



2026:DHC:8030



\$~

* **IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI**%
Judgment reserved on: 09.09.2026
Judgment pronounced on: 17.09.2026
Judgment uploaded on: 18.09.2026# **CNR No. DLHC010409292026**+ **W.P.(C) 12662/2026 & CM APPL. 58741/2026**

MASTER SHUBH CHOWDHARIPetitioner

Through: Mr. Saurabh Kripal, Senior Advocate with Ms. Manini Brar, Mr. Divyansh Singh and Mr. O.P. Harsh Singh Munday, Advocates.

versus

EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION OF INDIA
& ORS.

....Respondents

Through: Mr. Tanmay Mehta, Ms. Niyati Kohli, Mr. Rishabh Parikh and Ms. Isha Kakkar, Advocates for R-1.

Ms. Kumudavalli Seetharaman and Ms. Geetika Vyas, Advocates for R-2.

Mr. Balbir Singh, Senior Advocate with Mr. Kartik Yadav, Ms. Sumedha Chadha, Mr. Duvva Pavan Kumar, Ms. Shradha Gupta, Mr. Chirag Madan and Mr. G. Sai Krishna Kumar, Advocates for R-3.

CORAM:
HON'BLE DR. JUSTICE SWARANA KANTA SHARMA



2026:DHC:8030



JUDGMENT

DR. SWARANA KANTA SHARMA, J

1. The petitioner, Shubh Chowdhari, a young equestrian athlete, has approached this Court by way of the present writ petition, praying for grant of following reliefs:

“A. Quash and set-aside the Selection Decision II dated 27 August 2026 and dated 06.08.2026 issued by Respondent No.1 or its committees, and any other notification, public announcement or communication issued by any Respondents, or any government authority or ministry on the basis of these decisions.

B. Direct Respondent No.1 to carry out a fresh selection of the horse rider and reserve rider, based on already submitted results by the competing riders for the Show Jumping competition at the Youth Olympic Games 2026 in accordance with the selection criteria previously published by it on 10 June 2026 and 10 July 2026, *inter alia* such that consistency of performance based on penalty in the latest competitions is used for ranking the best athlete.

C. Declare that the Petitioner is in fact first in the list of riders who qualify as per the selection criteria published by Respondent No.1, and is therefore the selected rider for the Youth Olympic Games 2026.

D. Direct all Respondents and any other government authority or ministry involved in the process of selection of riders for the Show Jumpings competition and / or in the process of sending them to the Youth Olympic Games 2026 give effect to the directions of this Hon'ble Court and selection of the Petitioner as the eligible rider.

E. Grant ex-parte, ad interim reliefs to give effect to the prayers made above; and or.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

2. The facts of the case, as discernible from the petition, are that



2026:DHC:8030



in May 2025, an information brochure was issued for participation in the Youth Olympic Games 2026 [hereafter '**YOG, 2026**'], according to which the selection process was to commence with notification of the eligibility criteria for each discipline by the concerned international federation. In respect of Horse Jumping, the Fédération Équestre Internationale (**FEI**) issued an invitation proposal pathway prescribing minimum eligibility requirements, including a Certificate of Capability (**COC**) confirming that an athlete had fulfilled the minimum requirements for participation in the YOG, 2026. The FEI also issued regulations for the Horse Jumping competition at the YOG, 2026. The regulations provided that each participant would attempt each obstacle course only once in a round, that the course would remain the same for all participants, including in respect of the height and spread of jumps and the length of the course, and that the height of the jumps would remain between 120 cm and 125 cm. The classification of athletes was to be based on penalties, followed by the time taken to complete the course. In September 2025, a Youth Olympics Qualifier round was held in Bangalore, where the competing athletes participated on courses laid out in accordance with the FEI Regulations for the YOG, 2026. Based on the results of this competition, the petitioner herein received his COC on 10.06.2026.

3. Thereafter, the respondent no. 1, i.e. Equestrian Federation of India (**EFI**) issued selection criteria, *vide* emails dated 10.06.2026 and 10.07.2026. The criteria referred to objective assessment of



2026:DHC:8030



recent performances, consistency of results, competitiveness at CSI1*/CSI2* events and overall merit. Further, the clarification issued on 10.07.2026 stated that only CSI1*/CSI2* events with a minimum jump height of 130 cm would be considered for Minimum Eligibility Requirements (**MERs**) and performance consistency. According to the petitioner, the criteria did not prescribe any priority based on the number of rounds attempted or the height of the jumps.

