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Overcrowded CSI Calendar Means Too Many Stars, Not Enough Shine

By Armand Leone

Armand reasons that the proliferation of international jumping shows is hurting national shows and what steps might be taken to mitigate the situation in his latest article on [The Chronicle of the Horse](#).

Over the past few years, there has been an explosive proliferation in the number of FEI jumping shows in the United States, referred to as CSIs, the shortened form of Concours de Saut International.

In 2025 alone, the U.S. is scheduled to host 109 CSI shows, with 84 of those holding competition at CSI3* level and above. There are no fewer than 20 CSI5* “elite” jumping shows on the calendar. That’s too many. When everything is special, nothing is special. Not only does the quality of competition suffer when top riders are spread too thin, but national competitions also get elbowed out.

These glittery, prestigious CSI5* shows were not very common even a decade ago. In 2010, just one CSI5* was held in the U.S., at the Winter Equestrian Festival (Florida). By 2015, there were eight CSI5* events in the U.S., four of which were held during WEF.

The FEI designed the specifications for competitions at the five-star level to represent the highest level of difficulty and prestige in the sport, coupled with huge prize money. In my view, a CSI5* competition requires more than just standards for jump height and width, venue, and fees.



*The U.S. jumping calendar needs better overall management, argues Armand Leone. **Photo by iStock***

To justify the elite status of these events, there must be enough top-ranked riders in attendance to ensure the highest level of competition and spectator interest. It’s not only about the jumps and facilities — it’s about who and how many top riders compete. The quality of the field really matters and can be strongly influenced by effective calendar management. Simply designating a competition as a CSI5* does not automatically transform it into a world-class event worthy of global recognition.

The increase in the number of CSI shows in the U.S. has diluted the pool of competitors and lowered the level of competitive challenge for many. The U.S. calendar needs fewer four- and five-star shows to ensure big class numbers and thrilling action from a field of highly ranked riders. This requires strategically limiting the number of events to ensure the requisite number of top-ranked athletes attend. The U.S. Equestrian Federation should not approve CSI4* and CSI5* competitions based solely on management, venue, and prize money. It’s not just about jumping a CSI5* course clear that matters — it’s about jumping clear *and* going head-to-head against other top riders.

