

THE ORIGINS

OF THE WORLD CUP

1. Max E. Ammann in deep discussion with Fritz O. Widmer and Prince Philip. Or, when the director of the World Cup gets chatting with the FEI Secretary-General and President.

For the second time, Geneva and Switzerland are delighted and honoured to be hosting the World Cup Jumping Final. It is true that Switzerland has always been closely associated with the biggest indoor show jumping competition. Geneva has always hosted a leg of this circuit since it was first set up in 1978-79 (March 1979 for Geneva). And the whole idea was more or less conceived in Geneva, as Max E. Ammann explains in the following article. The Swiss journalist will always be seen as the main inspiration behind the circuit and he was in charge of it for 25 years. He also created the World Cup Driving, pioneered in 2001-02, that Geneva regularly hosts at Palexpo.

1970 was a crucial year for the international jumping sport. After a decade when all world events were held outside of Europe, the World Championships of 1970 in La Baule became the first world encounter in Europe since the 1960 Rome Olympics. In 1964 and 1968 the Olympics were held in Japan and Mexico respectively – 1966 the Jumping World Championship took place in Argentina.

La Baule 1970 saw an unprecedented international TV coverage and the largest number of media. This encounter of practically everybody who was somebody in the sport led to many discussions about the future of the equestrian sport, especially show jumping. I was, at that time, political foreign correspondent in New York but had, as a journalistic hobby, written about equestrian sport from the US: for the then Schweizer Kavallerist, for the Reiter Revue, for Information Hippique. I also had, in

1969, introduced world ratings in the three Olympic disciplines, not based on a computer, which was not available then, but on comparing the year-long results of the top riders. Thus I was very much involved in those talks and discussions.

Those discussions went on as the seventies progressed: at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich and then especially during the annual CHIO in Aachen. They became a special note when, in 1974, after an appeal by FEI President, Prince Philip, Great Britain and Ireland declared their top riders as professionals. At the 1975 European Championships and the 1976 Olympic Games, only amateurs represented Great Britain. Many discussions centered on the question on how international horse shows could be linked by TV to create a universal coverage. A World Cup Jumping, similar to Ski or Formula One, rarely came up in those discussions. But it started to grow in my head.

ONE PAY PHONE FOR THE JOURNALISTS

At the 1974 World Championships in Hickstead some 50 journalists founded the International Alliance of Equestrian Journalists (IAEJ), as a more dynamic successor to a similar, but rather socially conceived club, presided by François-Achille Roch. I became the president of this IAEJ and met Prince Philip, the President of the FEI, at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal. The topics were the working conditions for journalists at championships and international events. At that time the conditions for the media at many events were deplorable. The CSIO Rome for example had no

press center, only uncovered press seats for the foreign journalists and one pay phone on all of the Piazza di Siena. In order to file your story to your newspaper you had to descend the Spanish Steps and transmit in the postoffice at the bottom.

Prince Philip listened attentively and, after several more meetings and appearances before the Bureau of the FEI, working conditions were established which are still in use today. At the end of the meeting I asked Prince Philip if the FEI ever thought of a World Cup for Jumping Riders. The FEI President was stunned – what do you mean, he said. I explained that several major sports had achieved greater visibility by binding their major events into a series: the Ski World Cup, the various cups in football and, of course, Formula One. Prince Philip was interested and he asked me to make a proposal.

Being the chief editor of a daily newspaper in Lucerne who had just come out of a major financial crisis after the massive loss of advertisements following the oil crisis of 1973-74, my preoccupation after my return from the Olympics was with my job. The World Cup dream was on a back-burner. In March 1977 I went to the indoor-CSI in Dortmund. There Eric Wauters told me that practically all the riders present in Dortmund had met and discussed the creation of a riders union. They would meet again in Geneva in early April.

In Geneva – then in Les Vernets – I was happily sitting in the press seats when, on Friday afternoon, Neco Pessoa and François Mathy appeared and signaled that they would like to talk to me. They told me that the riders had met that morning and that they had decided to create a riders union. They also said that the riders wanted me as their president. I responded that, as chief editor of a major daily newspaper, I could not be their president, but that I would come to their next meeting to help.

This meeting took place in the riders' hotel on Saturday 2 April 1977 in Geneva. Close to 40 riders were there. I told them that I consider this coming together of the riders a good idea but not as a union, but rather as a club. This was agreed. I then said that I would write the statutes of their newly created club and help to solicit members and establish a membership list. At a quarter to 1 pm the riders got restless. At 1 pm the Grand National was on TV. Thus the meeting adjourned to see Red Rum doing it again.

