

FINAL DECISION of the FEI TRIBUNAL

6 August 2025

(Ref. no. FEI Tribunal: C24-0029 Cesar Parra v. FEI
Ref. FEI: 2024/HA01)

In the matter of

Mr Cesar Parra (the “Respondent”)

Vs.

FÉDÉRATION EQUESTRE INTERNATIONALE (the “FEI” or “the Claimant”)

together the “Parties”

COMPOSITION OF THE FEI TRIBUNAL PANEL:

Mr Jose A. Rodriguez Alvarez (MEX), Chair;
Mr Brian Ward (CAN), Member;
Mr Agustin Fattal Jaef (ARG), Member.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On 22 May 2024, Mr Cesar Parra applied to the FEI Tribunal (the “Tribunal”) to lift the provisional suspension (the “Provisional Suspension”) imposed on him on 2 February 2024 pursuant to Article 164.6 of the FEI General Regulations due to allegations of “abusive training techniques”. Following preliminary proceedings, the Tribunal decided, by Preliminary Decision (terms notified to the Parties on 8 July 2024, grounds notified to the Parties on 29 August 2024) to maintain the Provisional Suspension.
2. On 1 July 2024, the FEI applied to the Tribunal with an Urgent request for a stay of the deadline to submit its Claim pending the determination, by the Tribunal, of the admissibility of certain evidence. The Tribunal ruled on the admissibility of the evidence on 30 August 2024.
3. On 20 September 2024, the FEI submitted to the Tribunal its Claim Brief (the “Claim”) in relation to Mr Cesar Parra, which concluded that the Respondent committed among others Horse Abuse and thereafter committed violations of Art. 142 and Art. 164.11 (b), Art. 164.11 (g) and Art. 164.11 (i) of the FEI General Regulations.

Applicable Rule Provisions:

Statutes 25th edition, effective 23 November 2023 (the “Statutes”).

FEI General Regulations 23rd edition, updates effective as of 1 January 2017 and onwards.

FEI General Regulations 24th edition, updates effective 1 January 2024 (the “GRs”)¹.

Internal Regulations of the FEI Tribunal, 3rd Edition, 2 March 2018 (“the IRs”).

Internal Regulations of the FEI Tribunal, 4th edition, 1 February 2025 (“the IRs”).

FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse (the “Code of Conduct”).

¹ Although various versions of the GRs are applicable in the present matter in view of the timespan of the alleged violations (2017-2024), only the 2024 version of the GRs will be referred to, since – to the exception of the Statute of Limitations, addressed in a previous decision and again in this Decision – there have not been major changes to the GRs in relation to the articles at stake.

II. FACTUAL BACKGROUND

4. On 2 February 2024, the FEI notified Mr Parra (the “Notice”) that he was the subject of an investigation following allegations of horse abuse being reported to the FEI and the US Equestrian Federation (the “USA-NF”). Mr Parra was also informed that he was being provisionally suspended with immediate effect (the “Provisional Suspension”).
5. On 29 February 2024, Mr Parra, via his legal representative, wrote to the FEI to request full access to the evidence upon which the allegations were based, before proceeding to challenge the Provisional Suspension imposed on him. Mr Parra further indicated that he vehemently denied any wrongdoing.
6. On 11 March 2024, the FEI responded to Mr Parra, providing him with several videos and photos which had served as the basis for the FEI’s decision to provisionally suspend Mr Parra. The FEI further indicated that, since the matter was currently under investigation, it was unable to give any further updates at the moment.
7. Following additional exchanges that seem to have happened between the FEI and Mr Parra – which were mentioned in their respective submissions, but without having been enclosed – Mr Parra submitted his request to lift the Provisional Suspension to the FEI Tribunal on 22 May 2024 (although the letter was dated 21 May 2024). His request was based on the grounds that (a) the FEI has no power to impose any provisional suspension in the circumstances (alternatively, that the Provisional Suspension has been imposed in breach of the GRs) and/or (b) the Provisional Suspension has been imposed in a procedurally unfair manner (in particular, because the FEI has failed to sufficiently particularize the allegations and/or to disclose any competent evidence in support of the allegations). Mr Parra further requested an urgent hearing to be held.
8. On 22 May 2024 also, by way of the Notification Letter sent to Mr Parra (the “Notification Letter”), the FEI informed Mr Parra of the opening of disciplinary proceedings against him, in accordance with Art. 30 of the IRs, for the offences of Abuse of Horse, Breach of the FEI Code of Conduct on the Welfare of the Horse and Conduct that brings the FEI and/or equestrian sport into disrepute. The FEI further listed the following allegations, which were brought to the FEI’s attention:
 - Excessive use of whip and spurs;

- Excessive use of hand aid;
 - Use of abusive equipment;
 - Employment of hyperflexion (rollkur) on Horses;
 - Riding Horses despite them being lame and/or injured;
 - Overworking the horses;
 - Tying the Horses' heads down for a prolonged period of time.
9. The FEI also submitted that the latter allegations were not limited to one or two isolated incidents. On the contrary, the FEI noted that such incidents were alleged to be repetitive, deliberate and continuous acts of horse abuse by Mr Parra. In addition, it was alleged that a large number of Horses were subject to the alleged abuse. The submitted testimonies alongside the photographic and video evidence depicted a pattern of behaviour whereby abusive techniques were allegedly deployed on numerous horses and Mr Parra was in a perpetual search and use of new abusive techniques, gadgets and/or devices to force the Horses into submission.

III. PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

10. On 22 May 2024, Mr Parra applied to the Tribunal to have his Provisional Suspension lifted (the "Application").
11. On 4 June 2024, the FEI requested a deadline extension for the filing of its Claim on the merits, motivated by (i) Mr Parra's Application to lift the Provisional Suspension and the respective rounds of submissions which are needed in this respect, (ii) the complexity and the extensiveness of the disciplinary claim, (iii) the current heavy workload of the FEI Legal Department and its Legal Counsel in charge of the matter, and (iv) the final stages of preparation for Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris in 2024.
12. Later on 4 June 2024, Mr Parra's legal representative indicated, while not necessarily objecting to the FEI's request, that considering the already elapsed period of time during which he has been provisionally suspended by the FEI, that less restrictive means be put in place by which horses and the FEI's reputation can be protected, since the FEI indicated being concerned with the welfare of horses.
13. On 10 June 2024, the FEI Tribunal Chair acknowledged receipt of the FEI's request for a deadline extension, as well as Mr Parra's unsolicited response to it. The FEI Tribunal Chair

granted the FEI an extension of 4 weeks, i.e. until 22 July 2024, to submit its Claim, and informed Mr Parra that he would be granted similar timeframe to submit his Answer (i.e. 4 additional weeks to the otherwise 20 days applicable under Art. 30.5 of the IRs).

14. On 12 June 2024, Mr Parra submitted, in the preliminary proceedings, a rebuttal which was in fact entitled “Motion to Strike Allegations that are Time Barred” (the “Motion”), following the FEI’s submission of new allegations of horse abuse.
15. On 24 June 2024, the FEI submitted its reply to Mr Parra’s Motion, whereby it concluded that the FEI Tribunal should dismiss Mr Parra’s Request to lift the Provisional Suspension imposed on him and requested that the FEI’s deadline to submit its Claim be stayed, pending the FEI Tribunal’s determination of the Motion.
16. On 27 June 2024, the preliminary hearing took place via videoconference.
17. On 1 July 2024, the FEI submitted an “Urgent request for stay on deadline to submit FEI Claim pending determination of admissibility of evidence”. Based on the 12 June 2024 Motion filed by the Respondent and the 24 June 2024 submission by the FEI, the FEI requested that the Tribunal (i) constitutes urgently a 3-members Panel to address the following requests, (ii) determine the admissibility of the contested evidence addressed in the Motion and (iii) stays the FEI’s deadline to submit its Claim in accordance with Art. 30.4 of the IRs, pending the decision on the present request.
18. On the same day, the FEI Tribunal Chair informed the Parties of the constitution of the Panel appointed for the case. The Parties were invited to submit any objection to its constitution by 3 July 2024. Within the same deadline, the Respondent was requested to submit his position with respect to the FEI’s request.
19. On 2 July 2024, the FEI confirmed having no objection to the constitution of the Panel.
20. On 4 July 2024, the Respondent objected to the nomination of Mr Brian Ward as member of the Panel, on the basis of potential conflicts. Mr Parra submitted and alleged that Mr Ward had been involved in the prosecution of another case in Canada, which also involved individuals being charged with horse abuse by the FEI, provisionally suspended and their suspension overturned by a CAS Panel. Furthermore, Mr Parra sought clarification as to the extent of the Panel’s jurisdiction, i.e. whether the Panel would only decide the question of the Statute of Limitations, or also the entire Claim. Finally, Mr Parra requested that a Panel Member with significant personal experience as an athlete involved in dressage competition or who has great personal knowledge about dressage should be one of the Members of the

Panel. With respect to the FEI's 1 July 2024 letter, Mr Parra confirmed his Motion that the Statute of Limitations should apply to the allegations brought against him.

21. On 5 July 2024, after having collected Mr Ward's position and in view of the arguments raised, the FEI Tribunal Chair rejected the Respondent's Objection. First, the FEI Tribunal Chair noted that Mr Ward has not been involved in a matter related to the individual quoted by the respondent, in front of the FEI. Furthermore, even if he would have been involved (*quod non*), as Panel member in a case of a related nature to the present case, it does not constitute sufficient grounds to justify a possible conflict, in the sense of the IRs. Moreover, upon detailed review of the request, it was noted that the Respondent did not explain for which grounds the fact of having been involved in the case quoted, would constitute a conflicted position. Moreover, the Chair informed the Parties that the constituted Panel will hear and determine the entire matter related to the Claim to be submitted by the FEI, and not only the question related to the Statute of Limitations and the request for stay submitted by the FEI on 1 July 2024. Additionally, the Chair clarified that pursuant to Art. 19.1 of the IRs, the FEI Tribunal Chair shall nominate the members of the FEI Tribunal to sit at the Hearing Panel, and it is not up to the parties to request the composition of the Hearing Panel. The FEI Tribunal is established under Article 38 of the FEI Statutes, and all of its members have legal expertise and appropriate knowledge and experience of equestrian sport (cf. Article 38.6 of the FEI Statutes). Furthermore, all the FEI Tribunal Members have been duly elected following a thorough review and evaluation process, performed by the FEI Nominations Committee.
22. On 8 July 2024, the Preliminary Hearing Panel notified the Parties of the terms of his Preliminary Decision.
23. On the same day, the Hearing Panel Chair informed the Parties that, in application of Art. 23 a) of the IRs, the Panel decided to order that potentially dispositive issues raised (i.e. the admissibility of the FEI's evidence that is contested by the Respondent as being potentially time-barred) be heard and determined in advance of any other issues in the matter. The Respondent was therefore granted a 7-days deadline to expand, in writing, on his Motion, and the FEI was similarly granted a 7-days deadline, upon conclusion of the Respondent's submission's deadline, to respond in writing to the Motion.
24. On 15 July 2024, the Respondent submitted his Brief on the Statute of Limitations, to which the FEI responded on 22 July 2024.

25. On 5 August 2024, after having duly considered the Parties' respective submissions, the Panel decided to order a second round of submissions and granted the Parties' respective deadlines in this respect.
26. On 8 August 2024 (received on 9 August 2024), the Respondent submitted his Rebuttal, and the FEI its own Rebuttal on 12 August 2024.
27. On 29 August 2024, the Preliminary Hearing Panel notified the grounds of his Preliminary Decision to the Parties.
28. On 30 August 2024, the Panel ruled on the Motion to Strike Allegations that are Time Barred. The Panel's decision was notified to the Parties on the same day. By way of said decision, the Panel ruled that the evidence put forward by the FEI which refers to periods of time of more than five years before 1 January 2022 are indeed time barred. With respect to the allegation which, on 1 January 2022, were not time barred (i.e. allegations that back date until 1 January 2017 at the latest), the Panel ruled that they could indeed be prosecuted by the FEI and were no longer subject to any statute of limitations. In the same correspondence, the Hearing Panel Chair informed the Parties that the FEI's deadline to finalize and submit its Claim to the Tribunal would elapse on 20 September 2024.
29. On 20 September 2024, the FEI submitted its Claim Brief, which will be summarized below.
30. On 27 September 2024, the Hearing Panel Chair acknowledged receipt of the FEI's Claim Brief, copy of which had already been remitted to the Respondent. The Hearing Panel Chair informed the Respondent of the deadline afforded to submit his Answer pursuant to Art. 30.5 of the IRs and informed the Respondent of his right to request for an extension of such, since similar extension had been granted to the FEI. On the same day, the Respondent requested said extension.
31. On 2 October 2024, the Hearing Panel Chair confirmed to the Respondent that the deadline to submit his Answer would be extended until 7 November 2024.
32. On 6 November 2024, 11:29 PM (Swiss time, 5:29 PM local time for the Respondent, which is based in Florida, hence UTC -4), the Counsel for the Respondent requested an additional 7-days to file his Answer Brief, alleging his good faith in the proceedings and the impact of the Hurricane Milton and ensuing tornados in Florida, which prevented the Respondent and his employees to access crucial resources for the case. On 7 November 2024, the FEI Tribunal Clerk acknowledged receipt of the request, and informed the Respondent that said request has been transmitted to the attention of the Panel.

33. On 8 November 2024, 06:32 AM (Swiss time, 00:32 AM local time for the Respondent), the Respondent filed his Answer Brief. In the supporting email, the Counsel for the Respondent acknowledged that said filing was “29 minutes late”, but that said delay was “small enough so as not to prejudice the FEI” and therefore requested the Tribunal to accept the late filing. In the same email, the Respondent maintained his request for a 7-days extension to complete his Answer Brief.
34. On 8 November 2024, the Hearing Panel Chair acknowledged receipt of the Respondent’s correspondences. In relation to the Respondent’s request for an extension to file his Answer Brief, the Hearing Panel Chair noted that the Milton Hurricane swept through Florida between 5 and 10 October 2024, and that the Respondent did not submit any evidence establishing how such circumstances would have directly prevented him to properly prepare and/or submit his Answer. Nonetheless, in view of the circumstances of the present case, the Hearing Panel Chair informed the Parties that the Panel would be willing to exceptionally accept the Respondent’s request, provided that the FEI would not object otherwise. Since the FEI did not object, the Respondent’s deadline was extended until 14 November 2024.
35. On 15 November 2024, 06:29 AM (Swiss time, 00:29 AM local time for the Respondent), the Respondent submitted his “Amended (signed) Answer Brief”. He then submitted the exhibits in a separate email 1.30 hours later and requested the Panel to only consider the amended documents, and not the initial Answer Brief and documents submitted the week before.
36. On 15 November 2024, 08:44 AM (Swiss time, 02:44 AM local time for the Respondent), the Respondent submitted his “Corrected Amended (signed) Answer Brief”, since he realized that there was an error on the Title page of the submitted document, and requested the Panel to consider the “Corrected Amended Answer Brief”, instead of the “Amended Answer Brief”.
37. On 3 December 2024, the Hearing Panel Chair acknowledged receipt of the Respondent’s emails and offered dates to hold the hearing in the present matter, via video conference. The Parties confirmed their availability for the hearing to take place in January 2025.
38. On 13 December 2024, the Hearing Panel Chair requested the Parties to indicate which witnesses they intend to call for the Hearing, in order to determine which witnesses will be allowed, and thereafter the length of the hearing.

39. On 18 December 2024, the Respondent submitted a list of three witnesses he intended to call, in addition to two experts. He further submitted a “Motion for Protective Order” in relation to three additional anonymous witnesses, which expressed a fear of retaliation from the FEI witnesses.
40. On 18 December 2024, the FEI submitted a list of four witnesses they intended to call, in addition to one expert. The FEI further submitted that they felt impaired in their decision whether a cross-examination of the 54 witness declarations submitted by the Respondent would be needed, since the admissibility as evidence of the majority of them is legally questionable. In this respect, the FEI noted that some witnesses undoubtedly fall outside the Statute of Limitations decided by the FEI Tribunal in the present matter. Many others intentionally omit the timeframe in which they either worked for or attended clinics or were involved in the sale / purchase of horses with the Respondent. The FEI also contested the Respondent’s Motion for Protective Order, since the Respondent failed to clarify who those three witnesses are, and whether their witness testimonies would be part of the 54 declarations submitted in support of his Answer Brief. Furthermore, the FEI considered that the Respondent failed to prove concrete risks of retaliation and only submitted allegations.
41. On 3 January 2025, the Counsel for the Respondent submitted an urgent request for postponement of the hearing scheduled to take place in January 2025. This request was based on the fact that the Respondent was admitted to the hospital for a medical emergency. The Respondent further requested for an interpreter to be appointed for one of his experts, and for the costs of said interpreter to be borne by the FEI. Finally, the Respondent requested in advance for the hearing to be recorded and to receive a transcript of such.
42. After having been invited by the Hearing Panel Chair to submit their position in this respect, the FEI confirmed on 6 January 2025 not objecting to the postponement of the hearing due to medical reasons. With respect to the Respondent’s other requests, the FEI indicated that it is up to each party to provide an interpreter at their own expenses, pursuant to Art. 20.2 of the IRs. The FEI further informed the Panel that an interpreter would be present for one of their witnesses. With respect to the Respondent’s request for the recording and advanced arrangements for transcript, the FEI referred to Art. 27 of the IRs, which provide clearly that a party shall have a right to a transcript of the recording, provided that said party has commenced an Appeal against the Hearing Panel’s decision.
43. On 7 January 2025, the FEI Tribunal Clerk informed the parties of the cancelation of the hearing initially scheduled for mid-January 2025.

