



***Many-hat wearing Robert Kellerhouse on international, national & regional outlook.***

Like the rest of life, eventing is constantly in a state of transition, notes Robert Kellerhouse. As California's most prominent eventing competition organizer, a longtime volunteer in sport leadership and facilities manager at the ever-evolving Galway Downs venue in Temecula, he has a broad perspective on the state of eventing.

The biggest sport-wide change is the addition of a fifth level of FEI-sanctioned international competition. The new, lower level 1\* upshifts what were 4\* events to 5\*s. One benefit of the move is bringing eventing in line with its Olympic counterparts, show jumping and dressage, in having five levels. Simultaneously, the CIC designation is retired and replaced with CCI long and short formats at the 3\* and 4\* level.

The new international 1\* level corresponds with the national Modified division that debuted two years ago but has yet to get much traction. Fence heights and degrees of difficulty put both levels between Training and Preliminary.

"I think the reshaping of the international levels for FEI will absolutely inspire more people to compete at the international level, but to what extent is completely unknown," Robert says.

International divisions, of course, come with more expenses for exhibitors and organizers.

Narrowing the focus to the West Coast, he's optimistic about 2019. While entries were too light to support the 3\* level at November's Galway Downs International, he considers that a byproduct of horsepower ebb and flow in the region. "Upper level horses don't grow on trees," he notes. Coupled with the International falling in a WEG year and just a month after the WEG itself, the lack of support at 3\* was disappointing but not a shocker.

That all changes in 2019 with the Pan American Games on the horizon and horse/rider pairs jockeying to get on 2020 Olympic selectors' radar. With Erik Duvander, Ian Stark and Leslie Law leading the U.S. high performance charge, Robert is optimistic about the caliber of competition to be seen on the West Coast this year. □

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### **A Development Mindset**

"There had been a trend for upper level horses to take their talents elsewhere," he reflects. "Former leadership had the idea that you had to go somewhere else to prove your mettle."

Competing out of one's geographical comfort zone is important, Robert stresses, but "it's vitally important that people produce a result locally and have a justification behind the travel. There is a lot to be said for conquering the mountain in your own backyard. I believe the new leadership is very aligned with that thinking."



He also hopes that leaders and selectors will go back to a development mindset in determining the team for this year's Pan Am Games. The U.S. not finishing in the top six at the WEG puts extra pressure on the Pan Am outcome in terms of a Tokyo berth, Robert explains. A gold medal at Pan Ams would be great but a mistake if it's accomplished by leaving out

up-and-coming pairs that can greatly benefit from the unique international team experience.

“Because we hadn’t yet qualified for the 2016 Rio Olympics, we sent 4\* horses to the 2015 Pan Am Games and I was vehemently against that,” Robert recalls. “I was in the minority, but I always think you have to be developing your talent. You never know who you are going to inspire when you tap someone’s shoulder and say, ‘I want to see you at the next mandatory trial.’ That is how you keep the sport going and it’s the recipe for building a base of success.”

However that shakes out, the organizer says the West Coast should see many top riders at its two 4\* Long competitions, The Event at Rebecca Farms in the summer and The Galway Downs International in the Fall.

The competition horizon a notch below that has new bright spots. “Copper Meadows is looking to stage events again, The Fresno Horse Park is offering international divisions, Twin Rivers is adding a CCI short in September and Woodside is following it up with a CCI short in October.

“The sport has been going in the direction of offering introductory levels,” Robert continues. “That’s good because it’s providing a comfort level for people to enter eventing, while getting to do it at a recognized competition.” While recognized events are pricier than their more casual, unrecognized counterparts, “That usually correlates to the quality of competition, officials, vets, medical staff, etc.,” he cautions.

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### □ **What’s Up At Galway Downs**

Putting his facilities manager hat on, Robert is thrilled about Galway Downs’ transition from a venue at risk of residential development to a thriving multi-discipline equestrian property with a bright future. Since Ken Smith bought the 242-acre facility in 2011, Galway Downs leapt out of many-years’ limbo and into a state of perpetual improvement. That’s coincided with the Temecula area becoming “the new Palm Springs” and a huge hike in the quantity and quality of equestrian competition being held there.

In 2018, Scott Hayes kicked off the inaugural Adequan® West Coast Dressage Festival at Galway Downs. This year all six weeks of the expanded circuit will be hosted there, starting Jan.

17.

On the hunter/jumper side, Nilforushan Equisport Events launched its Temecula Valley National Horse Show Series there with remarkable success. That series jumps to four weeks this year, starting in April.

These new series build on an existing calendar of regional competition in several disciplines and an increasingly busy schedule this year. The Nilforushans in particular brought considerable investments in Galway's arena footing and other upgrades made possible by the big shows benefit all exhibitors all year.

While he's a veteran in the sport, Robert has a kid-in-the-candy-store attitude toward the future. Part of his mission to develop equestrian sport at all levels is attracting the public. "There are 250,000 people who live within 10 miles of Galway Downs," he says. Having managed the American Eventing Championships for a few years, he knows that fans are out there. "There were 6,000 people in the stands for the show jumping on Saturday night in Tryon, NC in 2017." Granted, Tryon may have fewer entertainment options than Southern California, but he's convinced Galway is the perfect place to make new enthusiasts for horse sports.