with some clear criticism towards the officials of ice-skating who try to

regulate the competitors' phantasy and thus limit their creativity. Many of the combinations, still allowed some

years ago, are banned nowadays. "This cannot be the way to permanent success".

Freestyle Music - unlimited possibilities

Cees **Slings** and Victor **Kerkhoff** captivated the audience by introducing a state-of-the-art music maker programme for professionals. Having been Anky van Grunsven's

composers for many years, they demonstrated how to find fitting music for the gaits of the horse and the charisma of the rider. Their technical possibilities ranged from a great orchestra to a synthesizer where they could produce a huge variety of sounds and timbres. They even found a way of compensating the noise of the disturbing wind in Athens by using a special horn.

Dressage as a media-event?

Hubert **Schulze-Hobeling**, TV-expert, analysed very thoroughly the problems of dressage sport on TV:

Dressage is an insider sport, not understood by a lot of people. Besides, there is a "mysterious group of five", sitting around the arena, and what they do is also not always understandable to the spectators ...

Schulze-Hobeling made a lot of proposals how to win more people for dressage:

- Open scoring on TV; running score to point out where the rider gains/loses points
- Parallel rides to show the differences by comparison
- Explanation of single movements by the commentator, telling the spectators where to look at
- Good co-commentators, possibly riders coming from the sport themselves who can explain precisely the highlights and difficulties
- Riders should become more open, not always talk nicely about their own rides
- No mysteries about horses anymore as it used to be in the past
- Judges should be more open in interviews and explain their judging
- Journalists must be involved more and also be convinced how attractive dressage riding can be

"Judges are not a mystery" (Mariette Withages)

The Chairman defended the judges in her answer to Schulze-Hobeling's lecture, and pointed out that it has been them who fought for the open scoring, whereas the riders did not like it. Furthermore the whole judges' panel always attends the press conferences on big Championships. "It's hard to be more open than we are now" she stated.

Stephen Clarke underlined the necessity of excellent co-commentators and mentioned that there had been worldwide complaints about unexperienced TV commentators during the Olympic Games in Athens. (Except for Canada with Cara Witham commentating!)

The **final discussion** dealt with various items:

Dress for the rider? → Mariette Withages informed the auditorium about the idea of making dressage uniforms more attractive. The idea of national colours has been discussed without a final solution.

Bandages or not? → Stephen Clarke declared that there might be a big problem if a bandage comes loose within the test.

Not too many rules!

Volker Moritz emphasized that a Kür must always follow the classical way of riding and that it is against our horse sport if it comes too close to "circus".

The representatives of the riders demanded more freedom of creativity:

David Hunt: "Not too many rules!"

Monica Theodorescu: "Not too many restrictions!"

Uwe **Mechlem** pointed out that it should be allowed to show very difficult exercises and combinations of movements as long as they are performed effortlessly and with ease. If a judge has the impression that the horse is forced to do unnatural exercises, he must be very strict and penalize it with his marks, since the welfare of the horse is the 1st thing to look at.

Finally two most interesting days ended with Louise Nathorst, Jose Antonio Garcia Mena, Ignacio Rambla Algarin and Falk **Rosenbauer** presenting their complete Freestyle Tests as the last highlight.

At 3.30 p.m. Chairman Mariette Withages closed a highly successful Forum. The harmonious but also constructive struggle for good technical solutions was one part of it. Just as important was that everybody realized dressage has to be brought out of its "ivory tower" to make it more attractive to the media and thus to a broader audience.

The Final Impressions:

"Brilliant two days, we got to the bottom." (David Hunt)

"Very important to find out the Do's & Don't's in Freestyle." (Heike Kemmer)

"No differences between judges and choreographers." (Stefan Krawczyk)

"Situations like this bring our sport forwards." (Stephen Clarke)

And Mariette Withages herself: "I'm a happy chairman!"