44. Later on the same day, the Respondent submitted a “Request for Clarification Regarding Hearing Scheduling and Related Matters”, whereby the Respondent asked about the number of days scheduled for the hearing, as well as updates on the witnesses allowed and the protective measures envisioned by the Panel.
45. On 10 January 2025, the FEI Tribunal Clerk informed the parties that the Panel’s feedback on the matters raised, and other outstanding matters would be provided to the Parties in the course of the following week.
46. On 16 January 2025, the Hearing Panel Chair provided the parties with updates in relation to the proceedings. First, the Hearing Panel Chair offered the dates of 11 to 13 March 2025 for the hearing and asked the Parties to confirm their availability. In relation to the Respondent’s Motion for Protective Order, the Hearing Panel Chair requested the Respondent to indicate why those witnesses requested to remain anonymous, and in what consisted concretely the alleged “fear of retaliation” as well as the “threats” mentioned in his 18 December 2024 submission. The Respondent was further requested to submit his position in response to the FEI’s position on those matters. On the question of interpreters, the Hearing Panel Chair drew the Parties’ attention to Art. 20.2 of the IRs, stating that any party wishing to make submissions or to rely on evidence in a language other than English must provide an independent interpreter at his own cost, and indicated that there were no grounds justifying from deviating from this principle. The Parties were requested to provide name and credentials of their respective interpreters no later than 15 days prior to the hearing. Finally, with respect to recording and advanced arrangements for transcription, the Panel noted that the FEI already duly answered and referred to Art. 27 of the IRs.
47. On 22 January 2025, the FEI confirmed their availability for the hearing to take place in March 2025.
48. On 23 January 2025, 06:05 AM (Swiss time, 00:05 AM local time for the Respondent), by way of a letter dated 22 January 2025, the Respondent also confirmed his availability for the hearing. The Respondent further elaborated on his request for anonymity for some of his witnesses, alleging that confidential information in relation to the proceedings had been disclosed in the media, in particular in relation to the cancelation and postponement of the hearing. The Respondent further provided screenshots of what he considers to constitute threats and aggressive behaviors committed by the people the FEI intend to call as witnesses. The Respondent further alleged to be the victim of social media posts and to be slaughtered on social media and hence requested the Fei and the Fei tribunal to make a

public statement clarifying that he never delayed the proceedings and cooperates fully through the proceedings. Finally, the Respondent confirmed that the three witnesses for whom he requested the anonymity are among the 54 declarations submitted as part of his Answer Brief, and that they fear to receive the same treatment as Mr Parra, i.e. to be crucified in social media.

49. On the next day, on 24 January 2025, the Respondent's Counsel submitted a corrected version of his 22 January 2025 submission, indicating that the latter contained a "single spelling mistake and one missing post".
50. On 28 January 2025, the Hearing Panel Chair acknowledged receipt of the Parties' respective confirmations of availability, and informed them that a hearing schedule, as well as the link to access the videoconference hearing, will be provided to the parties in due course. Furthermore, the FEI was requested to submit their position in response to the Respondent's letter of 22 January 2025, by 4 February 2025.
51. On 4 February 2025, the FEI replied to the Respondent's submission of 22 January 2025, stating that they had to inform their witnesses about the postponement of the hearing, since they were to appear at the hearing schedule. The FEI further indicated having not disclosed any information about the "medical reasons" behind the postponement. With respect to the alleged threats, the FEI noted that the person allegedly making the threats is not part of the proceedings. Also, some of the authenticity of the allegations from the Respondent cannot be verified, and finally, the texts provided to not amount to threats at a level that would justify the anonymity request. The FEI rejected all of the Respondent's allegations and will not issue any public statement in this matter.
52. On 5 February 2025, the FEI Tribunal Clerk acknowledged receipt of the FEI's correspondence of 4 February 2025, and on behalf of the Hearing Panel, invited the parties not to submit any further correspondence until the Panel reviews the outstanding matters.
53. On 12 February 2025, the Hearing Panel requested the FEI to confirm that the names of the three witnesses, when provided by the Respondent, will be kept confidential, and also that any recording to be provided by the FEI Tribunal will not be shared with any third party (with the exception of the company that would be hired to redact the transcript) and that the names of the three witnesses in question would be redacted from said transcript. In turn, the Panel confirmed that the names of the three witnesses would be redacted from the Final Decision to be issued. The FEI was requested to confirm their commitment to the

requested measures, and in turn after confirmation of receipt, the Respondent was requested to provide the Panel and the FEI with the names of the three witnesses.

54. On 14 February 2025, the FEI confirmed their commitment to undertake the measures requested by the Panel.
55. On 18 February 2025, at 04:55 AM (Swiss time, 10:55 PM local time on 17 February 2025 for the Respondent), the Counsel for the Respondent requested for a 24-hours extension of the deadline to submit the names of the deadline which had been granted by the Panel, due to medical reasons of the Respondent (and of his counsel as well) who did not approve the draft response sent by his counsel.
56. On 19 February 2025, at 04:40 AM (Swiss time, 10:40 PM local time on 18 February 2025 for the Respondent), the Respondent submitted his position with regard to his prior Motion for Protective Order. The Respondent expressed his sincere gratitude to the Panel for having addressed the concerns raised in connection with the three witnesses who sought protective measures and thanked the Tribunal's commitment to ensuring fairness and due process in those proceedings. Notwithstanding the efforts and measures proposed, the Respondent indicated that the witnesses remained unwilling to disclose their identities or proceed with their testimony. Therefore, the Respondent informed the Panel that given these persistent concerns, the witnesses have declined to proceed, even under the safeguards provided. Furthermore, the Respondent asked clarifications as to the scope of the protective measures – although having already confirmed that the witnesses would not appear – and also asked the Tribunal what consequences would be imposed on those responsible for violating the Tribunal's protective order, since confidential information is still disclosed in violation of that order.
57. On 21 February 2025, the Hearing Panel Chair acknowledged receipt of the Respondent's correspondences received on 18 and 19 February 2025. In this respect, the Panel noted that the three witnesses expressed that they would not attend the hearing, which was not conditioned to any further elements. Since their testimonies were in any event among the 54 declarations submitted by the Respondent, and that Mr Parra further requested for other witnesses to be heard at the hearing, the Panel considers that the Motion for Protective Order has been addressed and is now closed. The Hearing Panel Chair further answered to the Respondent's other questions, and in particular informed the Respondent that any violation of confidentiality would be part of possible different proceedings related to possible breaches of the offences listed in the FEI GRs, at art. 164.11. Moreover, the Hearing Panel Chair listed the Parties' respective witnesses and experts called to appear at the

hearing, which are admitted by the Panel. Those are, on behalf of the Respondent, Mr Parra himself, Respondent's Witness 1, Respondent's Witness 2, Respondent's Witness 3, Dr Johan Sebastian Cardenas and Ms Lisa El_Ramey as Respondent's experts. On behalf of the FEI, FEI's Witness 1, FEI's Witness 2, FEI's Witness 3, FEI's Witness 4 and Dr Rachel Murray as FEI's expert.

58. On 21 February 2025, the Respondent submitted the name and credentials of the interpreter which would assist the expert testimony of Dr Cardenas. The Respondent's Counsel further informed the Tribunal having received the new version of the IRs, which came into force on 1 February 2025.
59. On 23 February 2025, the FEI requested an extension of the deadline to provide the name and credentials of their interpreter, since the availability of said interpreter would depend on the exact day and hour of his/her appearance.
60. On 25 February 2025, the Hearing Panel Chair acknowledged receipt of the Parties' submissions of 21 and 23 February 2025 and extended the FEI's deadline to provide their interpreter's credentials, until 3 March 2025. Furthermore, the Hearing Panel Chair provided the parties with a hearing schedule for the two days of the hearing, with the third day being kept if needed.
61. On 3 March 2025, the FEI submitted their interpreter's name and credentials, which would be present at the hearing to assist FEI's Witness 4.
62. On 7 March 2025, the FEI requested for all the experts to be present online in the hearing room at the same time, i.e. also during direct and cross examinations of each expert. This would, in the FEI's view, allow the opportunity to address any outstanding question and to provide clarity, particularly in respect of complex technical issues to the Panel.
63. On 10 March 2025, the Hearing Panel Chair acknowledged receipt of the FEI's request and asked the Respondent to provide his position in this respect, further informing the Parties that the Panel would decide on this request at the beginning of the hearing.
64. On 10 March 2025, the Respondent submitted that compliance with the FEI's request would present significant logistical and technical challenges, in view of the fact that one of the experts requires interpretation English – Spanish, and in view of the allocated time for each expert in the context of the proceedings. By way of the same correspondence, the Respondent requested clarifications as to the starting time of the hearing, since, between 9 and 29 March 2025, the difference in time between EST (where the Respondent is located)

and CET (where the FEI is located) is only five hours, whereas the time difference is usually six hours. Furthermore, the Respondent requested additional time to cross examine some of the FEI's witnesses and offered to waive some of his witnesses in "exchange" of this additional time. Finally, and in view of the above, the Respondent requested that the Tribunal put into play the third day of the hearing, which was at this stage only reserved.

65. On 10 March 2025, the FEI Tribunal Clerk confirmed to the parties that all relevant times mentioned in the proceedings were to be understood as Swiss time, since Swiss times have always been mentioned in the FEI Tribunal's correspondences. As per the other elements raised shortly before the start of the hearing, the FEI Tribunal Clerk informed the parties that they would be addressed at the beginning of said hearing. They are therefore addressed below in the present decision, starting at par. 137.
66. On 11, 12 and 13 March 2025, the hearing took place in front of the Hearing Panel. The Respondent attended the hearing personally, accompanied by his legal counsel, Mr Michael Romm. On behalf of the FEI were present, on the first day, Mr Mikael Rentsch (FEI Legal Director), Ms Ana Kricej (FEI Legal Counsel) and Ms Katarzyna Jozwik (FEI Legal Counsel). On the second and third day, only Mr Rentsch and Ms Kricej attended the hearing.

IV. The Submissions by and on behalf of the Parties²

i. The Submissions of the FEI:

67. On 20 September 2024, the FEI submitted their Claim Brief (the "Claim"), in accordance with Art. 30.4 of the IRs.
68. The Respondent is an American dressage rider who has been competing at international level since 1998, including in the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, and is an elite athlete who has reached the highest level of performance in dressage with considerable experience in equestrian sport.
69. In February 2024, the United States Equestrian Federation ("USEF") and the FEI were informed of allegations of abuse of horses by the Respondent and were provided with numerous videos and photographs, amongst others, depicting the Respondent engaging in

² The following section contains a summary of the relevant facts, allegations and arguments based on the Parties' written submissions, pleadings submitted by them throughout the proceedings. Although the Panel has fully considered all the facts, allegations, legal arguments and evidence presented in these proceedings, the Panel will only refer to the submissions and evidence it considers necessary to explain its reasoning in this decision.

abuse and abusive training techniques on several horses. On 2 February 2024, the Respondent was informed that he was subject of an FEI investigation, and immediately provisionally suspended.

70. On 22 May 2024, the FEI sent their Notification Letter to the Respondent, in accordance with Art. 30.1-2 of the IRs.
71. On 3 June 2024, the Respondent denied the allegations and requested that the liability and, if applicable, sanctions be determined by a hearing panel.
72. In support of their Claim, the FEI submitted 29 videos, 25 photographs and 4 witness statements, which, in the FEI's view, establishes that the Respondent engaged in:
 1. Excessive use of the whip and spurs, on a continuous basis, leaving whip and spur marks, welts and open wounds on the horses;
 2. Excessive use of hand aid, on a continuous basis, resulting in bleeding, sores and cuts in the horses' mouths;
 3. use of abusive equipment, i.e., amongst others, of:
 - the twisted steel wire headset which is placed on the Horse's head under the bridle and tied to the girth. The set up forces the Horses' heads down. When the Horses resist by trying to lift the heads up, it inflicts discomfort and pain, often resulting in cuts;
 - the metal nuts under the nosebands causing pain, swelling and inflammation resulting in the increased sensitivity of the nasal bone area with the Horses consequently less likely to resist to excessive rein use by opening their mouths;
 - use of electric spurs;
 - the leather shackles connected together with a rubber band placed on a pair of Horses' legs, allegedly used to restrict the movement of the Horses and by doing that building up the muscles and to teach them patience and discipline;
 - the pulley device placed on the Horses' front legs. The pulley device consists of leather shackles that are placed on the pastern of the front hooves with a long roping rope clipped on one side of the lunging girth, woven through the ring of one of the shackles back to the girth between the front legs, through the ring on the other shackle and through the ring on the other side of the lunging girth with the rope then being held by the person lunging the horse;
 - the metal ring braided into the tailbone section of the tail connected to a lunging line. By pulling the lunge line that ran through the lunging girth past

the flank of the Horse, in between the Horse's hind legs and sheath area, it creates a tension on the tail and tail bone allegedly causing the Horse to tilt his pelvic and "sit" more;

4. Employment of hyperflexion (rollkur) on Horses;
 5. Riding Horses despite them being lame and/or injured;
 6. Overworking the Horses, often to the point of exhaustion;
 7. Tying the Horses' heads down for a prolonged period of time;
 8. Beating a Horse with a thick piece of wood;
 9. Depriving the horses their basic needs such as food and water, healing and resting time.
73. The alleged behaviour concerns 10 different horses according to the FEI. Furthermore, each of the submitted photographs and videos underwent metadata analysis to confirm their authenticity by the Equestrian Community Integrity Unit (the "ECIU"). In addition, the majority of the multimedia has been corroborated by the written statements of the witnesses that took the photographs and videos.
74. The FEI submitted four witness statements in support of their Claim, all of which were then heard during the hearing. In the following paragraph, a summary of each witness' testimony is provided, which includes both the written and the oral statement from said witness.
75. FEI Witness 1 provided his oral testimony on the first day of the hearing, on 11 March 2025:
1. FEI Witness 1 is a dressage rider registered with USEF and the FEI, who worked for the Respondent between November 2022 and September 2023.
 2. During that period, FEI Witness 1 witnessed the Respondent engaging in practices abusive to the horses, in the form of the following acts:
 - Excessive use of whip and spurs resulting in whip marks, welts and open wounds on the horses' flanks.
 - Use of excessive and aggressive hand aid resulting in the horses bleeding from the mouth and mouth sores;
 - Use of abusive equipment, i.e.:
 1. A twisted wire headset placed on the horse's head under the bridle and tied down to the girth between the horse's legs to force the horse's head down. The use of the headset resulted in pain and cuts on the horse's head, on the horses Dakhir, Mollegardens Fashion, Don Cesar Junior and Fanta 4.

2. A metal nut under the noseband, which causes pressure and pain when the horse opens the mouth from excessive rein aid, to create pain and inflammation by pressure of the metal nut on the nasal bone when the horse opened its mouth. The pressure would often result in swelling on the nasal bones.
3. A pulley system consisting of hoof shackles connected with a lunging girth via a long roping rope, used for the forced resistance of the legs and body. The Respondent's philosophy was that by taking the horses' legs away from them, he would make them submissive and humble.
4. A metal ring braided into the tailbone section of the tail connected to a lunging line, in order to create a tension on the tail and tail bone causing the Horse to tilt his pelvic and "sit" more.
5. Leather pastern shackles with rubber band used on various horses a few times a week.
 - Riding and pushing a lame horse and/or a horse in pain. Some of the horses mentioned above had curs in the corners of their mouths from the bits and/or lameness from the Respondent's aggressive and extensive riding.
 - Overworking the horses, with the Respondent working them twice per day, six days per week even in the summer heat in Florida. The air flow in the Respondent's property was at a minimum, with an enormous amount of humidity during the summer in Florida.
 - At some instance, the Respondent's hitting of the horse was so hard, while the witness was riding the horse, that the horse snapped.
3. The witness provided a large number of photographs and videos in support of his witness statement, which were detailed, with references, in each of the allegation related to the video.
4. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness submitted that for one of the pictures provided, the witness confirmed that the Respondent was not present in the barn that day, because when he was present, it was much harder to take photos, since the people were not allowed to use their phones in the barns. While the witness confirmed that the Respondent could not be held accountable for that specific occurrence (picture 8292), he mentioned that the Respondent was however doing it the whole time.
5. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness submitted that in general the horses were in a mental state of distress consecutively to the Respondent's behaviour, and they wanted to leave the arena. Sometimes, they would refuse to move, lean down or spin around, among other signs of stress.

6. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness submitted that he had had multiple discussions with Mr Parra during the time he worked for him, in relation to the various issues raised, but that Mr Parra was not willing to listen to him or to the others.
 7. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness confirmed that he could have gone to the PanAm Games with the horse Don Cesar Junior, but was not retained at the end. He was not upset by that decision, since it was not his horse, it was not his decision to make.
 8. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness indicated that he resigned in September 2023 with a 2-weeks' notice, which was only shortly after the US Championships which took place in late August 2023.
 9. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness indicated that he decided to work for Mr Parra because of the convenient location of the stables, but also because at that time, Mr Parra had a provide record of success and awards. The witness stated that, at that time, he was not aware of what happens behind closed doors.
 10. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness indicated having not immediately reported the matter to the FEI because he had personal and emotional connections with the horses and first wanted to mitigate the harm caused to them, later document it before reporting the matter to the FEI.
 11. Upon questioning from the Chair of the Hearing Panel, the witness confirmed not having witnessed the use of electric spurs.
76. FEI Witness 2 provided her oral testimony on the first day of the hearing, on 11 March 2025:
1. FEI Witness 2 is a dressage rider who worked for the Respondent between July 2023 and January 2024, as a rider but also managed the Respondent's business social media accounts.
 2. During that period, FEI Witness 2 witnessed the Respondent engaging in practices abusive to the horses, in the form of the following acts:
 - Excessive use of whip, spurs resulting in raw spur wounds and cuts and open sores in the horses' mouths. And when the horses were hurt or with wounds, the Respondent would not give them time to rest and heal but instead would continue riding them.
 - Beating the horses, in particular the horse Fashion, for which the witness gave a specific example of excessive beating and whipping.
 - Tying down the horses' heads in draw rein and leaving them standing in that position for hours, which was a routine training technique for all of the Respondent's competition horses. The witness gave the example of a horse

(Dakhir) which was tied to a tree in his full track for 8.5 hours, to “work thorough his thoughts”.

- Regularly overworking the horses even in high heat (about 118 degrees Fahrenheit). Sometimes, the Respondent would ride (or have someone ride) a horse after a show or a test, because the performance at the test was not good enough, and although the horses were exhausted. The witness gave the example of the Global Dressage show.
 - Riding horses despite wounds, including wounds in the mouth and bitten tongue caused by prior aggressive training techniques by the Respondent.
 - Tying the horse’s head down and at the same time excessively whipping the horse from the ground.
 - Whipping of horses was performed on a daily basis, to the extent that the sound of the whipping became almost normal.
 - Use of abusive equipment, i.e.:
 1. Whips to which black zip ties were added with electrical tape resulting in the whips having a sharp ending and being more severe when hitting the horses;
 2. Elastics composed of two leather straps that would be placed on the horse’s pastern and linked with an elastic. This was not only dangerous for the horses, but also for the riders due to the horses stumbling.
 3. Pulley system as depicted in one of the videos submitted by the witness
3. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness testified that the horses were in a very bad mental state in consequence of the Respondent’s behaviour. They urinated all over themselves, and their eyes became huge with fear when the Respondent would approach them.
 4. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness testified that the Respondent’s abuse did not concern only horses, but also riders, which were verbally abused by him (including the witness herself)³.
 5. Upon questioning from the FEI in respect to photograph 4799, the witness testified that the Respondent was the last one to ride that horse, before the picture was taken. Upon questioning from Mr Parra’s Counsel, the witness confirmed that Mr Parra indeed was not in the country that day, but still was the last one to have ridden the horse.
 6. Upon questioning from the FEI in respect to photograph 7022, the witness testified that the spur mark shown on that photograph was not directly related to the

³ The alleged verbal abuse committed by the Respondent has not been brought by the FEI as a stand-alone breach of the GRs, but as aggravating circumstances of the alleged Horse Abuse committed by the Respondent, in relation to the degree of fault. It will therefore be addressed by the Panel in this respect where applicable and relevant.

- Respondent, but the Respondent had instructed his groom to camouflage the wound afterwards.
7. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness testified that the Respondent tried to contact her five times since the start of the matter, and last time in February 2025. She never answered any of his calls.
 8. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness confirmed having been hired among others to manage the Respondent's social media account.
 9. About the videos posted at 03:00 AM from the Respondent's account, the witness confirmed that she was not the owner of those videos but had access to them in view of her role as social media manager, she had a shared access. And since those videos showed abuse, she had to do something about it.
 10. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness indicated that there was no "no-phone rule" in the barn.
 11. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness indicated that she did not report all the abuse immediately, because she first tried to help and save the horses instead of taking pictures. Later, in view of the Respondent's behavior, it was difficult for her to just leave, she was trapped, and at the end she also stayed to "create the case" in relation to the abuse committed by the Respondent.
 12. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness confirmed that when she left the Respondent's facilities, she was offered a job at a neighboring barn, which is also where FEI Witness 1 and his husband work. She further confirmed that the neighboring farm was and is a competitor of Mr Parra, but as any of the other farms nearby.
 13. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness confirmed that the attempts from Mr Parra to contact her occurred between August 2024 and February 2024, and consisted of one voicemail of 3 seconds, and the others were missed calls.
 14. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness confirmed that, at the time she was working for the Respondent, she was the only one dealing with social media, among the five people who worked there.
77. FEI Witness 3 provided her witness testimony on the second day of the hearing, on 12 March 2025:
1. FEI Witness 3 has been a professional rider and coach for 20 years.
 2. She witnessed the Respondent's mistreatment of horses at national competitions in 2022 and 2023.
 3. In particular, the witness testified of the violent behaviour from the Respondent at the qualifiers for the United States Dressage Festival of Champions 2023. In the hearing, the witness clarified that the qualifiers took place in 2022 at the New Jersey

- horseshow, which amounted as qualifiers for the championship in 2023. At that occasion, the witness indicated that the Respondent was extremely violent with his horses in the warm up arena, ripping the horse's mouth and sawing the bit. The horse was dripping in sweat and had whip marks on it.
4. In 2023, at the United States Dressage Festival of Champions, the witness also witnessed violent behaviour from the Respondent, who overrode his horses despite the very hot temperature (118 degrees Fahrenheit) and humidity wave, including riding for two hours in the warm-up arena. Also, some of the Respondent's horses were not sound, so he used the whip to encourage pace without limping.
 5. The witness also testified that the Respondent lunged horses at shows, with their chin tied to their chests with very short draw reins. The horses looked in distress, shut down and exhausted, and were in a state of learned helplessness.
 6. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness testified that she had reported the matter during the events and shows, but that the technical delegates would either ignore it, or indicate that the Respondent probably knows what he is doing since he is a professional.
 7. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness confirmed that the technical delegates would not want to go against the Respondent, because they were concerned for their job and their reputation would be damaged, if they were to go against a "big name", which is the only reasons she can think of for the technical delegates not to move forward but dismiss those reports.
 8. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness confirmed that, while indeed, the riders were allowed to ride only for one hour in the warm-up arena, this application of that rule would depend on whether the technical delegates would pay enough attention to the timing, which was not the case there.
 9. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness indicated that the Respondent's groom was not present during those occurrences, and that it was the Respondent himself who lunged his horses.
 10. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, she indicated that she did not file a direct complaint to the FEI, because she was at that time teaching her students and had no time to file a formal complaint at that time. She further confirmed having never been to the Respondent's barn.
 11. Upon questioning from the Panel, the witness indicated that the United States Dressage Festival of Champions is a very important in the USA calendar, it is held every year with the top 15 riders attending it. She further clarified that she did not know the technical delegate who officiated there at this occasion, but probably saw him afterwards, but would have to think.

78. FEI Witness 4 provided her witness testimony at the second day of the hearing, on 12 March 2025:

1. FEI Witness 4 is a German rider who worked for the Respondent between among others February 2017 and August 2017.
2. During that period, FEI Witness 4 witnessed the Respondent engaging in practices abusive to the horses, in the form of the following acts:
 - Excessive use of whip and spurs resulting in bloody and swollen whip marks and bloody spur marks on a regular basis;
 - Use of excessive and aggressive hand aid resulting in the horses bleeding from the mouth;
 - Use of electric spurs, on more than ten occasions, even when the horses had blood from spur wounds. The Respondent would use those electric spurs before shows to make the horses more sensitive to his leg aids. The spurs would be triggered with a remote control which the Respondent had in one of his hands. The electric spurs were also used by some of the working students, following instructions from the Respondent.
 - Over-flexing (hyperflexion) of the horses' necks to the point where they were sometimes touching their chest;
 - Overworking the horses, with the Respondent working them three to four times per day for 1-1.5h, six days a week. The horses were exhausted and not given rest.
 - Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness further elaborated that the Respondent would not only overwork the horses but also ride and train them while they were injured, or bleeding.
3. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness indicated that she had been the victim of sexual abuse from the Respondent and is afraid of him⁴. She wants to protect herself, the other women as well as the horses. She does not work with horses anymore, she lost her passion after what she had experienced in the USA.
4. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness indicated that the Respondent did not try to contact her in 2024 or 2025, but his wife did, by sending the witness a friend request on Facebook, to which she did not reply.
5. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, she specified that two working students used the electric spurs, without disclosing their names. She saw Mr Parra put the electric spurs on, in the tech room. The spurs were outside of the boots. The cable came from the boots, and was visible from the outside, where it was in the

⁴ In her witness testimony, the witness testified of these possible breaches of the GRs committed by the Respondent. However, those alleged breaches were not brought and raised by the FEI as separate breaches in the proceedings, which precludes the FEI Tribunal from looking into this matter.

- Respondent's hand. There was a loose cable from the boot to the hand, with a remote control in the Respondent's hand.
6. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness testified that the purpose of those electric spurs was to make the horse more sensitive on the leg, but that in the end, the person best placed to explain would be the Respondent himself.
 7. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, besides herself, everyone else who worked at the Respondent's barn during her time observed the use of electric spurs. Asked why they did not complain about it, the witness indicated that she does not know and can only testify on what she saw.
 8. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness testified that she was not told to leave the barn, but that she left on her own wish.
 9. Upon questioning from Mr Parra's Counsel, the witness testified that contacted the CAEP and SafeSport when she left the barn, but did not contact the FEI at the time, because she thought that SafeSport was competent to deal with the matter. SafeSport did not do anything about it, for the CAEP, the witness withdrew her complaint, because the Respondent was calling her non-stop, and was scaring her. So, she decided to tell the CAEP that what had happened there did not happen, but not because it was not true.
 10. Upon questioning from the Hearing Panel Chair, the witness testified that she did not have any exchanges with the FEI's witnesses 1 and 2.
79. The FEI further submitted that horses are prey animals, which do not express pain either vocally or audibly, but that show nonetheless a number of pain indicators in their face, body and posture, such as wrinkles above the eye and between the nostrils, open mouth, nostrils open wide, widened eyes, ears pinned back, a tightened muzzle where the lower lip is retracted, a raised head and hollow back, and/or tail flagging or swishing
80. In addition to the witness testimonies put forward, the FEI also submitted an expert opinion, from Dr Rachel Murray (the "FEI Expert"), who later also testified at the hearing.
1. Dr Murray is a world-renowned expert in the field of sport horse injury, biomechanics and horse/track equipment interaction. She is an experienced veterinary surgeon, sport horse veterinarian and scientist with a particular interest in advanced imaging, sport horse injuries, performance and rehabilitation, leading extensive research and publications into sport horse equipment, performance and injury. She has published over 160 peer reviewed scientific publications and more than 15 book chapters on sport horse biomechanics and welfare, orthopaedic problems, risk factors for injury, rehabilitation and advanced imaging in horses.

2. Dr Murray has worked for the British Equestrian Federation in various roles and is also a FEI treating veterinarian and has officiated at the 2012 Olympics.
 3. She has led research teams investigating sport horse injury, horse/tack interface problems, biomechanics and advanced imaging. She ran the orthopedic research group at the Animal Health Trust for more than 20 years and remains actively involved in multiple areas of orthopedic and sport horse research.
 4. Finally, Dr Murray is also a Grand Prix dressage rider with a particular interest in ethical training and rehabilitation.
 5. Dr Murray provided a 53-pages legal expert opinion on the various documents (23 photos, 24 videos and 4 witness statements) which were part of the case file. Her expert opinion on the various pieces of evidence will be addressed in the legal analysis part.
81. In summary, the FEI considers that the Respondent adopted the following behaviours, which amount to abuse of horse:
1. Excessive use of the whip;
 2. Excessive and persistent use of spurs;
 3. Use of electric spurs;
 4. Mouth injuries and damage from misuse of hand aid;
 5. Overworking the horses;
 6. Use of abusive equipment that abnormally sensitise parts of the horses, equipment including:
 - Metal nuts under the noseband
 - Twisted wire steel headset under the bridle tied to the girth
 - Metal band around the tail bone
 7. Leaving a horse without adequate food, drink or exercise;
 8. Use of elasticated hobbles;
 9. Shackles
82. The FEI submitted that, based on the collected evidence, the Respondent:
1. engaged in grave and extensive abuse and abusive training practices;
 2. involving the majority, if not all the horses he owned/trained;
 3. continuously and repetitively throughout several years;
 4. instructed, as the employer in a position of power, his employees to also engage in abuse;
 5. and in doing all the above put the lives, mental and physical health of the horses and riders in danger.

83. A clear pattern, i.e. a *modus operandi* from the Respondent, can be seen from the submitted evidence, i.e. a methodical, repetitive and continuous abuse of most of the horses the Respondent owned and trained, in complete disregard of the wellbeing and welfare of the horses.
84. The FEI is of the opinion that in trying to obtain complete submissiveness, the Respondent employed various abusive practices in his pursuit of competition/commercial goals. They included, but were not limited to abuse through sheer force such as beating, whipping, abusing hand aids and spurs resulting in welts, swelling, open wounds, cuts, sores in the horses' mouths to more sophisticated abuse such as the electric spurs, metal nuts under the nosebands, elastics, pulley system, tail bone metal rings etc. In addition, overworking the horses to the point of exhaustion and depriving them of their basic needs such as food, water, recovery and healing time. All the before stated enhanced by the mental distress and trauma that the horses experienced at the time of the abuse and long after.
85. The FEI submits that the Respondent's conduct amounted to several offences under Art. 164.11 of the GRs, more specifically Art. 164.11 (b) Abuse of Horse, Art. 164.11 (g) Conduct that brings the FEI and/or equestrian sport into disrepute, conduct that causes the public opinion of the FEI and/or equestrian sport to be diminished and Art. 164.11 (i) Breach of the FEI Code of Conduct on the Welfare of the Horse.
86. Abuse of Horse is defined under Art. 142 of the GRs, which states that *an action or omission which causes or is likely to cause pain or unnecessary discomfort to a Horse* is considered as Abuse of Horse, which is then followed by a list of examples of behaviours which constitute abuse of horse. More specifically, according to the FEI, the Respondent engaged in the following abuse, in violation of Art. 142, ch. (i) *To whip or beat a Horse excessively*, (ii) *To subject a Horse to any kind of electric shock device*, (iii) *To use spurs excessively or persistently*, (iv) *To jab the Horse in the mouth with the bit or any other device*, (v) *To compete using an exhausted, lame or injured Horse*, (vii) *To abnormally sensitise or desensitise any part of a Horse*, (viii) *To leave a Horse without adequate food, drink or exercise* of the GRs:
1. Excessive use of the whip and spurs, on a continuous basis, leaving whip and spurs marks, welts and open wounds on the Horses;
 2. Excessive use of hand aid, on a continuous basis, resulting in bleeding, sores and cuts in the Horses' mouths;
 3. Use of abusive equipment on a continuous basis i.e., amongst others, of:
 - the twisted steel wire headset;
 - use of electric spurs;

- the leather shackles connected together with a rubber band;
 - the pulley device placed on the Horses' front legs;
 - the metal nuts under the nosebands;
 - the metal ring braided into the tailbone section of the tail connected to a lunging line;
4. Employment of hyperflexion (rollkur) on Horses;
 5. Riding Horses despite them being lame and/or injured;
 6. Overworking the Horses, often to the point of exhaustion;
 7. Tying the Horses' heads down for a prolonged period of time;
 8. Beating a Horse with a thick piece of wood;
 9. Depriving the horses their basic needs such as food and water, healing and resting time.
87. Each of the specific behaviors committed by the Respondent constitute, in the FEI's view, a specific count of horse abuse under the relevant regulations. Additionally, the FEI considers aggravating circumstances to be present, since the Respondent instructed others to engage in abuse, and created a closed and manipulative environment enabling his abuse. This is materialized by an inherent imbalance of powers between the Respondent and his employees, which were sometimes very young employees relying on him for their job and to remain in the country. The Respondent also created a toxic and manipulative environment that enabled his abuse, by forbidding his employees to question his training techniques, and even requesting them to use the same training techniques as himself. FEI's Witnesses 2 and 3 provided several examples of this behaviour.
88. The FEI further submitted that the Respondent breached the FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse, which requires *all those involved in international equestrian sport to adhere to the FEI Code of Conduct and to acknowledge and accept that at all times the welfare of the Horse must be paramount. Welfare of the horse must never be subordinated to competitive or commercial influences.* In particular, the Code of Conduct prohibits the use that the Respondent did of *training methods*, by stating that *Horses must only undergo training that matches their physical capabilities and level of maturity for their respective disciplines. They must not be subjected to methods which are abusive or cause fear.* Similarly, the Code of Conduct states that *abuse of Horse using natural riding aids or artificial aids (e.g. whips, spurs, etc.) will not be tolerated.* Finally, the Respondent failed to provide Tack that is designed and fitted to avoid the risk of pain or injury (*Foot care and shoeing must be of a high standard. Tack must be designed and fitted to avoid the risk of pain or injury*).

