

Top riders feeling pressure, admits FEI President



By Isabel Hurley

THE President of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI), Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, said that she will stand down from the job as soon as her key ambitions have been achieved. In the future she sees herself working on humanitarian issues, including world poverty and hunger.

In a frank interview with *The Irish Field* yesterday, Princess Haya spoke openly about the FEI's fight against horse doping and her determination to implement an "idiot-proof" system where everyone would know what can legally be used and what cannot. She pointed out that the number of positive drug tests had declined sharply from 2.3% in 2005 to just 1% in 2008.

The FEI will soon publish comprehensive new lists that will define exactly what substances can be used, which drugs cannot be used and the allowed thresholds of all listed medications. The FEI President acknowledged some riders were "confused" and competing in "a general atmosphere of fear".

Princess Haya said: "I was elected for four years in 2006 on my manifesto which had six pillars including the national federations, good governance, welfare, commercial, the Olympic Council and, of course, equestrian sport itself. It has been a lot more demanding than I envisaged.

"I came to it at a busy time; we were already moving in a

fast landscape. For the immediate future, it will be [focusing on] the doping issue and the restructuring of the Olympic Council body and once that is done, any president will be able to run the FEI. I would be gone if the restructuring was done. We are hoping for some advance on this work in November.

"After my presidency, I will have given back to the sport what it gave to me, which was independence and happiness. I don't want to dedicate my life to sport; I will do it as a hobby. I may have less friends now in the horse world - I've trod on some toes - and I will concentrate on humanitarian work, poverty and hunger," she said.

Princess Haya pointed out that the FEI started to seriously tackle the drugs issue in equestrian sport in 2005. "When it [positive drug cases] happens, I find it terribly sad. I feel that the media has grabbed this as a huge story and yet there are so many wonderful things about our sport. In 2005 the FEI set up a doping and administrative panel to look at medication and what is doping. I felt that it was not enough and that is one of the most successful parts of my campaign.

"We, as the governing body of the sport, must accept responsibility that we did not do enough fast enough. We set up a Clean Sport Commission after Hong Kong. We were trying to fight doping but we had not yet done enough for our own stakeholders.

"A certain amount of riders are being unwittingly caught and we as a governing body must accept responsibility for the question mark that still exists over what you can use and what cannot be used. It is absolutely essential that we



FEI President Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein hopes to implement an "idiot-proof" system when it comes to what drugs competitors can legally use

have a simple system in line with WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency). Once they are happy with the thresholds, with what is medication and what is doping, then you will see a different atmosphere.

"There will be a set list of what you can and can't do; a set list of thresholds. It has to be idiot-proof, that is the key to the problem," she told *The Irish Field*.

The FEI brought in the UK's Lord John Stevens to carry out an investigation. "That really should give people the answer as to what we are looking at. We are testing more horses now than we did in 2005. In 2005, we tested 1,494 horses at 222 events and 2.3% tested positive. In 2008, we tested 2,109 horses at 256

events and we went down from 2.3% to just 1% in 2008, so the situation is not exactly as it seems."

Princess Haya acknowledged that many of the world's top riders are feeling pressure, following the introduction of drug tests and thermal leg imagers at top shows to test their horses. One top rider went home annoyed from the Global Champions Tour in Monaco, where the FEI officials were operating thermal machines.

RESPONSIBILITY

Princess Haya said: "The top riders have been marginalised. It is important for the governing body to accept a large amount of the responsibility for what is happening.

Yes, riders are confused and there is a general atmosphere of fear. We have to remember that this sport is not like tennis. Horses are their way of life; it's an all-encompassing world. Most of them don't know what is happening and it is up to us to solve it.

"However, it is up to the ground jury of any event to decide and, if a competitor decides to walk away, there are rules there to be followed. It is not a matter of choice," added the FEI President.

Married to the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed, who had one of his own endurance horses fail a doping test earlier this year, Princess Haya commented: "Endurance sport is very specific as it is the only sport where 20%

of the riders don't prepare their horses themselves and turn up on the day to ride the horses. I have been asked if it would be worthwhile to change the PR (Person Responsible) so we don't have people like Sheikh Mohammed or my stepson test positive.

"It will not be changed in my presidency. Whoever rides the horse must take responsibility. I will fight tooth and nail over this, not to have it changed during my time," said the Princess firmly.

She acknowledged that in some cases there was a clear intent to dope horses. "It would be silly of me to say anything other than that. There is clear intent if you look at the substances being used. It is a push for results and this does have to be dealt with and the sanctions are not prohibitive at all in these cases.

"Once we clarify what is doping and we move totally in line with WADA sanctions, there are a lot bigger sanctions coming down the line. This will deal with the problem."

Princess Haya said that Ireland "holds a very special place in my heart" and that trips such as her upcoming one to the RDS in August "really keep me going".

She expressed full support for the organisers of Tattersalls International Horse Trials, who withdrew the controversial water fence from the course following complaints from some riders. "The organisers did the right thing. It was very lucky that this happened in Ireland, where the public and the sponsors are true horsemen and it was solved in the right way."

Whitaker suspended in drugs probe



Cameron Hanley

BRITAIN'S four-time Olympian Michael Whitaker (49) is the latest top rider to be suspended by the FEI after his horse failed a doping test.

Whitaker's stallion Tackera tested positive for traces of altrenogest, a synthetic hormone found in Regumate, which can be given legally to mares to control oestrus-related behaviour. Whitaker maintains that the positive result was down to a mix-up with feed for his top mare Portofino.

The Yorkshire man has requested a B sample analysis and a hearing before the FEI's tribunal. He withdrew from the Global Champions Tour in Monte Carlo on Friday and also missed the Hickstead Derby in Britain at the weekend as a result. A ban on Whitaker would see him miss the European Championships in August.

Last Saturday Irish chef d'équipe Robert Splaine replaced Mayo rider Cameron Hanley (36) on the Nations

Cup team for Aachen after his request to be dropped following an incident at the Balve CSI*** in Germany.

SYRINGE

It emerged that a used syringe was found in a working jacket used by him at the show and FEI officials tested Hanley's horses as a result. In a statement, the rider said that it was used legitimately on out of competition horses at his home yard and he was confident that the test results would

prove his innocence.

Secretary General of the German Equestrian Federation, Soenke Lauterbach, said: "I didn't find the syringe, although it was reported in some newspapers that I did. I happened to be standing nearby, unfortunately, when it was found. It was found in the late evening and was kept in a safe place overnight and then handed over to the FEI officials the following morning.

"From that point, it was out

of our hands. It was officials from the show's organising committee and the FEI officials dealing with it," he added.

FEI communications manager, Malina Gueorguiev, said there was no official FEI investigation into the matter taking place at present.

"If the test results are negative, that will be the end of it. If they are not, the case will be dealt with in the usual way."