A Parallel Circuit

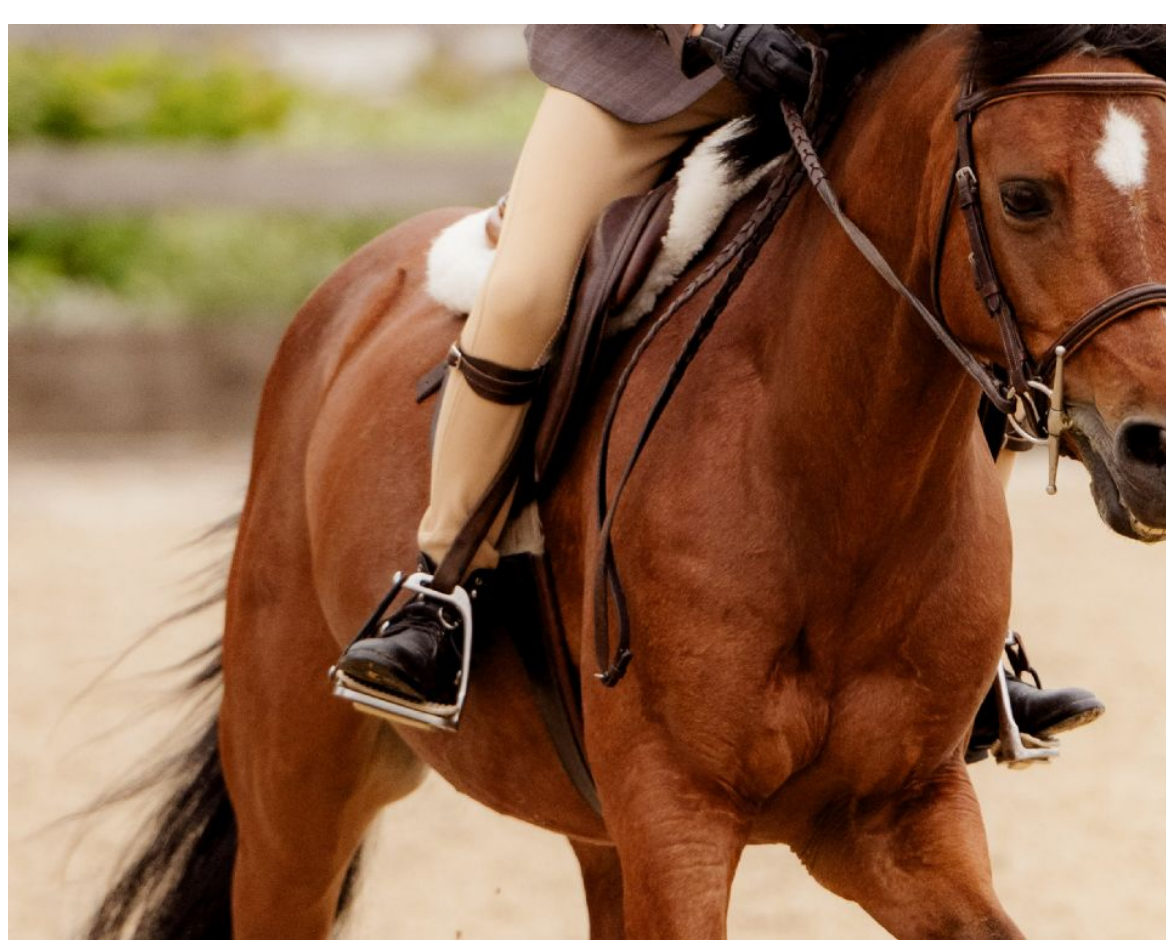
Perhaps even more damaging than diluting the level of competition is the rapid rise in the number of CSIs, which has ostensibly created a parallel circuit that crowds out and directly harms USEF national competitions. The CSI4* and CSI5* shows are so numerous that jumper riders can almost exclusively compete at these events without ever going to the traditionally popular national-rated shows, some of which are struggling as a result. Imagine a weekend where your local rated show draws crickets — empty stalls and silent rings — because a glittering CSI nearby is enticing riders away and stealing the spotlight.

[Read the Full Article on The Chronicle of the Horse](#)

[Read All Armand Leone’s Opinion Pieces on COTH](#)

Applauding the Stirrup Rule Change

Following a concerted campaign by Armand Leone, the use of certain “safety” stirrups will be banned in US Equestrian (USEF)-sanctioned competitions starting December 1, 2025. This ban applies to saddle attachments with rigid, upward-pointing projections that could catch a rider’s clothing or person during a dismount — including Peacock stirrups.



*The upward-pointing metal hook featured on Peacock stirrups has caused injuries to young riders. **Photo by Jump Media***

“I’m delighted that USEF looked at the reported injuries caused by the Peacock stirrups and is taking steps to prevent future injuries to riders when dismounting,” said Armand. “Given that these stirrups are often used by children and young riders, it is especially important to protect them from the rare but horrific injuries these stirrups can cause, which I outlined in my article in May 2024.

“To those complaining that they have been using Peacock stirrups for years without incident and should be able to continue to do so, please count yourself lucky. I have personally seen some life-changing injuries as a result of using them. Now that there are other, safer safety stirrups on the market, even one more injury from these stirrups is one too many. We need to work together to protect our children, and I applaud USEF in doing so,” he concluded.

[Read Armand’s Original Article](#)

For advice and counsel related to the equestrian industry, contact Leone Equestrian Law at info@equestriancounsel.com.

Led by Armand Leone, Jr., MD, JD, MBA, Leone Equestrian Law LLC provides legal services and consultation for equestrian professionals ranging from riders and trainers to owners and show managers in the FEI disciplines on a wide variety of issues.

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