



## Derek Pullem

Sport Operations Director candidate

I came to the sport of Dressage relatively late in life when I met my wife eighteen years ago. At that time, you still needed to be a class winner to enter the Regionals and my wife competing at Elementary was a major achievement at local competitions. My learning curve was steep, as the extent of my equestrian knowledge was limited to horse racing and watching Badminton and the Horse of the Year show on the BBC. But the bug bit me and now it seems perfectly normal to spend every spare moment mucking out, planning the dressage season campaign, and then working out how to fit in all the trips around the country. My wife now competes three horses at levels between Medium and Grand Prix, including the remarkable “Rosie”, or Cheeky Wee Red, the ex-racer who we took all the way from Novice to Grand Prix level.

As a groom for my wife, I have experienced the evolution of the British Dressage competition structure first hand. I first took an active interest in the competition structure in 2015 when the Gold, Silver and Bronze sections were introduced. This was when my alter ego – “Groomwithabroom” (or GWAB) was born on the old BD forums. The more I discussed with other members the more I realised that they shared my concerns over the new competition structure. So much so that BD invited me to sit on the Sport Operations committee in 2018.

Groomwithabroom didn’t disappear after 2018 though, you can find some of my views on my blog at <https://groomwithabroom.wordpress.com/>. This has led me back to working informally with several members of the BD team at Meriden over the years.

We have all now become accustomed to the Gold, Silver and Bronze structure and enjoy the opportunity to compete in winter and summer seasons at Area Festivals and Regionals. These are significant achievements by the BD Sport Operations team. It is fair to say that many members still struggle with the complexity of the eligibility rules and sometimes feel that the reward for success can feel more like a penalty when it tips them over into competing in a higher section. If I were elected my two principal objectives over the next four years would be:

- Simplify the eligibility rules as much as possible.
- Rebalance the competition structure so members are encouraged to compete at their highest level possible, but not pushed too early into a higher section, particularly for their second or following horses.

We have two very successful competitions, Area Festivals and Regionals. Both can lead to Championships at national level, but Area Festivals have always been aimed at the grassroots rider – and as such need ‘protecting’ from the riders who could be competitive at Regionals. There needs to be a much smoother transition from Area Festivals to Regionals to encourage those riders who are capable to compete at Regional level on their current horse.

Similarly, there needs to be opportunities for the talented grassroots combinations to compete at the Advanced levels without the commitment to the ‘professional’ Gold circuit that comes with entering Premier Leagues. More and more members are reaching or aspire to these levels, and we need to look closely at the opportunities available to them, such as through the number and timing of High Profile Shows offering Silver sections.

So, what do I see my role as Sports Operations Director, and by extension the wider Sports Operation team at BD HQ delivering? It can be summarised in these three actions:

**Enable:** Provide a range of competitions for the membership, from new riders just starting out to international competitors. We need to make sure we can sustain these competitions by making them a financially viable option for the venues.

**Encourage:** Ensure that success is rewarded by encouraging members to take on new challenges and not by penalising them. We need to recognise personal achievements more, as we used to do with rider groups.

**Engage:** We need to engage with the membership and communicate not only the changes in rules, but the reasons for those changes – and to listen to the feedback. Engagement is a two-way street, and we need to help and encourage more members to volunteer to support the sport at competitions and to be public ambassadors as part of the debate on equine welfare.

So why do I think I am the best candidate to guide the Sport Operations team at British Dressage for the next four years?

I have a wide knowledge of the rules and structure of the sport, plus a keen interest in equestrian issues beyond BD, both nationally and internationally. I also have hands-on experience of some of the actual challenge faced by members trying to navigate their way through the rulebook and qualification process, from Novice Area Festival to High Profile Shows and Grand Prix. I can also bring in a strong understanding of how to plan and ensure the timely delivery of change based on my day job as a Major Projects Manager.

We have an opportunity to build on the solid foundations of the last eight years to make the structure of our sport more progressive and less complex. We should aim for a system where everyone is motivated to compete against the best, without being overly penalised for a single success.

One person cannot do this alone. Even with the Sports Operations team and the support of the BD Board of Directors there is no guarantee of success. But if you are generous enough to vote for me in this election, I am committed to working with every member, be they rider, owner, judge, volunteer, or organiser to try to deliver these goals in the next four years.