



ALLISON SPRINGER: THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF THE CLASSIC THREE-DAY

BY ALLISON SPRINGER

I remember feeling like it was the beginning of the end of eventing as we know it when the sport that we all love so much was changed to the short format. I remember how upset and furious everyone was; “Save the Classic Three-Day” petitions were circulated, numerous articles and letters were written. We all felt so wronged by this seemingly hasty decision.

Looking back on that time, I realize this decision was anything but made in haste. I am grateful to the forward-thinking advocates of our sport that understood the importance of eventing remaining an Olympic event; only the short format would allow our sport to continue on in the Olympics for years to come, and these people knew we had to make a change. With so many other sports like baseball and softball not evolving to be a part of the Games and being cut, surely eventing would soon be on the chopping block. Eventing being an Olympic sport offers an important legitimacy, especially in countries like the U.S. where horses are not a part of the culture like they are in England, Ireland, and Germany (though I hope this will come).

Some people actually did not feel that being an Olympic sport was important/necessary to

eventing's survival, but I feel very strongly that being an Olympic sport is extremely important to the continued popularity and betterment of our sport, especially in our country. Since the time of the decision to change the primary format of upper-level competition, despite a few growing changes, I feel like we have seen a much improved sport on so many levels. I will be honest. I, too, was hesitant to support the change in the beginning like so many were. However, as someone who rode multiple full-phase events and has since competed numerous times across the globe in the "new" format, I feel that as a result of this change, we see better course design, safer fence construction, and a much higher quality of riding and horses at every level within our sport, as well as a more prominent longevity from our equine partners.

I do get a bit twitchy when I hear some of the legends of our sport say that the professionals and riders today do not know how to properly condition or develop their horses like the pros did in the days of the long format. I do not agree with this statement. I have been blessed to participate in many long and short format CCIs through the four-star level. Our short format CCI competitions require the same level of attention to our horses' fitness program (an 11-minute Phase D still requires an enormously fit and sound horse), and like anything evolving over time, I believe we are always striving for better ways to improve our horses' fitness while maintaining their soundness. I do, however, agree that something educationally was lost and is missing in the riders that never participated in a long-format competition, and I feel fortunate to have done so.

The steeplechase phase is one of the most educational ways for a rider to learn pace, to jump out of rhythm, and have a truly balanced gallop and jumping position. All of these elements seem to be woefully missing in many of the up-and-coming riders

and amateurs that I see competing. I also feel like the long format forced many riders to learn more about other aspects of equine care like nutrition, veterinary, and farrier care. Learning how to jog a horse correctly in hand is a big part of monitoring your horse's soundness, and this is a skill, again, that many low-level riders in our sport simply do not have.

I was so excited when they brought forth the Training Three-Day Event (T3DE) and most recently the Novice Three-Day Event (N3DE). I was first asked to participate in a long-format T3DE in 2010 thanks to Nancy Winter. I have been starting many of Nancy's wonderful Connemaras for many years now, and she thought it would be a great goal for her horses to go to the GMHA T3DE. Nancy competed in one of the first ever three-day events in this country at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs back in the '50s, so she is certainly familiar with how it can benefit a horse's education. Nancy was shortlisted for the 1984 Olympic Games with Tre Awain Belfast and has seen firsthand the evolution of eventing in this country.

I will admit that a part of me initially felt a bit funny being a four-star rider signing up for the T3DE on a pony, especially when I was at first a bit skeptical about the idea of the long format at the lower levels in the first place. I was skeptical because initially I did not think about the educational benefits of these competitions or what an extreme goal and accomplishment these competitions were for both the lower-level horses and riders. At first, I thought that it was a bit odd to keep hanging on to the past when our sport had already evolved.

My experience at the 2010 GMHA T3DE was such a positive one that we came back the next year with Dusty (Gold Dust Moon) again at the Training level and also brought Benny (Loughin's Aragorn) in the N3DE. Not only was this competition a blast to compete in, but I met so many amazing people and eventers and got to witness first hand the important

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educational role that the long-format competitions play in these people's lives.

I have to say that the way GMHA puts on these events is a gift to our sport and our riders. They bring on many great clinicians and legends of our sport, offering lectures and training throughout the weekend so it ends up being beneficial no matter your end result. At the events I attended, they offered a steeplechase practice the night before the cross-country phase where Denny Emerson, John Williams, and Marcia Kulak were all out on course giving instruction. It does not get better than that, not to mention it was at no extra charge!

I am so sad that GMHA is not hosting a Classic Three-Day competition this year and I look forward to its return in the future, as I think it is such a truly special competition to be a part of.

That same year at the USEA Convention, there was discussion about extending the Classic Three-Day competitions to the Beginner Novice level, and there were a number of people resistant to this idea. I, however, was not. I spoke to the group of my experiences at GMHA and how educational and fun the weekend was for all of the participants and how I felt like extending this to the Beginner Novice level would be a great opportunity for many of our members.

As a rider, I believe that one of the things that sets our sport apart in the equestrian disciplines is how well we know our horses, how much time we spend caring for them, listening to their needs, and forming a partnership with them unlike any other. We also have a camaraderie that is unique. To me, aside from lower-level riders getting to know their horses through the conditioning process, and young horses learning from the steeplechase phase, these Novice and Training Three-Days offer riders at the lower levels an opportunity to have the support of upper-level riders and their peers unlike any other time.

You will often see lower-level riders and amateurs as the first to offer their help in the vet box for upper-level riders as horses come off course, but what you will see if you look closely during the Smartpak Equine USEA Classic Series events, are upper level riders, parents, and friends all there to support a rider. Everyone is cheering them on and the focus is on the foundation and people in our sport who make up the majority.

I think that you will find the Classic Series also showcases the fun and passion for eventing that drives us all. You see people dressed up, wearing bright colors, smiling from ear to ear the whole way, to the point that at times the love they have for their horse and our sport is almost a distraction as they arrive in the box. Nonetheless, I think that we can all learn from the long-format events. Upper-level riders, myself included, should take a moment to look around and see how much fun these competitors are having, how well they are getting to know their horses, and how much excitement

and support is shown without the pressures that sometimes overwhelm us from making teams and running our businesses. To me, these people are a reminder of why we fell in love with eventing in the first place, and sometimes we all need that!

For the riders and horses competing in the Novice and Training Three-Days for educational purposes, I believe there is no better way to get to know your horse, learn the importance of fitness, and enjoy the


little importance, and although it is still as they say a three-day event, we all know that if you cannot shine in the sandbox now, you will likely never stand atop a podium. It takes a strong group of leaders to make a change like this one to our sport and the long format. It takes an even stronger group to have the vision of what something like this can do for future generations and amateurs from an educational standpoint by reintroducing it in a bit of a different

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teamwork and fun this sport offers. This also serves as a fantastic goal and accomplishment for many to strive for within eventing.

At a higher level, yes, our sport has changed and it has evolved, but all good things do over time and this is no exception. The quality of the horses we are seeing largely in part to these changes is remarkable. I remember a time when your dressage score played

way. I for one would like to say thank you to the group of leaders who made these choices and am excited to compete horses in the Classic Series again in the near future.

I hope you love this sport as much as I do because in my opinion, the Olympics deserve the excitement of eventing and all the wild, fun people who come along with it. 

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