

Going Halvesies

Ah, those bright college years! Saturday night would roll around. Guys with cars would head out for Smith, Vassar, Mount Holyoke—any target-rich environment. The public school kids would wait for the buses to roll in from Briarcliff and Sarah Lawrence. Once we wallflowers had ascertained that all the girls who didn't make their own clothes had been snagged by upperclassmen, it was time to retreat to our lair—our own little all-male drinking society and prayer service. You can only imagine what we were each praying for.

So, a beer or two. Then a third. Another. Then another. It gets late. Was six enough? Should I have one more—a seventh? So hard to decide! But, then, inspiration. I remember the Rolling Rock seven ounce green pony bottle option, and just like that, my problem is solved.

Add one more ounce, and you've got the USEF judges' solution to indecision—half pints, er, points. As of December 1st (or if you live in one of those northern "M" states, more likely it will get relevant around June 1st), it will be a hairsplitter's field day. We will be more precise than ever before! Not necessarily more accurate, remember, but more precise.

The question of half points has been around forever. My first thought is: now instead of a mental picture for each numbered score for each movement at each level, are we supposed to have additional mental pictures for each 0.5 score in between? In the past, judges have recognized that sometimes a horse performs a movement where the score ought to be someplace in between, say, a 6 or a 7. If they give the 6, they remember they "owe" the rider a half point and the next time in the test a borderline case comes up, they pay the rider back.

Will the new rule lead to a spate of homogeneous "six and a half"s instead of committed "this one was better than that one" judgments?

It will be interesting to see how prevalent the use of "point five" becomes. Will judges stick to their current standards and only give the half point occasionally? Will it be given when the judge is thinking "that's *clearly* halfway between a 6 or a 7"? Or will it be given when the judge dithers and just plain can't decide?

I can see some judges wavering between two scores in the "how satisfactory?" versus "how fairly good" range, but please spare me from 3.5s and 4.5s. Beyond a certain point, dissecting a movement's degree of suckitude doesn't further illuminate anything for the rider. In a similar vein, the first time I hear of a judge giving a 9.5, I will personally be the first to go throttle him! Even Mitt has more of a backbone than that!

