

# From the Judge's Box



## Teamwork

by Anne Cizadlo

When a horse trots down the centerline to compete in a horse show, there are several qualities that a judge spots with each horse and rider. There are the obvious traits such as the rhythm of the gait, the accuracy of the pattern and the athletic ability of the horse. One other item that is quite close to the top of the list is the quality of the teamwork. There isn't a category in the collective marks labeled "teamwork," although there are certain aspects of the teamwork that are specified under the Submission category such as "harmony." There is an aspect of harmony that implies that the performance is pleasant to watch, and that is certainly an aspect of judging, but, more importantly, harmony originates from a functional level of teamwork between the horse and the rider.

In any team, there needs to be an obvious leader, and that should be the rider. In any well oiled team, however, the leader can't also have the job of one of the workers. If the quarterback also had to run all the plays and be his own defenseman, then we would call the sport boxing instead of football. Likewise, if the quarterback never throws the ball to his teammates, they never score. In dressage, riders need to understand that they are the quarterback of this little one rider/one horse team. The horse will be happy to run the plays, assuming that he knows what they are ahead of time, and

218.349.3452  
koderster1@yahoo.com  
Located in Marion, Iowa



**Anne Cizadlo**

Training • Lessons • Competition

USDF Gold Medalist • "r" Judge

[www.annecizadlo.com](http://www.annecizadlo.com)

# Dressage

can count on the quarterback to throw him the ball most of the time. If the rider is too restrictive or unsteady with the reins, for example, why should the horse continue to move boldly forward? Restrictive reins to a horse mean that you aren't telling him the play ahead of time, so he doesn't know where to run on the field, and bouncy hands just tell the horse to run out there somewhere and maybe you will tell him where to go later. In either case, he just isn't going to be real excited about going forward into the contact. Steady, elastic contact is a much more "clear" play to run. Steady contact makes the horse reliably know that you will throw him the ball and elastic contact means that if he's a bit off from the mark where he was supposed to be, you will make a minor adjustment and still throw the ball to him. It will make him confident enough to run the plays over and over (or stay on the bit.)

Likewise, with leg aids, you should be able to just give little reminders to the horse to trigger his response to get started. Once the quarterback yells, "hut, hut, hut," the team goes into action to run the play. The quarterback isn't screaming, "56 you go over there and 75, you block that guy and 23 you run on the left side of the field," during the play. He expects that the team knows what to do since they have practiced this play during training. The same thing is true when you are doing something like a leg-yield with your horse. You would expect that by game time (show time) you could turn down the center line and essentially say to the horse, "ready, hut!" when it's time to start the leg-yield and expect the horse to "run the play" once he gets started. If he makes a little error in distance, then you (quarterback) can put a leg on again for a moment to help him get back on track. If you feel that you need to show him the play book (kick every stride) during the game/show then you need to head back to the practice field and run some more plays until the two of you have worked out the kinks.

All of the judges expect that at the lower levels, the horses don't always know the plays that well and may make a mistake, but we do expect that if a mistake happens, that is only limited to a single play. Once everyone huddles (on the short side between

movements), then we should be able to come back and not let that single bad play destroy the confidence that the players have in the team. I have often seen riders make a mistake and then essentially "quit riding" for the rest of the test. Again, one of the aspects that we are judging is the teamwork. We need to see a fearless leader who has the mental strength to guide his team and perhaps psyche them up when the chips are down, and is ready to run a play himself if need be, but isn't so greedy that he runs all the plays himself.

I have also seen riders who almost insist on running all the plays themselves. If you have trained your horse that you will never let him or expect him to seek the contact himself, and that you will kick hard and pull on the inside rein every time you want a turn or a transition, then he will allow you to do that. If the quarterback wants to run all the plays himself, then the rest of the team will just stand on the field. It doesn't work so well! The quarterback might be angry that the other players aren't helping him win the game, but if he won't tell them what plays to run, how will they know where to go? Sometimes when you tell the horse which plays to run, you have to remind him of his posture or tempo or gait, but if it crosses the line from reminding to doing it for him, then the teamwork is falling apart. We are not saying that the rider at that point needs to work harder to make up for the lack of assistance that she is getting from her horse, but rather, she needs to explain the play book to the horse and then insist that he run his part of the play.

Often at the horse show, the team is still negotiating who will do which part of the

plays. Try to have these settled before you get to the show and then just review them in the warm-up. Sometimes, there will have to be a new play created at the game, or an alteration to a play while at the game. This will be possible if the other plays are clearly negotiated prior to arriving. If the horse is still unclear about how fast or straight or bent he needs to be during certain parts of the test, then changing who does what part at the last minute is a bad idea. When we see negotiations happening during the test (horse not willing to stay on the bit or pick up the canter or perform a 10 meter circle) then we know that there is something wrong with the partnership. The horse doesn't know the plays or the quarterback doesn't believe that his teammate can run the play successfully. It's going to lead to a less than desirable score on that movement.

Just like with any sport, don't go into the game without a plan of attack and some confidence that at least some of the test will be easy. Be a team leader for your horse and take some of the blame if things don't go as planned. And remember, it's your teammate that has to believe in you, even more than you believe in yourself sometimes. Don't tell the judge that you are sorry if the test went poorly, tell your horse! Then go home and work on that partnership. If he is lazy, inspire him. If he is an overachiever, keep him focused on his task. If he is bored, give him something exciting to do or think about. If he is naughty, make him do some community service laps until he settles down. You know your horse better than anyone. Use his personality traits to form a partnership that is flawless in the ring. Good luck and keep riding!

Anne Cizadlo is an FEI rider who resides in the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, area. Originally from Duluth, MN/Superior, WI, she returns to that area for clinics several times each year. She also teaches regular clinics near St. Cloud, MN; Aberdeen, SD; Fargo, ND; and Delano, MN.

A licensed United States Dressage Federation "r" dressage judge, Anne regularly judges dressage shows and horse trials in the Midwest.

Anne's recently deceased Swedish Warmblood gelding, Vodka, helped her to achieve her Grand Prix USDF Gold Medal in 2007.

Anne's newest horse, Lord Luschi, is a six-year-old Oldenburg gelding.

Anne is available for judging, training, competition, clinics, and private lessons. If you are not near the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, area, contact her for information about her clinic locations and dates. She is available in the Midwest from April through December, and in the West Palm Beach/Wellington area January through March. [kodester@aol.com](mailto:kodester@aol.com) / 218-349-3452