In the coming 12 months I chaired probably a dozen meetings of the riders: especially at indoor events, including in October 1977 in Teheran. At the important meeting during the European Championships in the summer of 1977 in Vienna, the main issue was the organization of the club. Then in the fall of 1977, the World Cup project took over. It was at the CSI Donaueschingen in September 1977 when the German journalist Dieter Ludwig asked me: Max, how is your World Cup going? I realized that, since Montreal, one year before, I had done little to advance the project, partly because of my chief editor's job, partly because of my equestrian preoccupation with the Jumping Riders Club.

THE HUGE POTENTIAL OF THE INDOOR EVENTS

I asked Paul Schockemöhle and Hendrik Snoek for dinner in Donaueschingen. I could persuade them that a World Cup with the Grand Prix of the summer CSIO would have little impact. The priority of the CSIO's should be the Nations Cup, such as in Aachen and in Lucerne. On the other hand the indoor events offered a huge potential. Amsterdam, Vienna, London (Olympia), Berlin, Dortmund, 's-Hertogenbosch and Geneva were major shows but attracted (with the exception of Geneva, which was a CSIO with a Nations Cup) practically no international press. Because all these indoor CSIs were the only event at that weekend – contrary to summer CSIO or CSI when sometimes five events were held on the same weekend – practically all top European riders were present at these indoor events.

From this Donaueschingen dinner with Paul and Hendrik things moved on. There were several levels of action: I continued to chair the meetings of the International Riders Club at every occasion available; I talked to all the indoor events which could be interested in the World Cup and I looked for money to finance the undertaking. The riders meetings all went well and the contacts with the organizers were fruitful: they smelled the attraction of the World Cup, but resented the possible interference by a World Cup organization or this Max E. Ammann. The search for financing was rockier. The FEI had contacts to IMG, but ultimately nothing



2. Eric Wauters (clearing 2m18 on Pomme d'Api at the Vernets in 1975) was a co-founder of the riders' club.

came off. Similarly the meetings with the then prominent promoting company of West-Nally saw no result. My feeling was that for an international sport agency the signing of individual athletes was more attractive than sponsoring a project such as the proposed World Cup. I also realized that even the most powerful agency has only a limited number of contacts to potential sponsors. Should they use it on a niche sport such as equestrian?

"IT'S A DEAL!"

Luckily I knew Anders Gernandt, former Swedish Olympic rider and then commentator for Swedish TV. I knew that the Swedish car maker Volvo was the main sponsor of the CSI in Göteborg. Göteborg and Geneva were, at that time, the last two events of the indoor season. Being a good Swiss I went first to the main sponsor of the CSIO Geneva. But Yves Piaget was not interested. Then I contacted Anders Gernandt whom I consequently met in early August 1978 at the World Championships in Aachen. His impressions of our talk and his report to Volvo must have been positive because a few days later I received an invitation to meet the president of Volvo, Pehr Gyllenhammar, for dinner in his home in Göteborg. Pehr Gyllenhammar had invited a few of his friends for the occasion, among them Ulf Bergqvist who later became my partner and friend in running the World Cup. During dinner-time I explained the project and answered questions – the asked amount for the annual sponsorship was CHF 480'000. A while later, in the library, with a cognac glass in the hand, Pehr Gyllenhammar reached out his right hand to me and said: "It's a deal!"

Less than two months later the first ever World Cup competition was held in Washington and another six months later, in April 1979, the first final was won by Hugo Simon on the great Gladstone. Volvo remained sponsor for 20 years, until the 1998 final in Helsinki, one of the longest sponsorships in all sports. In the last years of its sponsorship, Volvo's annual outlay amounted to approx. CHF 10'000'000 which, I was told at that time, was well spent and brought the return desired.

During those 20 Volvo sponsorship years the 18th final was held in Geneva. It was certainly one of the best organized finals I ever experienced, helped on the one side by the generous dimensions of Palexpo and on the other side by a great volunteer crew. For the 32nd final, the World Cup, now sponsored by Rolex, returns to Geneva.

MAX E. AMMANN
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1. Nelson «Neco» Pessoa (with Gran Geste) offered Max E. Ammann the presidency of the riders' club.
2. A dinner with Paul Schockemöhle (seen here on Deister) and Hendrik Snoek contributed greatly to furthering the World Cup cause.
3. Max E. Ammann, having just congratulated Nick Skelton, excellent 3rd in the 1996 World Cup Final, Geneva.