89. Finally, the FEI asserted that the Respondent engaged in a conduct that brings equestrian sport, and the FEI in particular, into disrepute. Any conduct that compromises the welfare of the horse or moreover amounts to Abuse of Horse, negatively impacts on the equestrian sport and its governing body, even more so when highly publicized as in the present case.
90. Horse welfare incidents, including the ones from the Respondent, have provoked public outcry and resulted in a loss of trust in the integrity of the equestrian sports, even more so when the people involved are high-level, Olympic and well-known athletes, such as the Respondent.
91. The Respondent's abuse was highly publicized in equine and sport journals globally. The Articles were widely shared on social media and negatively commented upon while displaying the sport and the FEI in a negative light. In support of their Claim, the FE submitted various examples of media articles published about the Respondent.
92. In conclusion, the Respondent engaged in conduct that severely and negatively affected the image of equestrian sport and caused the public opinion of the sport, in particular the Dressage discipline, and the FEI to be diminished, in violation of Art. 164.11 (g) of the GRs.
93. In terms of sanctions, the FEI referred to Art. 164 (including Art. 164.1, 164.4, 164.6, 164.12 and 164.13) and Art. 159.2 f the GRs.
94. The FEI submitted that the following factors are present in the current case, which need to be taken into account under Art. 164.13 of the Grs:
1. The Respondent's misconduct involved the maltreatment of Horses.
 2. The Respondent's misconduct involved violence and abuse;
 3. The Respondent's misconduct was carried out deliberately;
 4. The Respondent's misconduct affected the dignity or integrity of the Respondent's employees and furthermore affected the integrity of the sport.
95. As additional elements to take into consideration, the FEI mentioned the following aspects:
1. The Respondent's behaviour and comments attest to the fact that for the Respondent the horses (as well as his employees) are dispensable and are treated as such.
 2. The abuse, was in the most part, not committed out of negligence or from a momentary frustration, it was the essential and indispensable part of the Respondent's training technique.
 3. the Respondent instructed his employees to also engage in abuse while creating a toxic and manipulative environment where his abuse was enabled.

4. The Respondent not only put the horses in danger, but also the riders.
 5. There are no mitigating factors, the Respondent having not showed any remorse.
96. The FEI further referred to various precedents decided by the FEI Tribunal when it comes to weighing the proportionality of the sanction, which always included – but on one occasion – a singular incident of abuse of one horse. In the present case, the FEI considers that there are 15 different types of abuse committed by the Respondent, on numerous horses.
97. As per the FEI, a lifelong suspension would not only adequately sanction the Respondent but also protect the sport and its participants (riders and horses) from further misconduct by the Respondent. It would also have a deterrent effect on others tempted to adopt similar misconduct and maintain the confidence of the sport's stakeholders that the FEI is willing and able to do what is necessary to maintain the integrity of equestrian sport.
98. Finally, in terms of costs, the FEI had to conduct an extensive investigation, involving significant time and resources, including expenses of the experts, which warrants for costs in the amount of CHF 10'000.- to be imposed on the Respondent. This falls within the FEI Guidelines for Fines and Contributions towards Legal Costs, which range between CHF 1'500 and CHF 15'000 in disciplinary cases.
99. The FEI therefore respectfully request that the FEI Tribunal:
1. finds that the Respondent has breached Art. 142 and Art. 164.11(b), Art. 164.11(g) and Art. 164.11(i) of the FEI General Regulations;
 2. as a consequence of such breaches, impose on the Respondent:
 - a life time suspension starting from the date of the FEI Tribunal's final decision (the Provisional Suspension served by the Respondent shall be credited against the imposed Ineligibility Period), during which the Respondent may take no part in Competitions or Events or in any activities related to any Competition or Event in any capacity, including as a spectator, or in the organisation of, any Competition or Event under the jurisdiction of the FEI or any Competition or Event under the jurisdiction of an NF in accordance with the Statutes or in any FEI and/or NF related activity, in accordance with Art. 164.6 of the FEI General Regulations; and
 - a fine of twenty-five thousand Swiss Francs (25'000 CHF).
 3. order the Respondent to pay a contribution towards the costs of these proceedings in an amount of ten thousand Swiss Francs 10'000 CHF.

100. During the hearing, the FEI addressed various additional points for the Panel's consideration, which can be summarized as follows:

1. It is telling that, of the 54 written declarations of witnesses submitted by the Respondent, ultimately only two accepted to appear in front of the FEI Tribunal. Moreover, some of the written statements concern current employees of the Respondent, which are in a position where they would not say anything bad about the Respondent.
2. With respect to the 27-pages, and 32-pages declarations from the Respondent on the FEI witnesses' statements, the FEI indicated that, when looking closer to those documents, one realizes that everything falls apart.
3. With respect to the various materials submitted in support of the Claim, the FEI urged the Panel to not only carefully view and review the photos and videos, but also to put on the sound to those videos, where we can hear the sound of the whip. In this sense, under the FEI Regulations, one whip can already be excessive; then, when it happens 18 times as it is the case in one of the videos, it is undoubtedly abusive and excessive.
4. The FEI further referred to the metadata report from the ECIU, which attests of the veracity of the photos and videos.
5. With respect of witnesses, the FEI noted that, while they did not share anything with their witnesses, it was noted that both Respondent's witnesses received the FEI's witness testimonies in full.
6. The FEI finally indicated that the Panel should weigh the different expert opinions submitted as part of the file and consider that the FEI's expert was more credible and sustainable than the Respondent's experts. In this sense, the FEI submitted that the Respondent's Expert Dr Cardenas, has a flawed knowledge of biomechanics. When it came to Ms El-Ramey, the FEI considered her expert opinion to be shocking in terms of analysis of possible horse abuse.
7. The submitted videos show multiple signs of stress of the horses. As per Dr Murray's testimony, the horses' hyperflexion, used in combination with other equipment, is abuse.
8. Upon questioning from the Panel, the FEI confirmed that none of the videos remitted as part of the file were edited. All of them were received as such from the source.

9. Upon questioning from the Panel, the FEI stated having more evidence in relation to the use of electric spurs, but that evidence was time-barred in relation to the Statute of Limitations.

ii. The Submissions of and on behalf of Mr Parra:

101. Via a document entitled “Corrected Amended Answer Brief”, dated 14 November 2024, the Respondent’s Counsel submitted the Respondent’s Answer. For the purpose of the present Final Decision, this document will be referred to as the Respondent’s Answer.
102. As a preliminary matter, the Respondent referred to the FEI Tribunal’s ruling of 30 August 2024 on his Motion to strike out evidence. Although said decision had not been appealed at the time by either party, the Respondent raised the same issue by way of his Answer. The Respondent’s position is that the effective date of the change to Art. 157.1 (d) of the GRs is 1 January 2022, and that all evidence presented in support of the alleged allegations of horse abuse which would have taken place prior to 1 January 2022 would be subject to the 5-years statute of limitations, and that any allegation of horse abuse which happened after that date would be subject to the new rule of the statute of limitations, which is “forever”.
103. If the FEI wants to prosecute a Respondent for an alleged abuse of horse that is subject to the 5-years statute of limitations, the FEI must file a claim against the Respondent within 5 years of the date of the alleged act. In the present matter, the FEI brought their Claim on 20 September 2024, which means, in the Respondent’s view, that all acts which took place prior to the effective date of the change in the GRs of 1 January 2024⁵ must have taken place not more than 5 years prior to 20 September 2024. Thereafter, counting back 5 years, any allegations relating to the purported acts of abuse of horse that took place prior to 20 November 2019⁶ is contested evidence and not admissible, in the Respondent’s view.
104. While the FEI Tribunal considered that any acts that took place in the five years prior to the 1 January 2022 change (i.e. any act committed between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2021) would be admissible, the Respondent submits, in opposition, that all acts of alleged horse abuse which took place prior to the effective date of change in Art. 157.1 (d) of the GRs, or prior to the date of 1 January 2022, is contested evidence and should be stricken.

⁵ Note: the change in question occurred on 1 January 2022, but the Respondent indicated 1 January 2024 in his Answer, which is why it is kept as such in this summary.

⁶ Note: the date of 20 November 2019 is mentioned from the Respondent’s submission; it possibly was supposed to mean 20 September 2019.

105. In addition, the Respondent contested FEI Witness 3's witness statement, submitted by the FEI as Exhibit 14, on the grounds that her name is spelled differently, and her signature was not legible. Furthermore, the Respondent alleged that some of her evidence was not admissible since it referred to purported violations that took place in 2007 or 2008.
106. FEI Witness 3 alleged that the Respondent sent her two horses which were either "completely crippled" or "with trauma in his jaw and could never close his teeth properly", which was due to how the Respondent rode them. Based on the USEF' records of those two horses, the Respondent stated that FEI Witness 3's allegations are false. With respect to the first one, the last time the Respondent rode this horse was in 2003. A third party then bought the horse from the Respondent in 2003, and since then, Mr Parra only trained that horse, with said third party riding it, and only until 2005.
107. In relation to the second horse, Mr Parra rode him in 2002, and here again, the third party mentioned in the previous paragraph took over the ride in 2003. The last time the Respondent trained the horse with said third party riding it was in 2005. Then the horse was showed by another individual in multiple shows at Grand Prix, in 2006 and 2007, and later a lady showed the horse in 2008, and FEI Witness 3 showed the horse three times at Grand Prix in 2008.
108. Therefore, the Respondent had not touched those two horses for 2-3 years.
109. Furthermore, FEI Witness 3's statement is not based on her personal knowledge, since she stated, "according to Cesar's client...". Moreover, the Respondent submitted that her statement by means of which "the shanks on the horse's curb bit were bent" and "Cesar long lunged him and the bit was bent by sheer pressure applied by Cesar" are untrue. Bending the shanks on a horse's curb is nearly impossible. Mr Parra trained using a double bridle, a curb bit and a bradoon, which is a snaffle bit designed specifically for use in the double bridle. When using a curb bit and a bradoon in a double bridle, there is no place to attach a long line to the curb bit. A long line is attached to the bradoon (the snaffle bit). The curb bit used for training by the Respondent would be nearly impossible to bend at the shanks using a leather long line.
110. FEI Witness 3 also testified having seen the Respondent lunging horses at horse shows, which is contested by the Respondent, since it is Respondent's Witness 1, who has been working for him for 20 years, who does all the lunging of the horses at the shows. Since Respondent's Witness 1 has been employed by him, Mr Parra has never lunged a horse at a show.

111. With respect to FEI Witness 3's allegations about the Respondent's mistreatment of horses at a horse show in Sussex County, New Jersey in 2022, Mr Parra submitted that the New Jersey Qualifiers take place the same year as the Festival of Champions. Therefore, the 2022 event in Sussex cannot be the qualifier for the 2023 Festival of Champions. And Mr Parra did not show in New Jersey in 2023, therefore it is not possible that the FEI Witness 3 saw him riding at a Sussex show in 2023.
112. In relation to FEI Witness 3's allegation that Mr Parra overrode horses for two hours in the warm-up ring in Illinois in 2023, the Respondent submitted that the people are not allowed to train horses for so long, after one hour the technical delegates eject you. Moreover, on 21-27 August 2023, the temperature was on average between 79 and 93 degrees, and additionally the Respondent only rode at the start of the day, at around 9:00 am. If the heat index would have reached 118 degrees, the horse show would have been stopped in any event, to protect all of the horses.
113. Mr Parra has been a very successful dressage equestrian, who learned dressage from a list of dressage trainers / coaches and athletes which are amongst the most renowned of the last half-century. Mr Parra was also awarded the Order de Cruz de Boyacá, which is the highest medal ever handed to a civilian in the country of Colombia.
114. In support of his defense, Mr Parra submitted 54 (fifty-four) sworn declarations from people who testified about their lifetime experiences with Mr Parra as an equestrian. Out of those 54, the Respondent made emphasis on the following aspects:
1. Mr Parra trained the Colombian's army cavalry, and two notable declarations arise from a former Commander of the Colombian Army, and a current General of the Colombian Army.
 2. One of the witness declarations emanates from a friend of the Respondent for many years, who holds top secret clearance in the US Government.
 3. A reverend, who was not an equestrian, came to visit Mr Parra's training facility every day for four years (between 2018 and 2022), because those visits brought him peace and because he loved the horses.
 4. An equine sports trainer who is currently Spain's Secretary for all international shows in Spain, testified among the 54.
 5. More than half of the 54 declarations come from clients, trainers, grooms, farriers, and friends who all had the opportunity to observe, in person, Mr Parra training horses, and for decades.

6. In all of these years, not one of them has ever witnessed Mr Parra abuse a horse, nor done any of the horrible things which the FEI witnesses accuse him of.
115. In response to the FEI's allegations about the use of the Running W and the Stretches (Elastic resistance band training), the Respondent submitted the following.
1. An FEI 5* Judge with vast experience in dressage, was a coach to Cesar Parra and a friend for the past decade. In May 2023, she introduced an individual, known as the "Cowboy", to the Respondent, explaining that he utilized training tools (including the Running W and the stretchies) successfully with a difficult horse.
 2. When they met for the first time, at said individual's farm, Mr Parra was accompanied by Respondent Witness 3 and FEI Witness 1. Thereafter, the "Cowboy" came to Mr Parra's farm to conduct a live demonstration, and introduce his technics to Mr Parra's clients, staff and trainers, including FEI Witnesses 1 and 2. The latter responded favourably to the instruction received, and wanted to use those new training methods, which they did, always with Mr Parra.
 3. After a few months, the Respondent used the devices maybe one time per week in November / December 2023, and then in late January 2024 or early February 2024, he stopped using those tools as training devices.
 4. Dr Cardenas, one of the Respondent's Experts, stated that using elastics for resistance band training on the front legs of a horse begins with taking into account the strength of a horse's legs. According to him, a horse that weighs 630 kg could exert a force of close to 945 kg on the legs during a displacement movement and the elastics used in the videos of the stretches are only 15 kg of resistance.
 5. According to Dr Cardenas, the ability of the horse to overcome the small resistance force was so great that it explained why the elastic tubing would constantly break. Similarly, because of their strength, the horses were not suffering any physical or emotional distress.
 6. Dr Cardenas further indicated that if they were used correctly, the stretches and the Running W were permissible.
 7. Also, as the FEI refers to risks of harm or falling, Dr Cardenas stated that horses have one of the largest cerebellum areas that controls proprioception, which means that they have a strong ability to avoid falling down.
116. With respect to the video of the stretches, i.e. video 0013, the Respondent submitted the following.
1. The videos, which lasts 15 seconds, shows a horse walking with a stretchy in between his front legs while visiting trainer the "Cowboy" rode him. There were 20 walk steps captured in this video.

2. The elastic shortened a bit when the horse was asked to do a crossing motion, interrupting the rhythm of the walk for less than one second.
 3. The horse never tripped or fell.
 4. The horse showed no signs of stress. The FEI expert in paragraph 9 of her Affidavit defines behavioural markers of stress. The Respondent rejects the FEI expert's opinion that every time a horse engages in the behaviours she has identified, it means the horse is stressed. For example, the idea that every time a horse swishes his tail when being ridden means the horse is stressed fails to consider the horse using his tail to repel a bug.
 5. Notwithstanding, applying, arguendo, the FEI expert's definition of behavioural markers of horse stress, the horse in this video showed zero behavioural markers of stress.
117. With respect to the video 6592, the Respondent submitted the following:
1. Video of 18 seconds of FEI Witness 2 lunging a horse owned by a groom with a stretchy in between his front legs. The Respondent was not at the farm at that moment.
 2. There were 40 trot steps.
 3. The horse never tripped or fell. The horse showed no signs of stress (applying, arguendo, the behavioural markers of stress identified by the FEI's expert witness) and even lowered his head in the last 6 seconds of the video demonstrating relaxation.
118. With respect to the video 0011, the Respondent submitted the following:
1. Video of 44 seconds of the "Cowboy" riding the horse with Mr Parra offering ground support.
 2. There were 80 trot steps. The rider is asking the horse to change his level of collection/transitioning in and out of different levels of collection. In the majority of the video, the horse is nicely responding to the requests for collection. You can hear the "Cowboy" saying in the video: "When he gets too close to the ground, that's when I push him forward." Immediately after saying this, Isaac asks again for significant collection (piaffe) and then when he tries to transition out/to move forward, the horse displays some resistance. Cesar then helps Isaac from the ground to encourage the horse to move forward, which is critical for the safety of horse and rider. The resistance and response lasted a total of 4 seconds. The video is deliberately edited not to show the behaviour/movement of the horse immediately following his resistance, and not to show the verbal and other rewards offered to the horse thereafter by the humans.

