

# Showjumping Fences

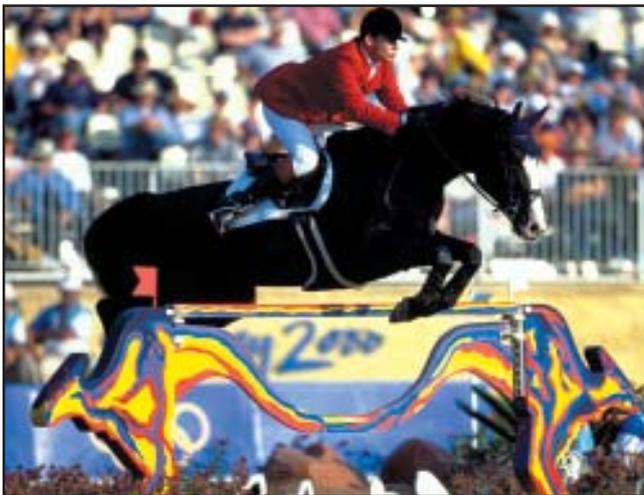
By Olaf Petersen  
International Course Designer  
Chairman of the FEI Jumping Committee



Showjumping is an exciting and fascinating sport with a tradition of more than 100 years. And it is a sport that has developed during the last decades - as all modern sports belonging to the Olympic program. Certainly one of the changes is the optical impression a spectator gets when looking at a showjumping course today. Many years ago, when I was a showjumper, courses all over the world looked more or less the same: black and white or red and white or green and white poles, bushes, simple wings, a grey or a red wall and a big water jump. Probably a rustic box with some rustic poles. These were the courses in Berlin, New York or Paris.

I started course designing in the mid 70's. Every show I went to, I had to work with the same material. Quite soon I was of the opinion that it was not only a bit boring for the public to see always the same kind of fences, I was also sure that our sport had missed so far the opportunity of presenting itself in a more interesting way.

Fences could for instance show famous buildings, the forms and colours of different cultures, they could point at parts of the history, they could express the course designer's individual sense for



colours. A set of individual fences could at the end tell a whole story.

Lars Nieberg, Sydney Olympic Games 2001.

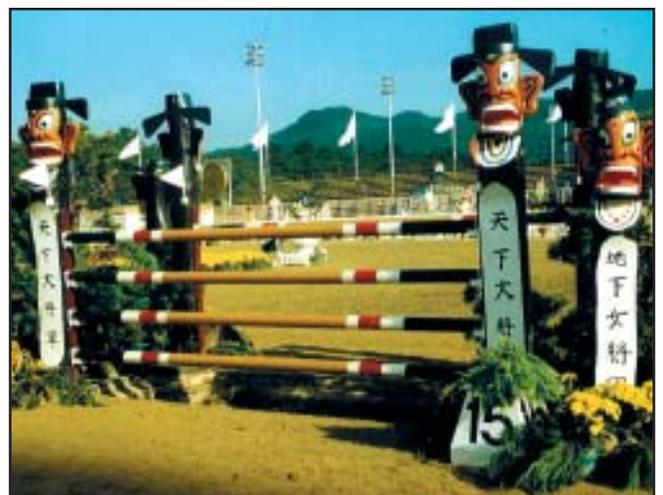
Fences could be used as kind of a stage set for our sport. If a horse clears a fence of 1.50 m, and this fence consists of unpainted poles fixed by two rusty iron standards, or if the same horse clears the same height of 1.50 m, let's say in Paris, over bright shining red poles and planks held by a copy of the famous Moulin Rouge - the sporting performance is the same. 1.50 m after all is 1.50 m. But the presentation of the sport for the public is totally different.

