



Mr. David O'Connor
President
United States Equestrian Federation
Lexington, KY

January 8, 2008

Re: PVDA Opposition to Rule Change #275-07

Dear Mr. O'Connor:

The Potomac Valley Dressage Association ("PVDA") is a Group Member Organization of the United States Dressage Federation ("USDF") that represents over 1000 USDF members. This letter expresses PVDA's opposition to proposed Rule Change #275-07 regarding qualification for Dressage Competitions at Third Level and above. We support USEF's and USDF's efforts to advance our sport by broadening participation and deepening the connection of those currently acquainted with the art of Dressage, but we have not seen the need for the adoption of European-style qualification criteria, and we are concerned that enacting these criteria will harm our sport. Moreover, the fact that the proposal lacks the specific "qualification criteria" that would be used undermines member faith in the transparency of the rule adoption process, and, by extension, in the USEF and USDF.

Specifically, we request that the rule not be adopted for the following reasons:

1. We are opposed to a points-based qualification process.

Our membership rejects the idea that qualification criteria for upper levels is required, believing strongly that a points-based qualification system will reduce interest in Dressage after years of growth. Our GMO members feel that the goal of the USDF and USEF should be to foster participation and education for largely amateur riders. Moving up the levels is effectively controlled by judges, who punish bad riding and should discourage individuals from showing above their level. Implementing nation-wide, burdensome, qualification criteria based on European models shows a lack of faith in our pool of recognized judges.

While we aspire to match the success of German and Dutch riders in international competition, mirroring their national competition rules does not directly advance that goal. In Germany and the Netherlands, the systems are designed to prevent over-subscription to dressage classes. These countries have a need for a "gatekeeper" function, given that thousands of competitors live within a few hours of shows that occur every weekend. Indeed, the preponderance of Warmblood horses specifically bred for performance sport combined with deep national equestrian traditions mean that the pool of interested competitors is frequently deeper than the number of show slots. In the United States, we do not have the same issues and rather have fewer shows and larger spaces thereby necessitating longer travel time, administrative difficulties



in “real-time” recording and tracking results, less of an equestrian tradition in dressage, and a much greater variety of horse breeds participating in sport.

2. *The lack of actual qualification criteria undermines the process.*

We feel it is essential that the actual qualification criteria when proposed be subjected to the USEF rule change process so that formal feedback may be presented and considered. The current proposal does not assure that this will take place and does not seem to fully comply with USEF Bylaw 702, which requires fair notice and hearings "before the Federation may declare such individual ineligible to participate in any amateur athletic competition".

Programs that have been successful in the United States, such as the Bronze, Silver, Gold medal programs and the Regional qualifiers, utilize a set number of scores above a minimum. To the extent that after lengthy review and further empirical evidence (which has not been forthcoming as of yet), qualification criteria are agreed to be necessary for the USDF levels, these criteria should be based on a certain number of scores from different judges rather than a point system.

In conclusion, a change of this magnitude should be made only after detailed discussion such that a consensus may be reached. We therefore request that the proposed Rule Change 275-07 be referred to the Dressage Committee for further study, and only if backed with empirical research and majority GMO support, be then re-introduced with the backing of a much larger segment of the dressage community and ample time for review and comment.

Sincerely,

Marne Martin-Tucker
President
Potomac Valley Dressage Association

CC: USEF Board of Directors
Mr. Sam Barish, President, USDF