

Psychology of Judging

By Gary Hermansson

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Components of Judging

A dictionary definition of ‘judging’ is to **“assess against a standard”**. In most situations, determining the standard is hard enough, without then having to think about the process involved in making the actual assessment against them. The task of assessing is complex – especially where people are part of the equation, as in the case of equestrian sports, especially dressage.

As with any complex activity involving humans, judging involves two major dimensions that must be managed:

1. The activity itself [Task]
2. The individuals involved [People]

The former centres on the issues of standards, specifications, criteria, objectives, programmes, procedures and resources – the technical elements of getting the job done. The latter centres on issues of judge selection and training, and the roles, relationships, communication and leadership in the event and its assessment – the human side of getting the job done.

There are other factors as well, that filter through both of these dimensions, such as incentives for people to do a job and to do it well, the overall atmosphere and climate that surrounds the operation, the organisations and bodies that apply pressure and control direction, the politics of power and even the just the collectively bizarre and personal idiosyncrasies that have to be accommodated [undoubtedly dressage has its fair share of silly rules and regulations and eccentrics who are important to the sport, but whom people have to learn to put up with].

In many ways the task dimensions of the activity of judging are more straightforward – increasingly specific and precise standards, combined with technology, could actually make judging in dressage just a matter of pushing the right buttons, The people dimension is more difficult and challenging, yet it, of all things, cannot be done away with. It is the major factor in people’s motivation and desire to participate and to strive to do well We are social beings and need others to interact and participate with. Other people engage us in terms of personal competition, challenge, confidence, acceptance, worth, standing and appreciation – as well as providing the forum for coping with and learning from our disappointments and our achievements.

There are struggles that surround the encroachment of technology into a sport like Cricket. Even though it would be very simple to develop technology to decide ‘lbw’ decisions, there is considerable resistance to doing this. In fact you could conceive of cricket as being played entirely without the involvement of people as judges / umpires – but there is resistance to this because it would remove much of the intrigue,

mystery, uncertainty and wonder that makes up the game. It would spoil the age-old saying that “Cricket is a funny old game”.

I have been aware of how technology has undermined the confidence and technical expertise of many cricket umpires. Now, even in many clear-cut moments, umpires are deferring to the video camera and I think this is spilling over to other aspects of their role – e.g. even keeping count of the balls in an over. **Their confidence is being undermined.**

When it comes to people issues in regard to the actual event, the main people participants are the riders and the judges.

- **To whom are the judges providing a service?**
- **What are the needs of those to whom this service is provided?**

These questions are not so straightforward, and probably will cover, at least:

- Riders [at differing levels / parents and other support people / other judges as part of the peers / sporting bodies / the equestrian world.
- The various needs among this group could be contradictory!
- What riders want may be at odds with what the sport wants.
- At times the needs of competing may be difficult to handle.

Now to the mental needs of the two major parties – riders and judges. What do both bring to the moment[s] of competition? This varies among individuals and occasions, yet likely commonalities are:

From the point of view of assessment, riders would seem to want:

- Accuracy / consistency / fairness **[being assessed without fear or favour]**
- Opportunities for learning and development.
- Achievement / success – individually and in comparison with others.
- Self-awareness – ability to ‘self monitor’.
- Constructive challenges to pursue
- Encouragement and motivation
- Enjoyment.
- Mastery
- Benchmark from which to progress.

Other qualities that **riders** bring to the competition:

- A hunger for feedback
- Hopes and aspirations
- Healthy and unhealthy competitiveness
- Anxieties and tensions as well as excitement
- Confidence and doubt
- Levels of psychological skills [self belief, imagery usage, management of stress, goals – performance and outcome – levels of relaxation, etc.
- Transference to authority – deference / defensiveness / resistance / blind spots – that is, they will bring with them all their previous history about being under

scrutiny and being judged, and this might make them passive and anxious, or defensive and arrogant.

Judges need to bring:

- High levels of both technical expertise [knowing the ‘elements’ of dressage] and what is known as **“Emotional Intelligence”**.
- Technical expertise can be gained by experience and study, knowing the techniques and standards.
- Emotional Intelligence [EQ] is much more difficult – yet predictably this may actually separate the really good from the adequate / poor judges.

The judge’s task is likely to vary, depending on the nature of the event. At the ‘elite’ level, the emphasis is likely to be on performance assessment [determining a score], whereas at lesser levels it is likely to be more focussed on performance feedback [which will include a score]

There are psychological matters involved in both assessment and feedback [with considerable overlap]. To a large extent judges are educators, with all that this involves in terms of student learning, motivation and accomplishment. This requires personal and interpersonal skills.

In terms of ‘assessment judgement’ judges need to be able to have:

- A clear and open mind [avoiding pre-conceptions and personal baggage].
- Various mental skills such as concentration – attention control [keeping extraneous things – internal and external – at bay] – constructive imagery – goals for own performance etc.
- Confidence – able to trust own senses and decisions **lopen to using full range of scores**.
- Flow and present – centredness – staying in the ‘now of the moment’, as it unfolds / relaxed attentiveness.
- Ability to handle pressure – coping with tensions, which result from being ‘on show’ and under comparative analysis.
- An ability to work constructively with other judges [involves teamwork and a constructive ‘judge’ identity]
- An “I’m OK – your OK” mind-set that is, judge adopts a position when he / she and other people are worthy of respect and should be approached and dealt with positively [in contrast to “I’m OK – You’re **NOT OK when** the judge is constantly critical and patronising, or “I’m not OK – You’re OK” when the judge would be persistently deferent and eager to please.

