

ABSTRACT

Equestrian sports are unique in that performance is highly dependent on the effective interaction between rider and horse, an interaction that can be based on a wide variety of reasons. On the one hand, the Rider participates in the competition in a conscious manner in order to achieve certain results through the horse that accompanies him in the competitive act. The horse, however, has been trained in advance to have certain reactions to a series of stimuli, and the final result of the competition depends a lot on how it reacts.

Although principles are now used to strengthen the horse's mentality so that it can cope with both positive and negative emotions, evidence from the latest studies suggests that performance and success in equestrian sports is much more likely when there is a harmonious relationship between the horse and rider. And this harmony in such a relationship is partly conditioned by the emotional calm of the rider.

This leads to a very interesting question, namely: "Can the rider who possesses certain psychological skills reach a higher level of interpretation of his horse's states?" As in most sports, prompt and positive response to stimuli (command) is an essential element in equestrian sports, as it leads to better performance. At the same time, a balanced psychological status of the horse-rider dyad can unequivocally lead to improved equestrian performance, which is why it is very important for the rider to possess a series of specific psychological skills.

Such psychological skills include for example: imagination, thought control and emotion management. In equestrian sports, imagination is the rider's ability to visualize himself performing the required course with his horse. Thought control is the rider's ability to induce his horse to allow access to only positive thoughts focused only on the activity at hand, aimed at improving the performance of the horse-rider team in competition.

Stimulus management is generally used in the conscious mind and helps the athlete control their own physiological symptoms of anxiety. In equestrian sports, this ability helps the horse to feel positive emotions during competition, thereby replacing negative ones.

These skills are acquired over time, through constant training, starting from the simplest movements, reaching through constant effort and repetition to learning the most complicated movements and training progressions.

In addition to these skills, the ability to concentrate is considered extremely important, as it allows the athlete to focus only on tasks and actions relevant to performance, instead of being distracted by other environmental factors.

The ability to concentrate is obtained when the familiarization factor intervenes: knowing the progression, the horse, its reactions, the way it responds to stimuli.

Moreover, specialized studies have revealed about the factors related to the success obtained in the biggest competitions, in that of the three major factors of preparation, respectively: the mental, physical and technical factor, continuous preparation and constant training, constitute the basic pillars in the final Olympic ranking.

Expert studies have also shown that athletes who were able to perform at their maximum potential were first able to maintain their focus and attention even when faced with a great deal of distractions. A major distraction can be considered competitive stress (or anxiety). Anxiety is considered the most important distraction that can make the difference between successful athletes and those less prepared to face the challenges.

And horses, like skilled athletes, can experience higher or lower intensities of anxiety, as well as various symptoms associated with competitive anxiety. The ability to make the horse perceive the arousal/stimulus as a motivating and performance-generating factor depends largely on the sense of capability induced in the horse by the trainer. The trainer has the task of constantly encouraging the animal, and especially when it correctly executes the received command, through reward and encouragement, thus helping it to cope with the demands that are imposed during a competition.

Thus, the success achieved in the biggest contests depends a lot on the effort put in during the preparation period before the contest. The training of the horse and the rider in the pre-competition period is essential for the results obtained in the competition.

Therefore, in order to obtain the best results, it is necessary to form and follow an alternate work schedule with proper nutrition, rest and rest time.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how the sporting skills of dressage horses can be developed in the pre-competitive period and to identify the role and effects of training for the development of both physical and mental skills, the latter being represented by confidence and the lack of fear, usually induced by the feeling of the new, the unknown. The study will focus on a series of techniques and ways of working considered indispensable for the pre-competitive period.

To achieve this objective, the study will describe and analyze, on the one hand, a series of training techniques, focused on setting objectives, on designing work and relaxation programs, on the reward and encouragement system.

The working methods used will consist of the study based on sampling, using various sources of information. In this research will be used, but not limited to these: body measurements, personalized training plans at the competitive level, the competitive results obtained in the years 2021, 2022 and 2023 by the FER-

licensed horses in the national competitions in the dressage discipline, the analysis and statistical calculation, photography, the data being synthesized in an observation sheet according to one's own conception. In research on the level of performance in dressage trials, the biological material is represented by the entire herd of FER registered horses.

At the end of the study, a series of conclusions will be issued related to the results obtained and the level of performance, following the description of the work procedure and the evaluation of its efficiency in a general application sense, with an emphasis on the applied discussions, generated by the specific description of the results obtained by the method main work chosen to study the phenomenon submitted for analysis.

The central idea of the study considers the unique character of equestrian sports and refers to the fact that the achievement of performance is conditioned by the effective interaction between horse and rider, based on continuous training, detailed training for learning individual movements and repetitive training of progression, using specific principles of physical and mental strengthening.

As in any field, performance and success are possible when the athlete, in this case the horse-rider couple, knows very well and in detail what they are going to perform, thus removing emotions and fear, leading to a state of maximum concentration and achieving performances better in equestrian competition.