Our sport has an advantage that only very few other sports in the world have. If you play soccer, all the soccer arenas in the world have the same size, all tennis courts are the same, a boxing ring is a boxing ring, and a swimming pool a swimming pool. Watching TV you can never say if the 400 m tartan track for athletes is in Cairo or Toronto. I was convinced, the advantage of our sport is that with different fence design, the different shapes of the arenas, the different decoration a course designer uses - with all this TV spectators could recognise if the show takes place in Aachen or Seoul without listening to the

And not only that. When we give a present to a friend, we decorate it often with a flower or wrap it with nice paper. The present is the same, but the decoration makes it even more valuable because it demonstrates to the friend that we care. Or think of a good wine. The same wine tastes different if you drink it out of a plastic cup, or if it is presented in a crystal glass. This is the difference when designing and jumping a course with always the same material, or presenting it in a festive atmosphere.

Starting course designing I was of the opinion that showjumping courses should always be enjoyed in a "crystal glass". With the idea of different and individual fence material for the big arenas of our sport, all these arenas could get their own individual atmosphere. They could be unique. Of course one can have ideas, but to realise ideas often costs a lot of money. And not too many show organisers can spend much money just for fence material.

I got my chance to realise my ideas when I was appointed as Course Designer for the Olympic Games in Seoul 1988. I visited Korea several times, went to museums, read history books and tried to learn as much as possible about the Korean way of life and culture. The result ended in an Olympic course with rickshaws, Korean temples, gates and bridges from the emperor's place, dragons, totem poles, war-ships from the middle age and a part of the ancient city wall that riders had to jump as a curved and difficult wall. One could watch the old



buildings from poor and rich people, and the poles were painted with the typical Korean colour combinations of their Sunday dresses.

1988 was the first time this new type of course designing became reality. And the time in our sport was ripe for such a change.

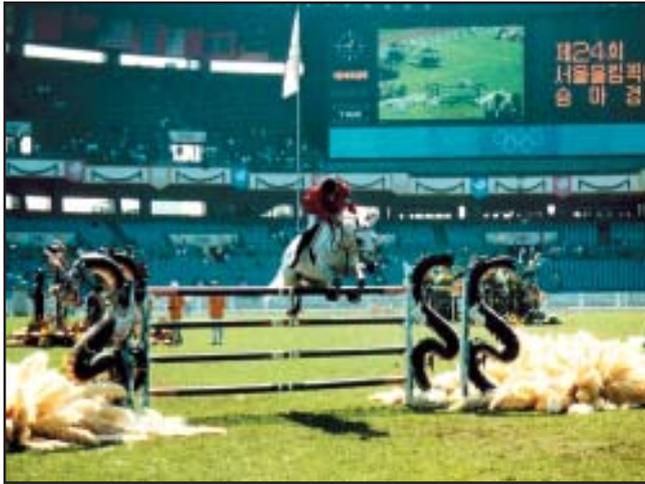
From then on everything developed fast. Two years later I did the World Equestrian Games in Stockholm, and the Organising Committee insisted to use typical Swedish fences. So I started designing old Viking boats, tents from Lapland, the king's castle Gripsholm and Swedish farm houses.

The Atlanta Organising Committee for the Olympic Games 1996 and also the Sydney Organising Committee 2000 decided that the respective Course Designer had to sign a contract to use national themes for the Olympic courses only. And what do you expect I am going to do when I design the

When the change started it was not so easy to convert the new design ideas we had on paper to wooden fences. Today the technique also in this respect has developed a lot. We invented in my company a new system that enables us to produce now almost every shape and form and to use this as fence material.

As sponsors play a more and more important role in our sport, it certainly is important to offer also to these sponsors special fences with i.e. the shape of their logos. And not only paint this logo in the old way on just a big panel. In this respect I see a great future where sponsors can get back a response for their investment.

And thinking of the Arab countries with their beautiful buildings and forms in their old culture connected with the horse since centuries, I believe that one day there will be the money to design a whole course of individual fences showing the history of this part of the

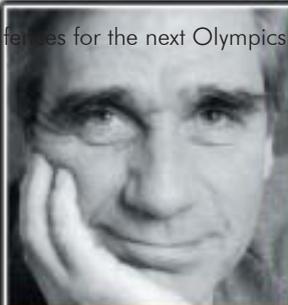


Dragon Fence, Seoul Olympic Games 1998.



Viking Boat, WEG Stockholm 1990.

fences for the next Olympics in Athens 2004? Yes, you are right.



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