3. There was no loss of balance or coordination. The horse never tripped or fell. The horse showed no signs of stress (applying, arguendo, the behavioural markers of stress identified by the FEI's expert witness). There is no noseband. The mouth opening and closing a little bit cannot reasonably be a consideration for this reason.
119. With respect to the video 0036, the Respondent submitted the following:
1. Video of 1:05 minutes of a horse being lunged with the Running W. The "Cowboy" is holding the ropes attached to the Running W and the whip. Mr Parra is only holding the lunge line attached to the halter and working at the direction of the "Cowboy".
 2. There were 38 walk steps, 78 trot steps and 13 canter strides. There was no loss of balance whatsoever at the walk and canter. At the trot, the horse is throwing out his haunches a bit and at the end of the second circle of trot he has a minor stumble lasting less than one second, which he immediately recovers from. In the third circle he has two minor stumbles each lasting fractions of a second, that he again quickly and successfully recovers from. The horse never fell or showed signs of a threat of falling. The horse showed no signs of stress (applying, arguendo, the behavioural markers of stress identified by the FEI's expert witness).
120. With respect to the video 0037, the Respondent submitted the following.
1. Video of 37 seconds of a horse being lunged with the Running W. The "Cowboy" is holding the ropes attached to the Running W and the whip. Mr Parra is only holding the lunge line attached to the halter.
 2. There were a total of 6 canter strides, 38 trot steps, and 8 walk steps with two minor stumbles. More specifically, there were 3 balanced canter strides, a minor stumble lasting one second, and then 3 balanced canter strides. Also, after 38 trot steps and 8 walk steps, the horse minorly stumbled for less than one second and then resumed trotting with ease for an additional 18 steps.
 3. The horse never fell or showed signs of a threat of falling. The horse showed no signs of stress (applying, arguendo, the behavioural markers of stress identified by the FEI's expert witness).
121. The Respondent contested the FEI Expert's analysis of the use of the Running W and the Stretches, considering that the videos did not show what the Expert alleged, in particular that the Running W would have a "large effect on the ability of the horse to control the limbs and not trip or fall". There is also no evidence that the horse is suffering pain or unnecessary discomfort.

122. On the videos, the horses can easily recover from any loss of balance, because the stretches and/or the Running W do not negatively alter the horse's proprioception at all.
123. The length of the videos also show that the Respondent never allowed his horses to work with stretches for very long, as he was well aware that this was a physical strength building workout that needed to be of a short duration.
124. With respect to the allegations submitted by FEI Witnesses 1 and 2, the Respondent submitted a specific exhibit entitled "Wrongful Allegations by [FEI Witnesses 1 and 2]", which contain tables where the Respondent provides his response to each allegation from the abovementioned witnesses. Those responses will be addressed where and if relevant during the legal analysis *infra*.
125. There are three videos submitted by the FEI, which are incorrectly described as videos of the Respondent in 2024. This is not possible as the farm shown in the videos was a property owned by the Respondent located in New Jersey, but which was sold in 2020. Also, there are two employees that can be seen in those videos⁷, which worked for Mr Parra's company until 2014 or 2015. Lastly, the Respondent on those videos is not grey, which has been the case for at least ten years. Those videos are therefore likely back dated to in between 2000 and 2015.
126. In relation to Rollkur, those allegations are based on pictures and videos where the videos last for short periods of time. The FEI Stewards Manual, p. 28 provides that Rollkur is permitted for short periods of time and not more than 10 minutes.
127. As per the allegations of electric spurs, twisted steel, beating a horse with a thick piece of wood and depriving the horses of the necessary food and water, the Respondent submitted that those allegations are pure fiction and derived only from the imagination of the witnesses.
128. As to allegations made against Respondent without proof (no pictures; no videos; etc.) Respondent has provided an EXCEL spreadsheet which sets forth all of the people present at the farm where the events allegedly occurred and for every single day of the year the persons listed are shown with proof that they were present. Also provided are Declarations from 60 persons who provide testimony in opposition to the allegations made

⁷ To be noted, neither of those two people submitted a witness testimony, or were called at the hearing as witnesses.

129. In addition to the 54 written Declarations, the Respondent requested that three witnesses be heard at the hearing. Ultimately, two were heard since one of those three witnesses (Respondent Witness 3) refused to appear.

130. Respondent Witness 1 testified on the first hearing day, on 11 March 2025:

1. Respondent Witness 1 has been the Respondent's Head Groom for twenty years. During that period, she has never seen him abusing a horse, use electric spurs or whip a horse until he goes down.
2. With respect to the Running W and the elastics, the witness testified remembering having been used, when the "Cowboy" came to the barn and demonstrated how to use them. She further confirmed that FEI Witness 1 and Respondent Witness 3 were also present, and that when the Respondent would use the Running W, it would always be with FEI Witnesses 1 or 2. Both never complained about using this tool to the witness.
3. The witness cares about the horses, they are very valuable, worth half a million. She would never allow anybody to overwork or mistreat the horses.
4. The witness testified having been threatened by the FEI Witness 1's husband. She was all the more surprised of those threats, as she had been offered a job by him, with a lot of money.
5. The witness further testified that other clients were also threatened.
6. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness confirmed that Mr Parra is her main source of income and, should the suspension be prolonged, she would risk losing her job. She further indicated that Mr Parra is her mentor and a friend, but that there are no romantic feelings between them.
7. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness testified having never seen the Respondent whipping a horse excessively, although she admitted that, in general, whipping a horse 18 times in a row would not be acceptable. Same for whipping a horse on the head with the hard handle of the whip. As to what is to be considered abuse, the witness indicated that it depends on the circumstances, in particular if the rider's life is in danger, whipping a horse in the hand with the hard handle of the whip could be acceptable.
8. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witnesses testified of various behaviours, in general terms, which she did not find acceptable in terms of mistreatment of horses. As per Mr Parra's behaviour, the witness indicated that it is taken out of context, those are moments in time.
9. The witness provided the name of the veterinarian which visited the Respondent's premisses weekly.

10. Upon questioning from the Chair of the Hearing Panel, the witness indicated that she had never received any complaint from any other employees of Mr Parra.
 11. Upon questioning from the Chair of the Hearing Panel, the witness testified that there was no rule on the use of the cell phone, each one had their cell phones with them.
131. Respondent Witness 2, testified on the first hearing day, on 11 March 2025:
1. Respondent Witness 2 is the Respondent's wife, married for 35 years. She works also at the farm, she is taking care of the administrative aspects, such as payments.
 2. Respondent Witness 2 testified that there are many WhatsApp groups of the people involved in the farm, and that there are protocols for everything (before they used to be on paper, now they are via WhatsApp).
 3. Everything that would happen to a horse, every little injury, the people were supposed to inform the Respondent about it.
 4. The witness testified that FEI Witness 2 never complained or mentioned any horse's whipping, and she never complained to her about Mr Parra.
 5. The only complaint that she received throughout the years came from FEI's Witness 1, who complained about the positive quotes that Mr Parra was sending to everybody at the beginning of each day.
 6. The witness never saw the Respondent using electric spurs, or steel wire headset, but confirmed that he used the Running W and the Stretches, after the demonstration. Everybody was excited about it.
 7. The Respondent never abused any horse. There has been an accident once, but that's all.
 8. Upon questioning from the FEI, the witness testified that it is not nice to hit horses. Similarly, horses' wounds are not ok, but none of them were made by Mr Parra.
 9. The witness testified that she saw the videos. While not being present at the time, but she saw that Mr Parra hit the neck of the horse once, but not the head of the horse. Hitting the horse in the head would not be acceptable.
 10. The witness testified having seen the Respondent training. He does not train being angry. He loves what he does.
 11. Upon questioning from the Panel, the witness explained that the accident she referred to happened in 2007 and was in relation to lunging of a horse who got hurt, without remembering the details.
 12. Upon questioning from the Hearing Panel, the witness testified that, following the suspension, the Respondent and herself live on their savings, but it is very difficult times, they struggle and have to tighten their belt.
 13. Upon questioning from the Panel, she indicated that she considered all of the riders as the kids, as the farm is a family.

14. Upon questioning from the Panel, the witness testified that, except for FEI Witnesses 1 and 2, they had troubles with another rider from Germany, who tried to steal clients, and was ultimately fired. Also with FEI Witness 4, she was “trouble” according to the witness.
132. Mr Parra himself was also heard at the occasion of the hearing, on 12 March 2025 during the second day of the hearing. At this occasion, the Respondent submitted the following.
1. Mr Parra has never seen, or used, or had electric spurs. He actually has no idea why such allegations are part of the file against him. The same applies to the twisted wire headset.
 2. His barn is very open, everyone can see from everywhere, nothing is hidden.
 3. Two of Mr Parra’s clients are people who are involved with animal protection.
 4. Mr Parra further testified that the horses are his life, he loves them. If the Panel does not believe that the Respondent loves them, they should at least believe him when he says that they are worth a lot of money, and that it is his whole life. Why would he hurt or mark them?
 5. In relation to the spur marks, if the FEI considers him responsible of the marks to the horses which happened at his barn because he is the owner of the barn, the accepts it, but he never did those spur marks himself. Sometimes, he was not even present.
 6. Same goes for riding injured horses. It is unfortunate to ride injured horses, but the Respondent never did so himself. It was actually FEI Witness 1 and the others who did.
 7. The Respondent insisted on never ever having hurt his horses intentionally and would never allow anybody to do so as well.
 8. In relation to the Running W, in the video, it was the first time he used it, the horse did not fall, and he used it 8 minutes at the maximum. In addition, it takes a very long time to put them in, it is a real hassle. Initially, he used the Running W three times a week, then reduced it and later stopped using it.
 9. The Respondent submitted that in the videos on file, we always see very short portions of it, and sometimes we do not even see the barn, or know which barn it is.
 10. The Respondent never tied to a tree for 8 hours. We can see the horse tied to a tree, under a shelter, for about 25 minutes and that was it, which is evidenced by the grass in the picture, which shows no signs of use. Six people testified of it.
 11. The Respondent knows that the Rollkur is questionable, so follows the rules. If it allowed for five minutes at shows, he would abide by those five minutes. There is no video of a Respondent’s horse in hyperflexion for more than 3 or 4 minutes.
 12. The Respondent submitted that it is hard to defend 30 years of career in 15 minutes.

13. Upon questioning from the FEI, about the video 3976, the Respondent testified that the horse was trying to rear, which is why he used the whip two times, for the safety of both the horse and the rider (i.e. himself). On that video, and even though it is hard to believe, it was the first time he did it. That day, he was trying to do a sales video. Right before the portion of the video, the Respondent alleges that he almost fell from the horse, so he had to correct it. When he hit the horse with the whip, he had to make sure that he left no marks, because it is a horse that was supposed to be sold.
14. Upon questioning from the FEI in relation to photo 7394, the wounds in there are not normal occurrences, but in any event, he does not recognize the hand in the picture, it is not his groom's hand.
15. Upon questioning from the FEI in relation to video 4686, he does not know whether the horse is willing to go or stressed, but what he can say is that all the horses would always greet him at the barn. While the horse on the video does not look happy, it is a happy horse now.
16. Upon questioning from the FEI in relation to the WhatsApp conversation with FEI Witness 2, the Respondent indicated that he told her to raise the curb, because he wanted the wound in the mouth to not happen again. He had talked on the phone with FEI Witness 2 previously, where he expressed his concern.
17. Upon questioning from the FEI, the Respondent stated that he hosted officials in the property every week. There would always be people in the house. For the officials coming at the barn, then they would not officiate to competitions where the Respondent competed, at least not right after but sometimes weeks after yes. Ms Lisa El-Ramey came once at the Respondent's property but did not stay for the night at the Respondent's property.
18. Upon questioning from the Panel, Mr Parra detailed that he agreed with the following elements brought by the FEI's Expert:
 - Using any equipment with intention to make a horse fall down is constitutive of abuse, and is stupid;
 - Using electric spurs on horses is abusive, same as sores in-the mouth;
 - The use of a twisted wire headset would be crazy, who would do such a thing?
 - Overworking a horse is also constitutive of abuse, people should not do that.
19. Upon questioning from the Panel, the Respondent also agreed that excessively whipping a horse is constitutive of abuse, but noted that in none of the videos showed, the horses had whip marks on them.
20. Upon questioning from the Panel, the Respondent mentioned regretting having used some of his training methods and agrees that hitting a horse in the neck is not good, but he does not consider it to be abusive. With respect to the use of elastic bands

- and Running W, he does not regret having used them, except for the time lost afterwards, and being there at the hearing.
21. Upon questioning from the Panel, the Respondent indicated that he thought it was ok to use the Running W. Also, the methods he used were only in his own barn and stables, without public watching.
 22. Upon questioning from the Panel, the Respondent, the use of elastic bands, looking back, was perhaps not okay, but it was not that clear to him at the time.
 23. Upon questioning from the Panel, the Respondent stated that overwhipping is bad, but that he did not adopt such behaviour, except for one situation shown in the video.
 24. Upon questioning from the Panel, the Respondent stated that he does not know where the wounds shown on file came from.
 25. Upon questioning from the Panel, the Respondent was shocked when FEI Witness 1 left the barn. FEI Witness 1 had never brought, raised or reported anything to the Respondent, before leaving the barn.
 26. Upon questioning from the Panel, the Respondent clarified that he never tried to reach FEI Witness 2 on purpose, her number happened to be just below Respondent Witness 1's one on the Respondent's phone.
133. The Respondent therefore requested that the FEI Tribunal:
1. Recognize that the allegations of the FEI four witnesses contain false allegations as to many of the accusations made against him.
 2. While the Respondent recognizes that the use of the Running W and the stretches is controversial although not prohibited, he had never used those training aids before July 2023.
 3. The Respondent only tried to incorporate those training aids into his program after following the recommendation of a trusted and highly reputed equestrian
 4. There is a difference between mistakes in training (bad training errors) and horse abuse.
 5. To the extent Mr Parra's actions have made it more troublesome for the FEI to meet its obligations regarding social licensing, Mr Parra is willing to accept responsibility.
134. During the hearing, Mr Parra's Legal Counsel addressed various additional points for the Panel's consideration, which can be summarized as follows;
1. The Respondent invited the FEI to come to his barn and look for themselves, but the FEI never answered to that proposal.

2. The case brought by the FEI is made of “cherry picked” information and videos, which are taken out of their context.
3. What is being reproached to the Respondent is not the equipment itself, but an “improper use” of said equipment.
4. With respect to the Respondent’s expert, Mr Romm insisted on the fact that she knows dressage very well and knows the rules, even though she did not participate in international competitions.
5. It is FEI Witnesses 1 and 2 who brought the FEI into disrepute, not Mr Parra. They are the ones who should be punished.
6. The witnesses brought by the FEI are not credible, in particular since all of them would benefit from the closure of the Respondent’s premises and business.
7. The Respondent was not able to bring more witnesses at the hearing, because they were afraid to testify for the Respondent, because of the threats and illegal behavior of the FEI’s witnesses, as well as the FEI Witness 1’s husband. In some of the unfounded allegations against him, Mr Parra was not even in the country.
8. On file, there are no direct evidence of Mr Parra using electric spurs, the steel wire headset, etc. The only direct evidence is the whipping, which Mr Parra acknowledged he could have done better, but he did not think it was abusive in itself, and he is remorseful for it.
9. If the Tribunal feels that Mr Parra hit the horse too much, or his training was improper, that is one thing. At most, the Respondent has been already suspended for more than one year, which would be, all in all, an appropriate penalty considering the excessive whipping that the Respondent admitted to in front of the Panel, and provided that the Panel considers that there have been violations and that a penalty is required.
10. Upon questioning from the Panel, Mr Romm stated that FEI Witness 2 removed the videos from Mr Parra’s database. Mr Parra always records the training, all the time. He has 17,000 videos on his phone.
11. At some point at the hearing, the Respondent tried to show an extended version of a video which was part of the file, which was denied. Upon questioning from the

Panel as to why such video was not remitted before, Mr Romm indicated that maybe he missed it.

12. Upon questioning from the Panel, Mr Romm stated that no proceedings are ongoing against FEI Witness 2 in relation to the publication of videos on social media, because they did not think it was appropriate, except to push for the FEI to prosecute this matter, which should fall under the FEI's competence.

135. During the three days of the hearing, various incidents took place (i.e. delays of participants or parties appearing, claims of harassment and intimidating behaviour brought by some people, online publications were made during the days the hearing took place, etc.) Those different incidents will be referred to below in the legal analysis of the case, where and if relevant to the case reasoning.

