

Press release on Charlotte Dujardin Matter

My surprise was great when I learned yesterday about the interviews given by Mr Wensing to Horses and Hoefslag regarding the complaint of Horse Abuse committed by Charlotte Dujardin, which he filed with the FEI and the BEF on behalf of an anonymous client.

Let me first say that Horse Abuse should not be accepted in any form and should be fought by the authorities that exist for that purpose. I know that both the FEI and the BEF take complaints about Horse Abuse very seriously and act very actively. As an equestrian and dressage enthusiast, I applaud this wholeheartedly. It is also for these reasons that I feel compelled to respond to the interviews now that I am convinced the sport of dressage has been seriously damaged.

Surely the manner and timing of action here raise more questions for me than the accusations against Charlotte Dujardin herself.

In said interviews, Mr Wensing shared on behalf of his anonymous client that it wished to prevent Charlotte Dujardin from winning medals at the Olympics.

With this announcement, it does become clear what moved the anonymous client to 1) file a complaint with FEI and BEF only after such a long period of 4 or 2.5 years and only a few days before the Paris Olympics and 2) seek publicity about the filing of the complaint.

When the complaining client considers Animal Welfare to be so important, it is not understandable why one waits so long to file complaints. Moreover, one is also bound to report alleged cases of Horse Abuse in a propitious manner.

The FEI REGULATIONS say:

“Article 142-Abuse of Horses

1. No person may abuse a horse during an Event or at any other time.....

*2. Any person witnessing an Abuse must report it in the form of a Protest (Article 161) **without delay.***

.....”

This obligation to file a protest "without delay" is aimed precisely at preventing animal suffering. Failure by the complaining client to comply with this reporting obligation in a timely manner may result in the Horse Abuse complaint against Charlotte Dujardin being declared inadmissible or the sanctions to be imposed being limited.

Both the timing of the filing of the complaint and the media's explanation through interviews that a Horse Abuse complaint has been filed with the aim of depriving Charlotte Dujardin of medals at the upcoming Olympics are harming the rider. But not only the rider in question but also Team GB, the other Olympiad participants and the dressage sport in general. Surely it is clear that all these parties are harmed by the timing of the filing of the complaint and by the media statements. Team GB is missing a key player, the other Teams are given the stigma of having an interest in the "elimination" of Charlotte Dujardin.

Without any substantiation, dressage judges are also brought into the 'game' when it is suggested that these judges appreciate "spastic movements". When you read something like this, you first think you are watching an hilarious play but it turns out to be a quote from the lawyer representing an anonymous client in a personal action against Charlotte Dujardin. In doing so, dressage judges are also being deliberately maligned and damaged.

In my opinion, Mr Wensing and his client should have taken all these stakeholders and interests into account when deciding and filing the complaint as well as in the media statements.

By failing to do so, one may ask whether the lawyer acted as he should have? I mention the Rules of Conduct of the Legal Profession which entail that one should not unnecessarily or impermissibly harm the legitimate interests of others.

This is all the more compelling as the BEF and FEI are quite capable of prosecuting abuses. Incoming reports of Horse Abuse are taken very seriously by these organisations and prosecuted wherever possible. That is also where these complaints belong. Not in the media.

Had the FEI considered the complaint 4 or 2.5 years ago, this unpleasant issue for everyone would have been long settled and, if proven and cause for any sanction, also behind Charlotte Dujardin so she could go to Paris as a team member.

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