



at the heart of horse sport

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Speech by the FEI President

“Where the land ends, and the sea begins.” is how a great Portuguese Poet from the 16th Century, Luís de Camões described this country. He referred of course to the fact that Portugal is a country on the very edge of Europe. But at that point in history as he looked out to sea, he was looking into the unknown as much that lay on far shores remained undiscovered and unconquered.

The challenge of his musings was taken up by visionary Portuguese pioneers who were willing to conquer what lay ahead of them and by doing so created the earliest and most long lived global empires. But these were not mere bold adventurers; they were thinkers who traveled in the name of science and exploration. The creation of Astrolabes and cartography made it possible for science, reason, and logic to team up with ambition and vision, to conquer half the world.

And so I find it an ironic parallel that we are here, now, today, at this point in the FEI’s history. By voting on the Statutes and General Regulations you have just proved that you are willing to stand on the shore and look out with vision across the sea to new challenges. There is so much goodwill in this room, so much knowledge, and such a sense of purpose. And although it may sometimes seem that we are looking out across unfamiliar waters, in so many ways, they are not unknown. We seek to navigate our future in an evolving sports industry, and in passing the new statutes you have empowered your FEI to take the well thought out steps towards our future. The future that you have asked of us. This is what that General Assembly, indeed this FEI is about, where the land ends and the sea begins.

Your Royal Highnesses, Ladies and Gentleman: this is your FEI. And each and every one of you here has given me, in the last year, more strength, energy, and pride than I ever thought possible. The National Federations have walked this road beside me, many times holding my hand, while it seemed in the beginning that I promised to hold yours. I have never been so grateful for so many friends, and kind listeners and advisors. As a result, some of what I will tell you is not new, or original, because they are your ideas, your wishes, and your inspiration that have given us the motivation.

The question that I asked last year was how the National Federations defined the FEI? The fact is that you are our gateway, no matter what your level or size. You, the NFs are the face of the FEI, in every country, to every competitor, and to our public. You are not just a voice that needs or should be heard by the FEI, you are the FEI, you are its very fabric. To this end FEI Headquarters has introduced some of the tools to enable you to vocalize yourselves more clearly, through the introduction of IT links, which includes the National Federation designated area on our website, and our National Federation liaison officer.

Nine years ago the FEI instigated the modernisation process. Now there is no separate “modernisation” process; you have made it an endemic part of our constitution. Now there is only the goal of good governance. Through the passing of the new Statutes and Internal Regulations we have a framework for transparency and a road on which to move forward. You have approved the



shedding of some of the archaic phraseology that limited our ability to be proactive, and in so doing you have heralded a new era of better working practices that will make us more cost effective and more efficient. The Bureau has supported the Integrity in Sport movement, which will be the first step to a clean sport, a clean administration, and a clear future.

If we are to achieve a truly global sport, we must accept the responsibility that this brings in providing a level playing field for all our athletes and horses. Like all sports there are certain threats to our future, corruption is high on that agenda. Amidst the growing pains of our emerging organisation there are always matters which might seem easier to put aside to deal with another day and yet it is paramount to recognize that corruption in any form is morally wrong and it also endangers our credibility and reputation not only with the IOC and our commercial partners but also with those who we have vowed to protect. I do not propose to outline each of the areas that constitute corruption but let me send out a very clear message on one particular area and that is that paying for wild cards or seeking opportunity through financial leverage is completely unacceptable. Our sport has always been labeled as expensive, but we will not tolerate it being for sale.

The ladies and gentlemen at Headquarters have spent the last year streamlining the organisation into a more ordered structure, and Michael Stone's appointment as Secretary General ensured that we have seen an increase in the responsibility and accountability of the FEI team, a task that they have truly risen to. Michael Stone has led a root and branch overhaul of the administration of headquarters. While the job descriptions of our professional team now exist, the roles and job descriptions of our volunteer body will be logically gleaned from the Internal Regulations that you have just agreed on. I believe that we are well on the way to living by proactive principles of governance.

To aid this transparency for all volunteers, it is important to clarify at this point that the function of the Nominations Committee cannot and must not be either viewed or practiced as a political function. It is not a position or apex of power, but rather one of objectivity and properly populating the FEI with the most proficient faces for tomorrow. We have also now shed some of our standing committees that were not relevant to the efficient running of the FEI, and we have a new emphasis on youth that will provide us with our successors.

I promised, in 2006, to increase the efficiency and timescale of anti-doping and judicial decisions by decreasing the existing average of 2.5 months from testing to judgment to 1.5 months, within two years. Progress has been made during the course of 2006 in the judicial processes but there is still much work to be done. I am pleased that we have been able to reduce the number of open cases at the end of this year to 13 versus 30 at the end of 2005.

