



November 26, 2018

Since I landed in US on the 22 October last year, I have been on the road meeting our squad riders in their home environment to work with them, but also to listen to their thoughts of US Eventing. I have spoken to and engaged with many riders outside our squads as well.

During my time in the US I have also been to 23 competitions with our riders and 3 Team competitions and WEG. My focus has been on WEG but simultaneously, I have made sure to talk, listen and observe to as many owners, donors and the general eventing community to try and read the landscape of US Eventing and work out what needs to be put into place for future success of our future Teams. We have many hard working talented riders, and I have been looking at what it could be that gets in the way of the performance. It is obviously different from rider to rider but to me there are a few key areas, which we need to further examine.

My observation is that we need to continue to improve the training systems that most of our riders have in place to ensure that they can produce horses to become their best, and also ensure the longevity of our horses. We need to analyze where the gaps are in the day-to-day work throughout the year and continuously enhance the knowledge through mentoring. It is universal that the modern riders rarely do their apprenticeships with experienced riders to learn the craft. The trend is to rely on specialist trainer to develop their skills as a rider, but miss out on horsemanship and how to take care, condition, prepare, and plan for the horses for best performance. It is very encouraging that several of our younger riders are basing themselves with elite riders round the world next year to learn from the best.

The time from when a horse is aged 5 until they are 10 or 11 are precious years. If a horse can turn up for work every day without interruptions from injury, we will have the time needed to put everything into place such as physical strength, to be appropriately trained and have the experience needed to succeed. Every one of these days needs to be used wisely and with a good plan in place. These are also the years when we work out the preparation of our horses for the pinnacle events of the year: what preparatory competitions the horse needs, how many days we need in advance to set them up and what they need, with a clear plan all the way up to the final warm up. This attention to detail is essential and is in place with every successful athlete I know. All of this needs to be detailed in each rider's performance plan.

Eventing has not reached the level that you can be a professional rider and make a living out of being a competitor. So, the reality is that our riders must have a business to support themselves. This is normal but riders need to plan their day, weeks and set aside the time required where they can be 100% focused on training their horses and preparing for competitions without distractions. This takes discipline, but to be a world-class athlete it's necessary. The riders also have to make time for themselves to be physically and mentally in peak condition. The mental game is something each rider has to find their individual way to master and it needs to be addressed.

It has been said that when we are born we have a higher chance of winning the lottery than winning a medal at the Olympic Games. However, we can influence our chances dramatically of winning medals. This does take extraordinary effort, determination and commitment from the athletes. Elite sport is not for everyone and Eventing is a great sport and many chose it as a lifestyle and a way of making a living. Everyone involved in the sport plays a role in our community, but our job in Elite sport, is to identify those riders who have the mind and heart to be their absolute best. They need to have exceptional work ethic, discipline and willingness to make big sacrifices to reach their goals. I have had the fortune to work closely with many riders that have won medals and 4* events over the years. They have all had slightly different characteristics but their approach to the sport is exactly the same and driven from within.



Another area of growth is how we operate as a Team and clarity in what it required from a Team member. It starts with a well laid out four-year and two-year campaign plan towards Championships. This will include what Nations Cups we are targeting and develop extra team events in the US to give our riders the experience of riding as a Team member and for us to practice and develop good Team routines.

Watching our new very impressive world champion Rosalind Canter riding her first WEG, is a great example of having ticked all the boxes. I have been watching Rosalind over the years and she is a fantastic competitor and trainer of horses. She had been exposed to nine Team competition in the last five years. I know that she puts herself through a grueling fitness program, and she has also found a way to deal with the pressure all riders feel at these big occasions riding in a Team. Five years ago, my good friend Judy Bradwell and I played a game of who would be in our World All-Star Team. One of my picks was Rosalind, as I believed she had all the ingredients and would do the work it takes to be a Champion.

In a continuously more competitive sport, we have to be very critical in our selection of horses. I believe the way forward is to play the long game, acquire the best younger horses we can get and have a long-term development plan to give the horses the right education and readiness for a targeted championship. Some riders have an innate ability to select a good horse and others we need to support in this area. For sure, there are times when a rider has to buy a ready-made horse to fill a gap, but I do not think it's a sustainable system that we can or should rely on. It is equally important for riders to be able to regular assess their horses, and if they are not turning out to be as good as they hoped, to move them on and replace them. We have a fantastic and supportive group of owners in the US. I am very grateful for their enormous efforts and contribution to our sport. I have started building a relationship with Gloria Callen who is now running the Event Owners Task Force to see how we can best support them in their work. It is equally important to me to have good direct relationships with our owners, and I look forward to continue to build on these.

One of our riders asked me for my impression of the culture and environment in US Eventing. It is a great question, as I believe this is another piece to the puzzle that needs to be approached. There is a definite divide of focus on either on the problems of the past or the great possibilities ahead. Firstly, I believe we have to appreciate that we have all the resources needed here in the US to be a world-leading nation within eventing. We have world-class events where people put in a massive effort to keep this quality. We have enthusiastic owners and the most generous supporters second to no other country. We have some of the best trainers, vets, farriers and highly skilled people in all areas. If we can align all our riders and resources, do the work, with the common goal of having the US Team on the podium, then we should be optimistic about the future.

In the beginning of next year we will bring our listed riders together and start the work on our Team environment, built on shared values, beliefs and behaviors that we all agree on. It is often said, "Culture beats strategy every time" however, we need both. If we can get this part right and our riders commit to and value it, then I truly believe this can be a game changer and could steer the way forward for all our riders in the future.

Our purpose in High Performance is to support our elite riders in their pursuit of excellence and to develop the next generation team riders to achieve sustainable successes at championships. To have a pathway in place and run programs where riders are given the opportunity to develop, be tested and prove themselves. We need to identify the riders dedicated to compete for the US Team and their own success. With the limited resources we work within, it will be a competitive environment with high expectations where we can support athletes who can contribute to our goal of winning medals. We have to constantly measure ourselves against the best in the world and not against each other. Our other objectives are to develop a culture of excellence, and consistently work with our owners and riders to ensure we have the best horsepower needed.





We have a big mountain to climb, but the more people we get behind us and pulling in the same direction the sooner, we will get there. After the last horse had jumped at WEG, I spoke to my wife Stephanie and told her that we had just missed our Olympic qualifier. Her immediate response was that means that I will not see you any more next year than I have this year. The truth is unfortunately so. I am 100% committed to the success of our Team and everyone will have to make big sacrifices to reach the end goal, this is the life in high performance. I look forward to preparing our Team for the Olympic qualifier in Lima next year, and we do not take that lightly, however the focus is equally on Tokyo 2020 and the World Championships in 2022.

Sincerely,

Erik Duvander