V. LEGAL ANALYSIS

i. Jurisdiction

136. The Panel has jurisdiction in this matter pursuant to Article 38 of the Statutes, Article 159 of the GRs and Article 18 of the IRs. The Panel takes note that Mr Parra is registered with the FEI through the United States Equestrian Federation the "USEF". As such, Mr Parra is obliged to follow the FEI Rules and Regulations, including the GRs. Moreover, with the exception of the Statute of Limitations which was already addressed by the Tribunal, the Parties have not objected to the Tribunal's jurisdiction.

ii. Procedural matters

137. Before determining the case on the merits, the Panel must address procedural matters that were raised by the parties in the context of the present proceedings.

a. Request to hear the experts together

138. Prior to the hearing, the FEI had requested for the three experts to be heard simultaneously at the hearing, in order to facilitate their cross-examination. This matter was addressed by the Panel at the beginning of the hearing, and both parties were able to comment on it. While the Respondent did not object in principle to said request, he pointed out that it would be rather difficult to put it in place technically speaking, in particular taking into account

Dr Cardenas' need for an interpreter to also be present. After discussions, the FEI agreed and withdrew their request. The experts were therefore heard separately at the hearing.

b. Request for more time for cross-examination and witnesses' waivers

139. Prior to the hearing, the Respondent requested to be provided with more time to cross-examine two of the FEI's witnesses and offered to waive (i.e. renounce) some of his witnesses in "exchange" of said extension. The FEI objected to this request. First, the FEI stated that this request was submitted belatedly, considering that the parties had been provided with the hearing schedule two weeks before the hearing, to which the Respondent did not make any comments. Moreover, the witnesses need to organize themselves to be present at the hearing, and therefore such last-minute modifications should not be accepted. With respect to the withdrawal of witnesses, if they decide not to appear, the FEI stated that their testimony should be deemed withdrawn.

140. After having deliberated that matter, the Panel granted partially the Respondent's request, and extended, for a portion, the time allocated to parties for the examination and cross-examination of two of the FEI's witnesses. With respect to the renouncement for witnesses to appear, the Panel indicated that there would be no need, and that the witnesses summoned should therefore appear at the hearing.

c. Statute of Limitations (SOL)

141. On 12 June 2024, Mr Parra submitted his Motion to Strike Allegations that are Time Barred. After both parties were granted rounds of submissions on that request, the Panel ruled on this Motion by way of a Decision which was notified to the Parties on 30 August 2024.

142. Said decision stated that the evidence put forward by the FEI which refers to periods of time of more than five years before 1 January 2022, is indeed time barred, and therefore not admissible. In this sense and by way of example, FEI Witness 4 initial testimony concerned matters that occurred in 2016 and 2017. In this respect, only the part which related to 2017 was deemed admissible by the Panel. The reasoning was provided to the parties in full on 30 August 2024.

143. Neither party contested this Decision, nor appealed it to CAS.

144. As part of his Answer, and also prior to the hearing, the Respondent again contested part of the evidence brought by the FEI, considering that all allegations of horse abuse which

happened prior to 1 January 2022 should be deemed inadmissible. The Respondent referred to some parts of FEI Witness 3, and also FEI Witness 4 testimonies. The FEI contested it and also pointed out that this was not a preliminary matter, since it had already been addressed by the Panel in the course of the proceedings, by way of the 30 August 2024 Decision notified to the parties.

145. In this respect, the Panel noted that the Respondent did not bring any elements that would justify modifying the Panel's decision of 30 August 2024, which remains therefore fully applicable. The Respondent's request is, thus, rejected when it comes to striking out evidence of allegations happening before 1 January 2022, as far as they concern the period between 2017 and 2022. For the sake of good order, the Panel notes that the FEI indeed did not bring any allegations of facts that would have occurred prior to 2017 as part of the Claim.

146. Furthermore, the Panel noted that this request from the Respondent tends more to analyze the reliability of the witness testimonies, rather than their admissibility.

d. Request to refuse some of the evidence from witnesses and expert

147. The Respondent also requested that some parts of FEI Witness 4 testimony should not be admitted, and that she should be prevented from testifying on specific matters, which are not directly linked to the present proceedings. Furthermore, the Respondent contested parts of Dr Murray's report.

148. In this respect, the FEI contested the Respondent's request, noting first that it was not a preliminary matter, and also that this evidence is fully relevant to the case.

149. The Panel informed the Parties that he did not have to rule on that matter, since it was indeed not a question of admissibility, but rather of reliability of evidence. The Panel further informed the parties that any specific objection raised would be addressed at the moment of the questioning of the respective witness or expert, during the hearing.

e. Objection to the admissibility of 39 out of the 54 witness declarations

150. The FEI requested, at the onset of the hearing, and as they had requested during the proceedings on 18 December 2024, that 39 out of the 54 witness declarations submitted by the Respondent should be removed from the case file, since they refer to times which are time-barred, or they refer to unknown times (and intentionally omitted), and therefore

not relevant for the case. The FEI considers that the Respondent has the burden of proving the admissibility of his witnesses, burden which was not met in this respect.

151. The Respondent indicated that those witnesses, which are “moral” witnesses, have known him for many years, and therefore their testimony is fully relevant to the case. There is a difference between accusing someone of a specific behaviour, which had to address the statute of limitations, and the fact of providing a testimony in general terms about a person, *in casu* about the 40+ years career of the Respondent without a single allegation of horse abuse.

152. As for the previous preliminary matters, the Panel decided not to uphold the FEI's request, for the same reasons as for the other objections to witnesses and experts, i.e. that it relates to the reliability, and not the admissibility of the witness testimonies.

f. Redaction of names of witnesses in the Final Decision

153. The FEI requested that the names of their witnesses be redacted from the text of the Final Decision, because it was a difficult decision for them to expose themselves and participate at that hearing, facing directly the person committing the abuse. Some of the FEI witnesses are terrified, but are nonetheless going ahead with it. All but 1 of the FEI witnesses make their living from the equestrian world. Redacting their names would protect them against possible retaliation, since they would be seen by some as people who went against their former employer.

154. The Respondent contested the FEI's request, because he considers that this would grant immunity to the witnesses, which would be free to say anything they want, including accusing him of wrongdoing, without any consequences. This would be an unfair situation. The Respondent further stated that some of his witnesses are so afraid that they won't show up, and in this sense, it would not be fair to grant the FEI's request.

155. At the hearing, the Panel informed the parties that the ruling on that motion would be assessed and addressed in the Final Decision, depending also on the outcome of it.

156. In this respect, the Panel decided, after having duly weighed the various interests at stake, that the names of all witnesses concerned in the present matter, on both sides (i.e. FEI's witnesses and Respondent's witnesses), are to be redacted in the Final Decision notified to the parties. Thereafter, the witnesses are referred to, throughout this Final Decision, as “FEI Witness 1, FEI Witness 2, etc.”. The Panel wishes to clarify that all witnesses which appeared

at the hearing did so via videoconference with the camera on, and that there were no specific protective measures requested, nor were they undertaken in this respect.

g. Immunity of the FEI's witnesses

157. The Respondent requested the FEI to clarify whether they granted full immunity to their witnesses, in particular in relation to violations of the FEI Social Media Policy. The Respondent alleged that the FEI witnesses made threats and lied via social media, but nonetheless, they do not face any consequences. If immunity has been granted, the Respondent, and the Panel, should be told about it.

158. The FEI responded that they did not enter into any immunity agreements with the witnesses, as can be already inferred from the written submissions.

159. The Panel notes that the FEI confirmed having not entered into any immunity agreement with any of their witnesses, which answers the Respondent's motion in this respect. The Panel further notes that, as a general rule and pursuant to the FEI regulations, it is up to the FEI to determine how and when they prosecute a matter, and therefore which claims they decide to prosecute or not.

iii. Merits

160. In support of their Claim, the FEI submitted that the following facts form the basis of the Respondent's disciplinary offences:

1. Excessive use of the whip;
2. Excessive and persistent use of spurs;
3. Use of electric spurs;
4. Mouth injuries and damage from misuse of hand aid;
5. Overworking the horses;
6. Use of abusive equipment that abnormally sensitizes parts of the horses;
7. Leaving a horse without adequate food, drink or exercise;
8. Elasticated hobbles;
9. Shackles.

161. The Panel will analyze each of those factual grounds to determine if they are substantiated, and, if in the affirmative, they amount to misconduct by the Respondent.

162. Before proceeding with such analysis, the Panel wishes to make an assessment of the Experts proposed by the parties, since their expertise will be considered in the context of the decision. In this respect, pursuant to consistent CAS jurisprudence on disciplinary proceedings as it is the case here, the applicable standard of proof is the one of the “personal conviction” of the members of the Panel, which equals to the standard of “comfortable satisfaction” (CAS 2011/A/2625 [Mohamed Bin Hammam v. FIFA, Award of 19 July 2012], CAS 2011/A/2426 [Amos Adamu v. FIFA, Award of 24 February 2012]). According to this standard of proof, the sanctioning authority must establish the disciplinary violation to the comfortable satisfaction of the judging body bearing in mind the seriousness of the allegation. It is a standard that is higher than the civil standard of “balance of probability” but lower than the criminal standard of “proof beyond a reasonable doubt” (CAS 2016/A/4501 [Joseph S. Blatter v. FIFA, Award of 5 December 2016]).
163. In this respect, the Panel considers that Dr Murray’s expertise has a very strong and solid reliability, based on her vast experience in the field. With respect to Dr Cardenas and Ms El Ramey, while the Panel acknowledges their expertise, it stresses however that none of them are FEI permitted veterinarians (and not veterinarians at all with respect to Ms El Ramey). In this sense, their comments in relation to horse welfare is to be weighted accordingly, and in comparison to the comments of Dr Murray, an internationally recognized expert and veterinarian. Furthermore, both experts from the Respondent have experience at domestic and amateur level, but not much experience on the international level. Finally, Dr Cardenas confirmed at the hearing to know well Mr Parra, to the extent of having business relationships with him, which further reduces the credibility of his statements.
164. With respect to the witnesses brought by the Parties, the Panel heard, at the hearing, two witnesses from the Respondent (three were called, but one refused to attend the hearing) and four witnesses from the FEI. In application of the standard of proof of the comfortable satisfaction of the members of the Panel, the Panel analyzed the credibility of each of the witnesses brought and heard, credibility which was challenged by the other party. In respect to the FEI witnesses, the Panel will value their credibility as long as their testimonies are supported by specific other evidence (photographs, videos, etc.).

a. Excessive use of the whip

165. The FEI submitted that the multimedia showed that the Respondent used the whip excessively. In particular, in the video IMG_3976.MOV, the Respondent is filmed hitting the horse with the handle of the whip in the neck/head area. Then, in IMG_4498.MOV, the

Respondent is filmed chasing a horse with two whips in his hand. In IMG_4611.mov, the footage shows the horse kicking as a result of the Respondent's whipping in combination with the restrictive equipment.

166. Furthermore, FEI Witness 1 testified to have witnessed excessive whipping from Mr Parra. The horses were whipped a lot, significantly, while riding, lunging and long-lining horses.
167. The excessive use of the whip by the Respondent is further evidenced by photographs of horses' wounds resulting directly from an excessive use of whip. As stated by the FEI Expert Dr Murray, the multimedia show extensive skin and subcutaneous tissue damage (lines of swelling and oedema) on multiple different horses at different chronological points. Horses experiencing this degree of tissue trauma would be expected to be experiencing pain and discomfort at the time of whip use and afterwards. Furthermore, the FEI Expert indicates that the videos show also an inappropriate timing of the whip use. For correct welfare, horses should be trained using learning theory and not by punishment. The videos show aggressive whip use in various different contexts, showing repeated episodes of punishment with no release including use of the whip on the head, and as the horse is running away, contrary to recognized learning theory and associated with multiple horse negative behavioural indicators in the video. Whipping a horse when it is already showing a heightened emotional response will create fear and frustration in the punished animal.
168. The injuries consistent with whip marks, including linear raised oedematous areas over hindquarters and hindlimbs, according to the FEI's Expert, are the following: 5701, 7052, 7046, 7094. The excessive whipping committed by the Respondent is also corroborated with the witness statements of all four FEI witnesses. The FEI Expert considers that there are 12 videos on file showing either direct excessive use of whip, or direct consequences of such.
169. Heard at the occasion of the hearing, the Respondent's experts considered that the various videos and photographs on file were not sufficient to be considered as abuse, and that each horse reacts differently to whips. According to Dr Cardenas, what is important is the intention, and Dr Cardenas is of the view that there was no intention, on the videos, from the Respondent to use the whip excessively. Dr Cardenas further stated that, in relation to video 4686, which was showed to him during the hearing, he only saw a horse's action, and a person's reaction, in the short seconds of the video. Dr Cardenas considers that whipping is not excessive in situations of difficult horses with big characters, but it needs to be properly assessed.

170. The second Respondent's expert, Ms Lisa El-Ramey, indicated at the hearing that she did not see any evidence of abuse in the videos shown. She requested to receive the entire videos and not only short footages, but those were not provided. When shown video 3993, Ms El-Ramey stated that the whipping in said video was not excessive in her opinion.
171. The Panel is of the opinion that the FEI's Expert is much more reliable than the Respondent's experts. When confronted with specific questions about the use of whips and horse's reactions, the Respondent's experts remained vague, and provided answers in general terms, as to what can be considered an excessive use of whip, and that the circumstances need to be considered. Furthermore, the excessive use of the whip is clearly evidenced by the various videos and photographs on file. Videos with reference 4611, 4686, 4686-2, 4687 show clear use of the whip from the Respondent that is excessive, and where horses show signs of distress, such as ears back, mouth open, bolting / flight, tail clamped down (in crupper) or swishing continuously, bucking.
172. In video 3976, the Respondent is clearly seen whipping the horse's head (or neck) with the hard part of the whip. The Respondent stated that he decided to hit the horse this way in order to leave less marks, since the horse in question was a horse to sell. Furthermore, the Respondent explained that he had to whip the horse this way because the horse was trying to rear him. Obviously, this is not, in the Panel's view, any justification for hitting the horse in the head or the neck.
173. In relation to videos 4686, 4686-2 and 4687, the Respondent can be clearly seen whipping the horse several times in a row, in a very short period of time, making the horse positioned in severe rollkur. At the hearing, the Respondent acknowledged that the horse did not seem happy in the video, but was happy now, and further stated that all the horses greet him at the barn. Based on the evidence produced, the Panel is comfortably satisfied that the Respondent's behaviour on those various videos amounted to an excessive use of the whip, which is further also evidenced by way of videos 3976, 3979, 3993, 4497, 4498 and 4499.

b. Excessive and persistent use of spurs

174. The FEI submitted that the wounds in the photographs show evidence of recent damage, with bleeding and swelling, and also evidence of attempted healing, indicating that the wounds were formed at more than one chronological point, supporting repeated damage and trauma and continued riding in the face of damage. The location of the wounds shown is the position of the rider's heel and where a spur is positioned.

175. The images of the wounds and injuries in question have been submitted as photographs 2694, 2695, 2696, 4799, 5028 and 7022. They evidence abraded skin, hair rubs, swelling and full thickness wounds (showing bleeding, attempted healing and reinjury) on flanks at location of spurs aligned with angle of spurs.
176. In support of this claim, the FEI submitted the four witness statements, which all testified to wounds on the flanks of horses from spurs, and continued riding of injured horses by the Respondent. FEI Witness 1 testified that the Respondent also made excessive use of spurs, evidence by blood on their sides after having been ridden by the Respondent.
177. The FEI Expert indicated that the type of wounds in the photographs of the file show evidence of recent damage, with bleeding and swelling. There are large wounds showing that the degree of friction and trauma has been enough to wear through the hair protection, including where the hair has been unclipped as protection. The decision to leave an area of unclipped hair could be considered an awareness by the rider that there was a risk of skin damage.
178. The Respondent did not deny the existence of the photographs submitted and further acknowledged to be held responsible as the owner and director of the barn but denied ever been the person having made such wounds to the horses. In support of his defense, the Respondent stated that, in some of the examples shown on the case, he was not even present at the barn when the photograph was taken (example with photograph 5028, taken on 30 November 2023 in the morning, whereas the Respondent was out of the country from 23 November to 30 November 2023), therefore proving that he was not the last one to ride the horse, and also not the one who inflicted the injury. Similarly, the Respondent stated that it is of course unfortunate to ride injured horses, and that one should not do that, and if some people perhaps did, he never rode himself injured horses. The Respondent stated that he would never hurt his horses intentionally.
179. The Panel upholds that the evidence and the file indeed show, to its comfortable satisfaction, wounds which were the result of an excessive and persistent use of the spurs. While the photographs do not permit to link directly the Respondent to the wounds, the fact that the Respondent did not deny that the horses in question were his horses, and that these wounds were incurred at his barn, confirm that he was aware of the situation which occurred at his premises. In this sense, the Respondent is liable, at least negligently, for this count of Horse Abuse.

c. Use of electric spurs

180. The FEI submitted that the Respondent used electric spurs, based on witness statements. To support this finding, the FEI had submitted the witness testimony of FEI Witness 4, who testified that she witnessed the Respondent using electric spurs on the horses more than ten occasions when she worked for him, and that he would even use them when the horses had blood from spur wounds. FEI Witness 4 further testified that the Respondent used the spurs with a remote control in his hand, and from where one could see the cables running down to the spurs. Some of the working students also used electric spurs, because the Respondent instructed them to, according to the witness. The FEI Expert confirmed that the use of electric spurs was reported and described appropriately by the FEI Witnesses. Upon questioning at the hearing, the other (FEI & Respondent) witnesses indicated that they never saw any use of electric spurs at the Respondent's premises.