We have to find ways to make money from means other than ourselves. We cannot keep taxing the population of the FEI in order to sustain ourselves in order to pay for the future. We must diversify and create our own economy only then we will be able to lay the foundations of reality for the dreams of which we speak.

Our FEI Commercial Department was created in the Autumn of 2003 and from the balance sheet their results have proven that the FEI is a commercially viable entity.

This evidence means that we need no longer consider this as a pilot project. In order to survive in the turbulent world of sport business I would request your full



support for our Commercial Department that it may provide you with the means to sustain the future that is so vital. This means more freedom for the commercial department to make decisions, more resources to handle the evolving business landscape, and in time, once empowered with the tools that it so richly deserves it will evolve into a stand alone structure within the umbrella of the FEI.

Last year you all voted for change realizing perhaps that the world we live in was changing drastically at its very core, and that is where we stand today, on the precipice of a changing sport world, and a changing sport movement.

The world in which we live really is changing. In so many areas it is improving but we cannot be complacent, we must constantly look outwards beyond our organisation into society and adapt our strategies for growth according to its shifting horizon.

Youth is the lifeblood of our sport. Success may be achieved at a later age than in many sports but if we do not generate interest in children and young people we will not maintain the pipeline of talent which will provide the Olympians of tomorrow.

We are guilty of planning our sport without looking at the expectations of our future market. Young people today do not look at the world as we did when we were their age.

Very few sports want to admit it but their viewership and membership is ageing. Young people are raised in a society which delivers them instant gratification. Their landscape is very cluttered, they make their own lifestyle choices through the huge array of opportunities offered to them. I watch the news on a television but over 30% of young people watch the news via the internet. They don't feel the need to go to a football stadium to see a game when they can see the clips of the goals on their mobile within seconds of the ball crashing into the back of the net.

And more worryingly for us as a sporting federation, and particularly one in which it takes years to reach the top, they want instant gratification, they don't want complicated sport, it is part of an alien culture to train for 10 years in the hope of achieving some far distant medal. They want 6 hour success.

We should be very concerned about this shift in culture on two levels, firstly the obvious importance of keeping the blood flowing to the heart of our sport but if that artery slows, the serious global brands, the major commercial players who we want on our team will hesitate and move away. These brand conscious manufacturers and service providers want youth. Youth equals Brand Sovereignty. This is why it is so important that we engage with youth. And I will be proposing to the next Bureau Meeting that we should make 2009 the Year of Youth.

We are not living in a changing world we are living in a counter culture and be under no illusion we will die or survive on our ability to communicate with Youth

The Olympic Movement itself is realizing its place in this changing world not only as it relates to youth but also the wider community and is evolving rapidly through concepts such as Sport For All, Sport for Peace and latterly Sustainable Development and these are initiatives which we must emulate and adopt.



The Olympics truly are the greatest sporting spectacle on earth but more and more we are seeing that the IOC and other IF's are grasping the real importance of sport as a catalyst for the enhancement of the societies in which they are active.

I have been following closely the proposals for the implementation of the community philosophy for London 2012, and I believe that the path of community engagement which they have adopted is one which we must follow. But the vision of leaving a lasting legacy, through community coalition, not only for our sport and its participants but reaching out to the surrounding community is one which all our events should follow at whatever level. It is my fervent hope that as horsesport will be a central pillar of the 2012 Games in the ideal setting of Greenwich that we can and will play a leading role in the implementation of this community based strategy which embodies the spirit of Sport For All.

I have said before, but I believe it bears repeating, horse sport's relationship with the IOC is a good one. The IOC President, Jacques Rogge visited the World Equestrian Games in Aachen, where he was shown the sport at its pinnacle. We have had the privilege to welcome two IOC members here at our General Assembly, and I believe that our three Olympic disciplines enjoy good standing within the Olympic movement. Of course, there is no room for complacency but as we meet and exceed IOC criteria and as we forge fruitful and open personal relationships, our stock with the IOC continues to rise.

Remaining on the Olympic theme, I am delighted that so many representatives of BOCOG have come to Estoril to make a presentation to you. Hong Kong is the gateway to Asia and we must strive to ensure that we embrace the opportunity that it presents.

The 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen showed us the power of branding our product before we branded ourselves. The GA showed great wisdom in awarding the WEG to Aachen it is at the heart of the horseworld. It strategically straddles three countries but it also spans many of the separate components that are the fibre of our organization, breeding, public, and horses.

59 competing nations, 767 Athletes, 884 horses, over 1,500 accredited media, over 2,000 Volunteers and officials, an incredible 576,000 spectators, and a total of 1.6 Billion Television viewers world wide – that is more than the entire population of China and America.

But the numbers are only statistics, and they are hollow, the world is about people, and what was most touching was that everyone I saw in Aachen was smiling, the crowds sat in the stands through pouring rain to watch the beauty and elegance of a Kür, the stands for the vaulting were full, the crowds roared to the Jumping and Reining, raced from hazard to hazard and fence to fence in the driving and Eventing and received a good drenching in the Endurance.