Some of the qualities will be determined by and / or challenged by the climate of particular events, the equestrian culture, modelling from other judges, etc. Most of them though, will be based on what the judge brings as a person and on their mental skills [with these often needing to be worked on, as for athletes – covering preparation, performance, and post-performance components].

Emotional Intelligence:

These factors, and the psychological factors involved in assessment / feedback can be encompassed by the notion of Emotional Intelligence [EQ] – a term coined by David Goleman. We all have levels of emotional intelligence to some degree or other – it's more a matter of what level of such intelligence we have, and indeed how we may 'increase' it.

EQ relates to life in general, but also relates to specific experiences, such as the process and experience of judging. One's emotional competence incorporates two dimensions – personal and social competence, with specific qualities under each of these broader categories.

Personal Competence includes:

1. **Self-Awareness** – emotional awareness / accurate self assessment [knowing strengths and limitations] / Self Confidence [through competencies and self worth].
2. **Self-Regulation** – self control / trustworthiness / conscientiousness [taking responsibility for own performance] / adaptability and innovativeness.
3. **Motivation** – achievement drive / commitment / initiative and optimism.

Social competence includes:

1. **Empathy** – understanding others / helping to develop others / having a service orientation [meeting other's needs] / leveraging diversity [developing opportunities through and for different people] and political astuteness.
2. **Social Skills** – being able to influence others / good communication / able to manage conflict / leadership / being a change catalyst / building bonds / able to collaborate and co-operate, and team capabilities.

Clearly this is a big task, but it's important to remember that we have these qualities to some degree or other.

It is a matter of trying to develop and express them constructively. In regard to judging, the two most crucial elements, I believe are Self Awareness and Empathy, with the former being central to the latter, as well.

Self Awareness:

It is important to know what you bring to the task of judging – especially in relation to matters of power, authority and control; positivity-negativity; perfectionism; self worth and awareness of limitations; self-resilience.

The degree of self awareness will determine the extent to which the judge will have high or low levels of:

Empathy:

This involves an awareness of and a stance towards the experience of others. See comments earlier about what riders bring to the competitive moment, and consider the level of understanding of these.

Feedback

Both of these dimensions [self awareness and empathy], as well as social skills, are fundamental to quality feedback. Various principles are important for this.

They are:

- Feedback needs to be informative and usable [related to learning and development] – learn to express the feedback in terms of goals, more than criticisms.

- Feedback sandwich – give feedback in the sequence of positives – negatives – goals.
- Make sure that feedback provides overall comments as well as comments on separate components [feedback sheets should provide a structure for this].
- Look for opportunities for riders to give self-feedback first – this increases confidence, awareness, self-correction, style and learning.
- Key issue is for the judge to ask what they would want / get most from, if they were the rider getting the assessment / feedback.

Psychological Development.

Several things can be done in the way of mental skills development for Judges. The Judge should:

- Know technical requirements
- Examine own purposes / beliefs / values re dressage, riding and judging and motives for being a judge. Learn from own style and feedback from others [in particular look at what makes one defensive, as that will be a signal as to what blind spots one might have].
- Develop psychological skill for own performance [in preparation and on the day], look at beliefs, goals etc. Remember that the judge is a performer as much as the athlete, and will too be challenged by mental issues, so needs to develop them.
- Develop self awareness [maintain a diary and journal of events and debriefings] and examine own motives, aspirations, responses and reactions to peer pressures, etc. Work towards enhanced self-awareness.
- Develop empathy – seek feedback on own feedback.
- Debrief constructively with other judges and with riders [keep open to new ideas, and learning about oneself].

Extracts from some notes from a Seminar with Linda Zang and Stephen Clarke, during the World Cup Qualifier at Paris:

- All judges should continue to look at the six ‘training bricks’:
 1. Rhythm,
 2. Suppleness,
 3. Contact,
 4. Impulsion,
 5. Straightness and
 6. Collection

Together with the “overall quality”.

- Engagement, plus impulsion, produces ‘suspension’
- When this is through the back – self-carriage.
- It is important that they are not on the forehead, heavy on the hand etc.
- Mouth open – then horse **is not** in self-carriage.

Collected Walk: [plus see page 26 of FEI Dressage Rules]

- The way to decide whether it is collected is to assess how well the horse would react to being asked to proceed to another movement that requires collection. If easily then that’s collection.

- A slight over-track is allowed if there is a clear difference in the length of the steps from the medium / extended walks.

Collected Trot: [plus see page 28 of FEI Dressage Rules]

- Should track up to the fore imprints.

Extended Canter: [plus see page 32 of FEI Dressage Rules]

- The horse should 'grow' in front of the rider
- Should be in self-carriage

Of course these are just some 'pointers' and all judges must follow:

FEI Rules for Dressage 20th Edition – effective from 1st January 1999, and the Modifications to Rules for Dressage Events – up to 28th May 2002,

Every eventuality cannot be provided for in the Dressage Rules. In any unforeseen or exceptional circumstances, it is the duty of the Ground Jury to make a decision in a "sporting spirit" and approaching as nearly as possible to the intention of these Rules, and of the General Regulations.

The Dressage Rules should be read in conjunction with:

The FEI Statutes - 20th Edition 17th April 1999 – and the Revision of March 2002.

The General Regulations – 20th Edition - revised May 2002 and

The Veterinary Regulations – 9th Edition 1st January 2002

These rule books can all be seen on, and down-loaded from the FEI Website at:

www.horsesport.org

Reference:

Rules:

Rule Books

Jean Mitchell [July 2002]