181. The Respondent vehemently denied having ever used electric spurs. Furthermore, the evidence brought forward by the FEI in respect of the use of the electric spurs is limited to one witness testimony, while even some of the FEI witnesses did not witness such misbehavior. Considering also the absence of any footage, being photographic or video, the Panel is not comfortably satisfied that there is enough evidence in the case to consider that, indeed, the Respondent ever used electric spurs with his horses. This allegation will therefore not be upheld by the Panel.

d. Mouth injuries and damage from misuse of hand aid

182. The FEI submitted that the photos and videos on file show mouth injuries consistent with recent and repeated damage from the bit or other structures within the mouth. These include splits, lacerations, scarring and bleeding corners of the lips, mucosa and tongue. This claim is supported by photographs 2262, 2263 and 7394, as well as videos 2258 and 4603. The FEI witnesses 1, 2 and 3 also testified to the injuries suffered by the horses as a result of misuse of hand aid by the Respondent.

183. FEI Witness 1 testified that double bridles would be used with draw reins while the Respondent would be long lining or lunging the horses. This resulted in the horses being forced to pull their chins to their chest or down. As a result, one could see that the outer layer was gone, and that the wound in the mouth was the direct flesh. Multiple times, the witness saw horses bleed from their mouth.

184. The FEI Expert, Dr Murray, testified that, based on the evidence produced, the scarring and granulation tissue present alongside fresh (red) blood show attempted healing and scarring indicative of repetitive trauma, which supports continued riding or use of bit in the face of a laceration.

185. With respect to picture 7394, the Respondent acknowledged that this wound is not a normal occurrence, but stated that he does not know the hand in the picture, which is definitely not his groom's hand.

186. With respect to pictures 2262, 2263 and video 2258, the Respondent acknowledged that they concerned one of his horses, but not the one alleged by FEI Witness 1. The horse pictured was actually a horse solely ridden by said Witness, which means that he was responsible for the horse, and was therefore the one who caused the sores in the horse's mouth.

187. The mouth injuries to the horses are clearly established as part of the file, and the Respondent acknowledges that those wounds are not normal and should not happen. In this respect, the Panel is comfortably satisfied that the Respondent committed Horse Abuse in allowing those wounds – at the very least negligently – to happen to his horses, at his premises. As owner, and employer of the individuals working at the barn, the Respondent was responsible.

e. Overworking the horses

188. The FEI submitted that the Respondent often trained horses multiple times per day for long periods in high temperatures, which resulted in heatstroke / heat stress and exhaustion, including exhaustion and excessive sweating. The Respondent further rode horses with injuries.

189. The FEI based its case on the four witness statements submitted, which all described the Respondent as often overriding the horses, for very long periods of time, even more so in the heat and humidity of Florida.

190. The Respondent denied any wrongdoing, and stated that of course he is based in Florida, which means that his horses train and are ridden there. But the Respondent denied any overworking of his horses, or riding horses with injuries.

191. In the case at hand, the Panel is not comfortably satisfied that the Respondent, indeed, committed the alleged misbehavior in overworking his horses. Considering also the absence

of any footage, being photographic or video, the Panel is not comfortably satisfied that there is enough evidence in the case to consider that, indeed, the Respondent overworked his horses. This allegation will therefore not be upheld by the Panel.

f. Use of abusive equipment that abnormally sensitizes parts of the horses

192. The FEI submitted that the Respondent used various equipment and technics that abnormally sensitized parts of the horses, which were:

1. *Metal nuts under noseband*: the use of metal nuts under the noseband is evidenced by photographs 2675 and 2676, and video 8874 submitted by the FEI as part of the case file, as well as FEI Witness 1. The evidence was brought and detailed by FEI Witness 1 in his witness testimony, where he explained not only the date and time where he took the photographs, but also the horse pictured on them. The FEI Expert further testified that the locations of maximal pressure under a horse's noseband occur at locations when the bones of the head have little muscle coverage and there are bone angles, creating a focal pressure point. This pressure point can cause bone and soft tissue trauma, where the metal nuts are shown to be positioned. This metal nut would create very focal high pressures to a level expected of a painful stimulus, either continuously or whenever the horse opened its mouth, abnormally sensitizing the horse's head. Considering the evidence on file, as well as Dr Murray's detailed evidence and explanations as to the abuse constituted in the use of this training technique, the Panel is comfortably satisfied that the Respondent indeed used – at the very least tolerated the use, and therefore was aware of it – metal nuts under horses' noseband, and by doing so, committed horse abuse. Therefore, the Panel is comfortably satisfied that the Respondent is responsible for this misbehavior, at least negligently since it happened with one of his horses and at his premises.
2. *Twisted wire steel headset under bridle tied to girth*: The Respondent vehemently denied having ever used a twisted wire steel headset. The Respondent's witnesses both stated that they had never seen the Respondent using a twisted wire steel headset. Furthermore, the evidence brought forward by the FEI in respect of the use of said wire steel headset is limited to witness testimonies. In this sense, there is no picture or photograph of the twisted wire steel headset on the file. While some of the horses' injuries might indeed have come from the use of such a device, the Panel, considering the absence of any footage, being photographic or video, is not comfortably satisfied that there is enough evidence in the case to consider that, indeed, the Respondent

ever used a twisted wire steel headset with his horses. This allegation will therefore not be upheld by the Panel.

3. *Metal band around tail bone:* The Respondent vehemently denied having ever used a metal band around the horse's tail bones. The Respondent's witnesses both stated that they had never seen the Respondent using such a metal band. Furthermore, the evidence brought forward by the FEI in respect of the use of said metal band is limited to witness testimonies. While some of the horses' injuries might indeed have come from the use of such a device, the Panel, considering the absence of any footage, being photographic or video, is not comfortably satisfied that there is enough evidence in the case to consider that, indeed, the Respondent ever used a metal band around the tail bone of his horses. This allegation will therefore not be upheld by the Panel.

g. Leaving a horse without adequate food, drink or exercise

193. The FEI submitted that, based on witness statements, the Respondent left horses for many hours in restrictive equipment, which did not allow them to access food, drink or exercise their muscles which were restricted into a single position. The evidence put forward by the FEI was the witness statement of FEI Witness 2, as well as two photographs, referenced 4946 2 and 4946 3.
194. While agreeing that one can see the horse tied to a tree on the pictures, the Respondent vehemently denied any wrongdoing, and stated that the horse pictured had actually been tied for 25 minutes. Furthermore, the Respondent submitted that, in the pictures, one can see that the grass does not show any marks, it remained perfect. If a horse would have been tied for 8 hours, in particular with the Florida weather, there would be marks on the grass, which was not the case on the pictures.
195. The Panel notes that the evidence shows indeed a horse tied to a tree, which in itself would not amount to be considered as *leaving a horse without adequate food, drink or exercise*, unless it could be proven that, indeed, the horse remained tied for a long period. The scenario explained by FEI Witness 2 might well have happened, but the Panel has doubts, and cannot reach a personal conviction that the Respondent indeed adopted the alleged misbehavior. In particular, the Panel agrees with the Respondent that, in the pictures produced, there is no sign that the horse would have been tied to the tree for a long period of time, in view of the grass which showed no marks. This allegation will therefore not be upheld by the Panel.

h. Elasticated hobbles

196. The FEI submitted that the Respondent used elasticated hobbles on his horses. This equipment was used ridden at walk where the horse shows loss of balance and tripping, and ridden in an extravagant trot combined with aggressive chasing with a whip. In support of their claim, the FEI submitted the witness statements of FEI Witnesses 1 and 2, as well as pictures and videos. In the photograph 8292, the elasticated hobbles can clearly be seen, as well as in the videos 0011, 0013 and 6592c3ad-04c9-43ba-a87d-1288a664a4a5. In the video 0011, one can further see the Respondent combining the elastic hobbles and the use of whips, in a ridden trot.
197. The Respondent did not deny having used those elasticated hobbles⁸, but considered that it was not a problem to use them with the horses. The Respondent considers them to be a training method, and not to be abusive. He further stated that he used this equipment only at his barn and stables.
198. The Panel upholds that the Respondent, indeed and at various occasions, used elasticated hobbles as a training technique and equipment, on his horses. This behaviour is not only supported by witness statements, but also by clear photographic and video footages. Furthermore, the Respondent did not deny the use of the elasticated hobbles, but indicated considering that those were not abusive as a training method.
199. The Panel will analyze the intention and negligence aspect of the Respondent's behavior below. As far as the use of elasticated hobbles is concerned, the Panel also need to analyze whether this use constitutes abuse of horse under the meaning of Art. 142 of the GRs. In this sense, the experts heard at the hearing have different opinions. The Respondent's experts are of the opinion that the use of elastic bands can strengthen the horse's legs, depending on the use, and the weight on each leg of the horse. On the other hand, the FEI's Expert stated that this equipment was used ridden at walk where the horse shows loss of balance and tripping, and ridden in an extravagant trot combined with aggressive chasing with a whip, where the horse is showing multiple behavioral indicators associated with distress, which is also confirmed by the FEI Expert. The FEI Expert further stated that the use of elasticated hobbles attached to the pasterns, and extending between the pastern region

⁸ At the hearing and in his statement of defense, the Respondent and his Counsel referred sometimes to the elasticated hobbles as the "stretchies". It is the Panel's understanding that those terms refer to the same elements of the file, as brought by the FEI. Therefore and for the sake of clarity, only the terms "elasticated hobbles" will be used in the present decision.

of both forelimbs or hindlimbs, will alter proprioception and ability for a horse to recover from a loss of balance or trip over the hobbles. Furthermore, the equipment will act as a resistance band which will rapidly create muscular fatigue.

200. Considering the evidence on file, as well as Dr Murray's detailed evidence and explanations as to the abuse constituted in the use of this training technique, the Panel is comfortably satisfied that the Respondent indeed used elasticated hobbles, and by doing so, committed horse abuse. Furthermore, one can clearly see from the horse's behaviour that the use of those elasticated hobbles had a negative impact on the horses. Thereafter, the Respondent should have directly stopped using this method, but decided nonetheless to continue, which makes his behaviour even more unacceptable.

i. Shackles

201. The FEI submitted that the Respondent also used shackles on his horses. In this sense, the shackles were used in a forced alteration in forelimb landing and proprioception was induced by the use of a rope pulley system from a roller through the distal forelimbs to a handler, which directly controls limb flexion and landing. Combined with whip use, the use of this system caused directly and repeatedly the horse to trip and partially fall, with serious risk of injury as the horse is unable to put its limbs in a position to recover. Two pictures submitted as part of the case file, referenced 0982 and 0982 (2), show shackles, with the name of Fiesta, one of the Respondent's horses, right behind the shackles. The use of shackles is further evidenced by three videos, 0036, 0037 and 6283, as well as witness statements of FEI Witnesses 1 and 2. In the videos produced, the Respondent is clearly pictured as the one lunging the horse which has the shackles at trot, and canter.

202. As it was the case for the elasticated hobbles, the Respondent did not deny having used those shackles⁹, but considered that it was not a problem to use them with the horses. The Respondent considers them to be a training method, and not to be abusive. He further stated that he used this equipment only at his barn and stables.

203. The Panel upholds that the Respondent, indeed and at various occasions, used shackles as a training technique and equipment, on his horses. This behaviour is not only supported by witness statements, but also by clear photographic and video footages. Furthermore, the

⁹ At the hearing and in his statement of defense, the Respondent and his Counsel referred to the Shackles as the "Running W". It is the Panel's understanding that those terms refer to the same elements of the file, as brought by the FEI. Therefore, and for the sake of clarity, only the term "shackles" will be used in the present decision.

Respondent did not deny the use of the shackles, but indicated considering that those were not abusive as a training method.

204. The Panel will analyze the intention and negligence aspect of the Respondent's behavior below. As far as the use of shackles is concerned, the Panel also need to analyze whether this use constitutes abuse of horse under the meaning of Art. 142 of the GRs. In this sense, the experts heard at the hearing have different opinions. The Respondent's experts are of the opinion that the training methods used by the Respondent were not abusive. On the other hand, the FEI's Expert stated that the videos showed a forced alteration in forelimb landing and proprioception induced by the use of a rope pulley system from a roller through the distal forelimbs to a handler, which directly controls limb flexion and landing, combined with whip use, directly and repeatedly causing the horse to trip and partially fall, with serious risk of injury as the horse is unable to put its limbs in a position to recover. Furthermore, the videos show various indicators of distress on the horse.

205. Considering the evidence on file, as well as Dr Murray's detailed evidence and explanations as to the abuse constituted in the use of this training technique, the Panel is comfortably satisfied that the Respondent indeed used shackles, and by doing so, committed horse abuse. Furthermore, one can clearly see from the horse's behaviour that the use of those elasticated hobbles had a negative impact on the horses. Thereafter, the Respondent should have directly stopped using this method, but decided nonetheless to continue, which makes his behaviour even more unacceptable.

206. In summary, the Panel considers that the Respondent engaged in the following abusive behaviours:

1. Excessive use of the whip;
2. Excessive and persistent use of spurs;
3. Mouth injuries and damage from misuse of hand aid;
4. Use of abusive equipment that abnormally sensitize parts of the horses with the use of metal nuts under the noseband;
5. Use of Elasticated hobbles;
6. Use of Shackles.

Analysis of the Respondent's responsibility

207. In analyzing the Respondent's responsibility, the Panel considered the following elements.

208. First, the Panel notes that the Respondent has been involved in the abovementioned unacceptable behaviours over a long period of time, at least since 2017 based on the case file at its disposal. Since the allegations prior to that date were not analyzed by the Panel, in view of the statute of limitations, it is only as of 2017 that the Respondent's misbehaviour is under scrutiny by the Panel. But this still provides for a period of seven years (the proceedings were opened against the Respondent in February 2024), which is a significantly long period.

209. The above is a first factor which makes the Respondent's responsibility severe.

210. Furthermore, the Respondent was the person in charge of his horses, his barn and his stables. As such, he is therefore accountable for the injuries which were suffered by his horses even if, in some rare instances, it may have been that he was not the one inflicting directly the injuries. Indeed, as per Art. 142 of the GRs (see also below, under *Analysis of the Rule Violations*), "abuse" means *an action or omission which causes or is likely to cause pain or unnecessary discomfort to a Horse*. The Respondent was also the employer of various persons working (and interns) at his stables. From the case file, that the Panel is comfortably satisfied that the Respondent, in this position, engaged, and at least allowed his employees and staff members in engaging in abuse of horse, using the abusive training technics that he deemed to be relevant. In this sense, he had obviously a position of power. Not only was the Respondent the hierarchical superior of his employees, but also engaged personally in some of the practices observed during the case, despite his position as a well-known individual in the field of dressage. The Panel reached the personal conviction that the Respondent was present and involved in his barn when the acts of Horse Abuse took place. We can furthermore infer from the case file that the Respondent allowed for said abuse to take place, at the very least by negligence.

211. In this sense, the Respondent, as well as his legal representative, insisted on the Respondent's career in dressage, including international and national awards and prizes. Where his career is certainly one to be impressed upon, the Panel also notes that the Respondent should have taken into account that, as such, he should have adopted a position as a role model for the equestrian community and for the young individuals who were working for him. Which he did not.

212. The case file, photographs and videos also show that various of the Respondent's horses were subjected to a repeated pattern of abuse. In other words, we are not in presence of only one horse or an isolated set of incidents, but instead it is a situation of several and

repeated cases of abusive behaviors during an extended time. This constitutes, in the Panel's view, clear aggravating circumstances of the Respondent's misbehaviour.

213. Moreover, the Respondent's actions put the horses' mental and physical health at risk. Based on his own declarations, the Respondent did not see any issue in his behaviour, considering it to be specific training technics or practices. The Panel strongly disagrees. On the contrary, the Respondent adopted a behaviour aiming at obtaining complete submissiveness, in his pursuit of competition and commercial goals. The Respondent's practices included, in this sense, abuse through sheer force such as beating, whipping, abusing hand aids and spurs resulting in welts, swelling, open wounds, cuts, sores in the horses' mouths to also more sophisticated abuse, such as elastics, pulley system, shackles, metal nuts under the noseband, etc. The Panel is amazed to see how creative the Respondent has been in trying to find techniques and practices that would hurt horses, in perfect indifference to their suffering.

214. The Respondent's defense was that he did not consider his techniques as in breach to the existing regulations, and that he did not think that they would constitute abuse of horse. Quite obviously, this reasoning is not tenable. One could infer that, for some occasions, the Respondent thought it could be specific techniques which did not amount to abuse, such as the use of elastic bands, which were clearly documented. In the best case scenario, *quod non*, this reasoning could only be regarded as plausible if we were in the presence of minor isolated practices. However, this is obviously not the case, in particular considering the repeated incidents, the different nature of miss-practices in file and above all the horses' responsiveness to the Respondent's actions - when they used to incline their heads in submission after being whipped hardly, or were fighting with their legs with the elastic bands limiting their actions.