Solutions and Rules - some of them still under discussion

- If a rider **deliberately** shows a compulsory movement clearly **above the requirements**, he will receive a 0 for the whole movement (**regardless of any other correct execution**). The scores for the choreography **as well as** for the degree of difficulty cannot be higher than 5.
- If a rider **deliberately** shows a compulsory movement clearly **below the requirements without showing it correctly at least once** (e.g. half instead of full pirouette, too few flying changes in a series), he will receive an 'unsufficient' as a maximum for the whole movement. The scores for the choreography **as well as** for the degree of difficulty cannot be higher than 5.
- If any movements, **not mentioned in the test sheet** for the class as compulsory movements, are **deliberately** shown, the competitor will be eliminated (e.g. airs above the ground, piaffe in a junior freestyle...). Exception: Renvers, travers are allowed, additionally, as part of the choreography, but without receiving a technical mark.
- **Walk**: Each walk has to be shown at least 20 m on one track (=> on straight or curved lines). If it is **only** performed as a lateral movement, it is considered as not being shown = 0, and the scores for the choreography **as well as** for the degree of difficulty cannot be higher than 5.
- **Steepness of half-passes**: The angles of half-passes are left to the riders' discretion. If the half-passes are shown correctly and with ease, a steeper angle might heighten the degree of difficulty; if not executed with ease the marks for harmony **as well as** for the degree of difficulty will be also lowered.
- **Canter pirouettes**: In order to obtain a high technical score, half/ full canter pirouettes must be shown from a straight line to a straight line, in collected canter. They may be shown from/to half-passes. However if half/ full pirouettes are shown **only** from/to half-passes, the score for the pirouette will be insufficient, and the marks for choreography **as well as** for the degree of difficulty will also be lowered.
- Canter pirouettes performed from/ into e.g. halt, walk or piaffe are not regarded as pirouettes and will therefore only be scored in the harmony and choreography sections.

- **Piaffe:** In order to obtain a high technical score, the piaffe must be shown as a minimum of 10 steps on a straight line. Piaffe pirouettes are allowed. If they are shown **in addition** to a correctly performed piaffe (10 steps straight) they will be technically scored as piaffe. If the piaffe is **only** shown in a pirouette, it will be technically scored as 'not sufficient' and the marks for choreography **as well as** for the degree of difficulty will also be lowered.
- **Passage:** In order to obtain a high technical score, passage must be shown as a minimum of 20 m on a straight or curved line. Passage can also be shown in a half-pass. If this is shown **in addition** to a correctly executed passage (20 m on one

track) it will be technically scored as passage. If the passage is **only** shown in a half-pass, it will be technically scored as 'not sufficient' and the marks for choreography **as well as** for the degree of difficulty will also be lowered.

Level of Freestyle:	Movements allowed in addition to test sheet	Movements not allowed	If shown deliberately:
Pony Freestyle	Renvers, Travers 'Zig-zags' in trot	More than half (=180°) pirouettes in walk	→ Final mark for the pirouette = 0, regardless of any other correctly executed pirouettes; choreogr. + degree of difficulty max. 5
Junior Freestyle	Renvers, Travers 'Zig-zags' in trot, one counter change of hand in canter, Flying changes every 5 or more strides	Walk pir. > 180° More than one change of direction in canter half-passes Flying changes shown in sequence (every 4 strides or less)	→ as above → Final mark for half passes left + right = 0, regardless of correctly shown individual half-passes; choreography + degree of diff. max 5 → Final mark for all flying changes = 0, regardless of any other single flying changes shown correctly; chor. + degree of diff. max 5
Young Rider Freestyle	Renvers, Travers, 'Zig-zags' in trot and canter	More than half (=180°) pirouettes in canter	→ Final mark for the pir. to the corresponding side = 0, regardless of any other correctly executed pir. to this side; choreogr. + degree of diff. max

		Flying changes shown in sequences of two time or one time	5 → Final mark for all flying changes = 0, regardless of any other correctly shown 4 time or 3 time changes; chor. + degree of diff. max 5
Intermédiaire I Freestyle	Renvers, Travers, 'Zig-zags' in trot and canter	More than single (= 360°) pirouettes in canter Flying changes shown in sequence at every stride	→ Final mark for the pir. to the corresponding side = 0, regardless of any other correctly executed pir. to this side; choreogr. + degree of diff. max 5 → Final mark for all flying changes = 0, regardless of any other correctly shown 3 time or 2 time changes; chor. + degree of diff. max 5
Grand Prix Freestyle	Renvers, Travers, 'Zig-zags' in trot and canter Piaffe-pirouettes, Half-passes in Passage	More than double pirouettes in canter (= more than two pirouettes of 360° each in one continuous movement)	→ Final mark for the pir. to the corresponding side = 0, regardless of any other correctly executed pir. to this side; choreogr. + degree of diff. max 5