But Aachen did not only show us the art of what is possible. They threw down an undeniable challenge to every WEG that follows. It is a cross which we will gladly bear. We cannot go back to the time before Aachen, the organisers clearly showed us what we must be and what we must give the world. They showed us that it is not a choice, we have no option, it is a demand. They added art to organization, married community to sport and through imaginative concepts provided the opportunity for the crowds to interact, they added a level of detail and creative thought that have now become leading criteria in the bid process. Indeed Aachen



has herself re-written the Bid Requirements for any WEG, and we rely on the athletes and horses of the world to uphold and guard these criterion.

As Aachen is the cradle of horsesport in Europe, so to Kentuckians, Central Kentucky is the horse capital of the world. There are 450 thoroughbred farms standing 340 stallions and over 75% of the Kentucky Derby winners are bred there. Which makes Kentucky similar to the triangle of Germany, Holland and Belgium in its capacity to produce the type of public who populated the stands in Aachen. If any people could celebrate their love of horses as the people of Aachen do it is the people of Kentucky and so we look to a new avenue as we create our global map.

I have no doubt that the people of the 'Bluegrass State' will rise to the challenge of the great burden of expectation which we are placing upon them.

At the World Equestrian Games we saw enormous depth in all the sports and the universality was underpinned for me by the diversity of the crowds. Our disciplines attract many different types of audiences drawn from all sectors of society and from all continents. It showed us all that our platform for further development is wide and deep.

The World Equestrian Games also underlined the spirit of our athletes; it is they who are the ambassadors and public face of horsesport and on whom our image largely rides.

It is for that reason that I am particularly pleased with one component of the revised Statutes, and that is that we now have a truly visible and audible Athletes Commission and that they have a voice in the Bureau. Whilst the FEI holds paramount the welfare of our athletes, both horses and people, our Athletes Commission now opens a new and exciting chapter for us. Their voices and faces in the decision making process are vital for the welfare of our organisation, and will ensure that we always have our fingers on the pulse of all our disciplines, and that they remain the heartbeat of the organisation. Without our athletes, and without properly respecting our sports, there is no FEI.

The Development Strategy based on the quantitative analysis of the situation in developing National Federations, carried out by the Development department, will become a major artery in the body of the FEI. While the Developing National Federations have seen this as a step forward for them, the General Assembly in 2006 indicated its wish that the distribution of funds be dictated by a concrete business and financial plan. This plan is about giving National Federations the tools to help themselves - they need to use them fast. But I feel I should make clear that this is not a pot of cash that will be simply handed out for local strategies. Its allocation will flow from the overarching Development plan.

When we meet again in 2008 we will already have enjoyed the spectacle of the Olympics in Hong Kong. The IT strategy will ensure that we remain in as close contact as we are here in order to maintain the efficiency and productivity that we have gained here despite the physical separation.

Communication with our National Federations is not an improvement in my eyes; it is a simple and basic necessity. I believe that the implementation of the proposed IT strategy is possibly the second most important proposal, after the Statutes and General Regulations that is being put to you during this General Assembly. When you elected me it was on a mandate of retaining the fine traditions of horsesport



whilst ensuring its viability in the modern sporting environment. I am convinced that this strategy is fundamental to that mandate. It will give us the legs on which to run, and with this strategy, we will be able to run faster and further than any other International Federation. And this is no vague guess, this proposal, as you will hear, follows a comprehensive benchmarking of other International Federations. So although it is not a subject on which we may feel expert please give it your full attention, it is vital that you sign up to this vision so that you may benefit from its implementation through an unparalleled increase in integration.

Looking ahead to the coming year we need to treat the FEI as we would an athlete. We need to measure our successes with indicators that are clear such as measurements of our social impact, constituents, our internal operations, our finances and our organizational capacity. We need to end every year with a balanced scorecard because in order to deliver the power of sport we must audit properly.

It hardly seems one year ago that I was elected by you, I am daily reminded of how honoured I am by the trust that you have placed in me. Every day I have taken my duties to heart.

Working in coordination with the FEI Bureau has made the completion of one quarter of my first tenure a joy. Through my work in this first year I have been over-awed by the strength and depth of the individuals within our FEI team. And I want you all to know how much I appreciate your support. I would also like to thank the Portuguese Equestrian Federation and the Estoril Tourism Board for all they have done in providing us with this unique and picturesque setting for our General Assembly.

The last year has been the most amazing one, and it has been a truly wonderful experience to meet and work with so many people with the same heart as myself, who join together to organize and promote our sports, to protect our good name, and to present the world with the skill and talents of our participants, equine and human. Our sport is epitomized by the beauty, poetry, grace and dignity of our athletes let us work together to make sure that they continue to amaze the world.

Thank you