Rule Violations

215. Pursuant to Art. 164.11 of the GRs, *In addition to breaches of specific provisions of the FEI Rules and Regulations, the following is a list of other offences that the FEI may sanction:*

- (a) *Incorrect Behaviour;*
- (b) *Abuse of Horse;*
- (c) [...]
- (g) *Conduct that brings the FEI and/or the equestrian sport into disrepute, i.e. conduct that causes the public opinion of the FEI and/or equestrian sport to be diminished;*

(h) [...]

(i) *Breach of the FEI Code of Conduct on the Welfare of the Horse;*

(j) [...]

A. Abuse of Horse

216. Abuse of Horse is defined in Art. 142 of the GRs, which provides for the following: *No person may abuse a Horse during an Event or at any other time. "Abuse" means an action or omission which causes or is likely to cause pain or unnecessary discomfort to a Horse, including, but not limited to:*

- (i) *To whip or beat a Horse excessively;*
- (ii) *To subject a Horse to any kind of electric shock device;*
- (iii) *To use spurs excessively or persistently;* (iv)
- (iv) *To jab the Horse in the mouth with the bit or any other device;*
- (v) *To compete using an exhausted, lame or injured Horse;*
- (vi) *To "rap" a Horse.*
- (vii) *To abnormally sensitise or desensitise any part of a Horse;*
- (viii) *To leave a Horse without adequate food, drink or exercise;*
- (ix) *To use any device or equipment which causes excessive pain to the Horse upon knocking down an obstacle.*

217. In support of their Claim, the FEI allege that the Respondent engaged in Abuse of Horse by the following behaviours:

1. Excessive use of the whip and spurs, on a continuous basis, leaving whip and spurs marks, welts and open wounds on the Horses;
2. Excessive use of hand aid, on a continuous basis, resulting in bleeding, sores and cuts in the Horses' mouths;
3. Use of abusive equipment, on a continuous basis, i.e., amongst others, of:
 - The twisted steel wire headset;
 - Use of electric spurs;
 - The leather shackles connected together with a rubber band;
 - The pulley device placed on the Horses' front legs;
 - The metal nuts under the nosebands;
 - The metal ring braided into the tailbone section of the tail connected to a lunging line;
4. Employment of hyperflexion (rollkur) on Horses;
5. Riding Horses despite them being lame and/or injured;
6. Overworking the Horses, often to the point of exhaustion;

7. Tying the Horses' heads down for a prolonged period of time;
8. Beating a Horse with a thick piece of wood;
9. Depriving the Horses their basic needs such as food and water, healing and resting time.

218. According to the FEI, all of the above actions or omissions fulfil the general definition of abuse, since they caused, or likely caused pain or unnecessary discomfort to the horses. Furthermore, many of the examples provided are specifically listed as examples of abuse, i.e.:

- (i) *To whip or beat a Horse excessively;*
- (ii) *To subject a Horse to any kind of electric shock device;*
- (iii) *To use spurs excessively or persistently;*
- (iv) *To jab the Horse in the mouth with the bit or any other device;*
- (v) *To compete using an exhausted, lame or injured Horse;*
- ...
- (vii) *To abnormally sensitise or desensitise any part of a Horse;*
- (viii) *To leave a Horse without adequate food, drink or exercise;*

219. The Panel concurs with the FEI that many of the Respondent's actions, as summarized and evidenced in the FEI's Claim Brief, as well as the present decision, amount to *actions or omissions which cause or are likely to cause pain or unnecessary discomfort to a Horse*, under the meaning of Art. 142 par. 1 of the GRs. Already for this, the Panel considers that the Respondent committed Horse Abuse. It is evident from the photographs and videos submitted as part of the case file, but also based on the witness statements the FEI's Expert report, that the Horses suffered not only *unnecessary discomfort*, but also clearly *pain*, as a result of the Respondent's actions.

220. Moreover, the Panel is convinced that the Respondent also committed specific acts of Abuse as listed in Art. 142 of the GRs. The case file provides clear and concrete evidence, as detailed in the present Decision, that the Respondent, indeed, committed Horse Abuse in the meaning of Art. 142 (i), (iii), (iv) and (vii) of the GRs.

221. However, and as indicated above, the Panel is not comfortably satisfied that the Respondent committed Horse Abuse under the meaning of Art. 142 (ii), (v) and (viii) of the GRs.

B. Conduct that brings the FEI and/or the equestrian sport into disrepute

222. It is a breach of Art. 164.11 (g) of the GRs to engage in conduct that brings equestrian sport and the FEI in particular into disrepute.
223. According to the FEI, the Respondent's conduct brought the FEI and the equestrian sport into disrepute, as his abuse was highly publicized in equine and sports journals globally. The articles, submitted as examples by the FEI, were widely shared on social media and negatively commented upon while displaying the sport and the FEI in a negative light.
224. The FEI condemns all training methods and practices that are contrary to horse welfare. The welfare of the horse has always been and will always be at the core of every aspect of the FEI's work as the international governing body for equestrian sport. Nonetheless, the FEI and the equestrian sport is under constant scrutiny of Animal Rights Organizations, FEI Stakeholders, National Federations, the International Olympic Committee and the general public. Any conduct that compromises the welfare of the horse or moreover amounts to Abuse of Horse, negatively impacts the equestrian sport and its governing body, even more so when highly publicized as in the present case. After the allegations of the Respondent's abusive training techniques broke in the media, all major equestrian journals were reporting on it, with the equestrian community and public engaging in negative comments – the image of equestrian sport was negatively affected and the public opinion of the sport and the FEI was diminished. PETA incited the public to urge the Olympic Committee to ban equestrian events.
225. The Panel concurs with the FEI that the Respondent, in adopting the abusive behaviours as detailed in the present decision, engaged in a conduct that brought the FEI and the equestrian sport into disrepute. However, this breach is consequential to the Abuse of Horse committed by the Respondent. The violation of Art. 142 and Art. 164.11 (b) of the GRs is in this sense more specific than the violation of Art. 164.11 (g) of the GRs (*see* CAS 2016/A/4501, par. 304 ff).

C. Breach of the FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse

226. Any breach of the FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse is expressly prohibited under Art. 164.11 (i) of the GRs.
227. As indicated in the preamble to the FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse, *The FEI requires all those involved in international equestrian sport to adhere to the FEI Code of*

Conduct and to acknowledge and accept that at all times the welfare of the Horse must be paramount. Welfare of the horse must never be subordinated to competitive or commercial influences.

228. Under General Welfare, the FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse provides that *Horses must only undergo training that matches their physical capabilities and level of maturity for their respective disciplines. They must not be subjected to methods which are abusive or cause fear* (b) and that *Foot care and shoeing must be of a high standard. Tack must be designed and fitted to avoid the risk of pain or injury* (c).
229. Moreover, under Fitness to Compete, the FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse provides that *Abuse of a Horse using natural riding aids or artificial aids (e.g. whips, spurs, etc.) will not be tolerated* (f).
230. The FEI considers that the Respondent breached the three abovementioned provisions of the FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse, by using the training methods mentioned above, which were abuse and caused fear to his horses. Furthermore, the Respondent engaged in *misuse of aids*, by abusing his horses with excessive whipping and excessive use of spurs. Finally, the Respondent failed to provide Tack that is designed and fitted to avoid the risk of pain or injury.
231. The Panel concurs with the FEI that the Respondent, in adopting the abusive behaviours as detailed in the present decision, also breached the FEI Code of Conduct on the Welfare of the Horse. However, this breach -similarly as the one of bringing the FEI and the equestrian sport into disrepute – is consequential to the Abuse of Horse committed by the Respondent. The violation of Art. 142 and Art. 164.11 (b) of the GRs is in this sense more specific than the violation of Art. 164.11 (i) of the GRs (see CAS 2016/A/4501, par. 304 ff).

Sanctions

232. In accordance with Art. 164.1 of the GRs, the Sanction will be decided according to the guidelines mentioned in Art. 164.12 and 164.13 of the GRs, taking into account the circumstances of the case.
233. Art. 164.12 provides a non-exhaustive list of relevant factors that should guide the body imposing a Sanction, to categorise the offence in question as “low-end”, “mid-range”, “top-end” or “max”, pursuant to the table listed in Art. 164.13 of the GRs. As is applicable here, the Tribunal considers *inter alia* that the action or omission involved the maltreatment of Horses

(let. c), affected the dignity or integrity of any person involved in the sport (let. d), involved fraud, violence or abuse or similar criminal acts (let. e) and was deemed to be deliberate (let. f).

234. As it has been summarised above, the Respondent's behaviour amounts to a clear abuse of horse as well as maltreatment of horses. These are among the most severe offences that can be committed in the context of equestrian sport.

235. Furthermore, the Respondent's actions were, at least for a majority of them, deliberate. The Respondent is moreover an experienced 5-star dressage athlete and trainer, who has been participating in the most high-profile competitions. He should be a role-model however, his actions show quite the opposite.

236. Additionally, the abusive behaviours and techniques did not affect only one, but several of the Respondent's horses, and over a long period of time, which are other aggravating factors considered by the Panel.

237. The fact that the incidents and abuse happened at the Respondent's farm and premisses, in a private context, is another aggravating circumstance in the Panel's view. There was no reason justifying the Respondent's actions, performed at his premisses. Furthermore, the Respondent did not show remorse in the course of the proceedings, instead tried always to contest all the allegations brought against him. Although he tried to deny it, the Respondent could not have been unaware that the training technics that he decided to use on his horses were abusive ones.

238. As mitigating factors, the Panel notes that, to its knowledge, the Respondent has never been sanctioned for disciplinary offences in the context of his equestrian experience. Furthermore, the Respondent's age has also been taken into account.

239. As stated in applicable case law,¹⁰ it is a widely accepted general principle of sports law that the severity of a penalty must be in proportion with the seriousness of the infringement. The CAS has evidenced the existence and the importance of the principle of proportionality on several occasions. In the cases *TAS 91/56 (S. v. FEI)* and *TAS 92/63 (G. v. FEI)*, the CAS stated that: "*the seriousness of the penalty [...] depends on the degree of the fault committed by the person responsible*" (Digest of CAS Awards 1986-1998, Staempfli Editions, Berne 1998, 96 and 121).

¹⁰ Arbitration CAS 99/A/246 W. / International Equestrian Federation (FEI), award of 11 May 2000.

240. In the advisory opinion TAS 93/109 of September 1994 (Fédération Française de Triathlon / International Triathlon Union), CAS, quoting the IOC Charter against Doping in Sport, stated that all sports organisations must try to impose penalties graduated in accordance with the seriousness of the offence: *"All Sport Organisations must provide, in their respective regulations, for the imposition of balanced and realistic sanctions. Sanctions must be appropriate to the recognized offense, depending on its severity [...] Sport Organisations shall always seek to determine in which way the athlete has breached the rules, and adapted sanctions should be imposed on the respective offenders accordingly."*¹¹
241. The Tribunal further notes that proportionality in CAS case law has been understood to mean that: *"there must be a reasonable balance between the kind of misconduct and the sanction"* (CAS 2005/C/976 FIFA & WADA, para 138), or stated otherwise *"[t]o be proportionate, the sanction must not exceed what is reasonably required in the search of a justifiable aim"* (CAS 2005/C/976 FIFA & WADA, para 139).
242. The FEI concluded that the Tribunal should impose a lifetime suspension on the Respondent, as well as twenty-five thousand Swiss Francs (25'000.- CHF) fine. At the hearing, the Respondent concluded that, should the Panel find that he committed Horse Abuse, the sanction imposed should be much lower than a lifetime ban, which is "unbelievably excessive".
243. The applicable rule for horse abuse carries a suspension of a minimum of three (3) months up to life. The Panel has already described in detail the seriousness of the Respondent's infringements.
244. The Panel further finds that the Respondent compromised the horses' welfare. Horse welfare is paramount in equestrian sport, and to preserve and protect a horse's welfare is one of the FEI's statutory objectives (Article 1.4 of the Statutes).¹²
245. The Panel is of the opinion that the Respondent's offences with respect to Abuse of Horse falls within the "Max" category of the table provided at Art. 164.13 of the GRs. Accordingly, a sanction up to a lifetime ban should be imposed on the Respondent.

¹¹ *"Tous les organismes sportifs doivent prévoir dans leurs règlements l'imposition de sanctions pesées et réalistes. Les sanctions doivent être suffisantes pour l'infraction reconnue, selon sa gravité, [...] les organisations sportives doivent toujours chercher à déterminer de quelle façon l'athlète visé a enfreint les règlements, et des sanctions modulées devraient être imposées à toutes les personnes incriminées"* (loose translation on the text of the Decision).

¹² Article 1.4: To preserve and protect the welfare of the Horse and the natural environment by establishing appropriate codes of conduct.

246. With respect to the infringements to the FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse and bringing the FEI and/or equestrian sport into disrepute, those breaches being consequential and less specific, the Panel did not take them into consideration when imposing the Sanction on the Respondent.
247. Therefore, based on the principle of proportionality and all of the evidence considered by the Panel, as well as the applicable caselaw¹³, the Tribunal is imposing a period of Suspension of fifteen (15) years on the Respondent for violating Article 142.1 of the GRs. The Provisional Suspension served by the Respondent will be credited against the imposed Suspension.
248. With respect to the fine, the FEI Guidelines for Fines and Contributions towards Legal Costs provide that “[t]he FEI Tribunal must always exercise judgment and discretion and consider appropriate aggravating and mitigating factors in determining appropriate fines and contributions to legal costs in every case. In addition, regardless of whether the fines and contributions to legal costs are within or outside of the range stated in the Guidelines, the FEI Tribunal must explain the basis for the fines and contributions to legal costs imposed”.
249. Pursuant to Art. 164.13, the maximum fine that can be imposed on the Respondent in the “top-end” section of the Abuse of Horse offence is CHF 15'000.-. The FEI, in including the offences of the Code of Conduct on the Welfare of the Horse and bringing the FEI and/or the equestrian sport into disrepute, requested for a fine of CHF 25'000.-. Since the Panel did not consider those breaches separately, the fine imposed on the Respondent will amount to CHF 15'000.-.
250. Finally, with respect to the costs of the proceedings, the Panel concurs with the FEI that the proceedings necessitated an extensive investigation by the FEI, but also were particularly long and complex in front of the Tribunal, including a 3-days hearing which took place in March 2025. Thus, the Panel orders that the Respondent bears the proceeding costs in the amount of ten thousand Swiss Francs (10'000.- CHF).

¹³ Among others FEI Tribunal Decision C20-0060 Andrew Kocher v. FEI dated 10 June 2021, confirmed by CAS under CAS/2021/A/8112, Award of 13 June 2023

VI. DECISION

251. For the above reasons, and in accordance with Articles 142.1, 159.2, 164.4, 164.6, 164.11, 164.12 and 164.13 of the GRs, the Tribunal therefore decides as follows:

- 1) Cesar Parra has engaged in Horse Abuse and thereby violated Article 142 of the GRs in conjunction with Article 164.11 (b) of the GRs.
- 2) Cesar Parra breached the FEI Code of Conduct on the Welfare of the Horse as per Article 164.11 (i) of the GRs.
- 3) Cesar Parra has engaged in a conduct that brought the FEI and/or equestrian sport into disrepute as per Article 164.11 (g) of the GRs.
- 4) Consequently, Cesar Parra is suspended for a total period of fifteen (15) years, starting as of the date of the Provisional Suspension imposed on him on 2 February 2024.
- 5) Cesar Parra is fined fifteen thousand Swiss Francs (CHF 15'000.-).
- 6) Cesar Parra is ordered to pay ten thousand Swiss Francs (CHF 10'000.-) towards the costs of these proceedings.
- 7) In accordance with Art. 164.6 (a) of the GRs, during the period of a Suspension the Person suspended may take no part in any Competition or Event and/or in any activities related to any Competition or Event, as an Athlete, Support Personnel, and/or Official, or in the organisation of, any Competition or Event under the jurisdiction of the FEI or any Competition or Event under the jurisdiction of an NF in accordance with the Statutes or in any FEI and/or NF related activity (e.g. FEI courses, meetings, General Assembly etc.). For the avoidance of any doubt, training FEI Athletes and/or FEI Horses (whether at FEI Events or anywhere else) is to be considered as an FEI related activity.
- 8) According to Article 165 of the GRs, this Decision is effective from the date of its oral or written notification to the affected party or parties.
- 9) This Decision shall be notified to Mr Cesar Parra, to his Legal Representative, his NF and to the FEI.

DECISION TO BE FORWARDED TO:

- a. The Parties: Yes
- b. The NF of Mr Parra: Yes
- c. Any other: No

FOR THE TRIBUNAL



Jose A. Rodriguez Alvarez (MEX) Chair of the Hearing Panel

Notes relating to the decision:

According to Art. 162.1 and 162.7 of the GRs, this decision may be appealed before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) within twenty-one (21) days of the present notification.