4. On the basis of the said criteria, the petitioner submitted his competition results before the cut-off date of 25.07.2026. He participated in the Tour Portugal Summer Tour 2026 at Esposende, Portugal, in July 2026, completing five rounds at the 130 cm level. These results, according to the petitioner, represented his most recent competitive form after the notification of the selection criteria. The petitioner states that he achieved all relevant performances at or below eight penalties, which, according to him, demonstrated consistency of performance. He further states that all five rounds submitted by him were completed at 130 cm in CSI2* competitions. He relies on the FEI classification of events into star levels, which, according to him, already takes into account the height of obstacles and the technical challenges involved. He also states that he was the only competing athlete who had previously been shortlisted to represent India at the Asian Youth Games, 2025 in Bahrain. The petitioner alleges that, had he known that the number of rounds attempted would be given priority over consistency of performance in terms of penalties and time, he would have submitted results for a



2026:DHC:8030



greater number of rounds, even if they involved higher penalties. According to him, he had instead focused on submitting recent results with low penalties to demonstrate consistency.

5. The petitioner states that a new Selection Committee was appointed on 17.07.2026 and allegedly held a meeting on 06.08.2026, wherein respondent no. 3, Sresth Raju Mantena, was recommended to represent India at the YOG, 2026, while respondent no. 4, Vaasvi Khaitan, was recommended as reserve rider [hereafter '**Selection Decision-I**']. According to him, the Selection Committee introduced a priority based on jump height, placing riders who had competed at 135 cm above those who had competed at 130 cm, while disregarding certain high-penalty results and substituting them with lower-penalty results obtained below the qualifying height of 130 cm. The petitioner alleges that, in effect, jump height became the decisive criterion, while penalties and consistency of performance were disregarded, despite the fact that the height of the jumps in the international rounds was fixed. Aggrieved thereby, on 14.08.2026, the petitioner approached this Court by filing *W.P.(C) 11935/2026*, challenging the Selection Decision-I and the announcement of results dated 10.08.2026, *inter alia*, on the ground that undue priority had been given to jump height in a competition where the height of the jumps was fixed. It is stated that on 16.08.2026, EFI issued an addendum indicating that it proposed to reconsider Selection Decision-I in view of the writ petition and other representations. On 18.08.2026, this Court took note of EFI's decision to reconsider the



2026:DHC:8030



selection and granted it two weeks to do so. This Court further directed that any fresh decision would be withheld for three days to enable the petitioner to file a fresh writ petition in the event the decision was adverse to him. Thereafter, the number of members of the Selection Committee was increased from three to five. The petitioner states that the reason for, and authority behind, this change were not clear. On 19.08.2026, he submitted a detailed representation to the Selection Committee, relying upon the selection criteria previously notified on 10.06.2026 and 10.07.2026. Between 21.08.2026 and 25.08.2026, correspondence took place regarding the petitioner's hearing before the Selection Committee. On 24.08.2026, the window for EFI to notify the selection to the FEI opened, and the same was to remain open until 25.09.2026. On 25.08.2026, the petitioner's father appeared before the Selection Committee, referred to the representation already submitted, and requested that the petitioner be selected as the main rider on merits.

6. On 27.08.2026, the Ad-Hoc Committee for the Governance of EFI issued the fresh selection decision, comprising the Minutes dated 24.08.2026 of the Selection Committee, which is impugned before this Court [hereafter '**Selection Decision-II**'], whereby respondent no. 3 was retained at rank 1, being recommended to represent India at YOG, 2026, while the petitioner herein was upgraded to rank 2, from previous rank 3, and recommended as reserve rider. According to the petitioner, EFI admitted that Selection Decision-I was erroneous and that jump height could not be given priority. However, the petitioner



2026:DHC:8030



alleges that EFI again placed respondent no. 3 at rank 1 by omitting his results involving penalties as high as 20 points, despite penalties being the principal assessment criterion under the FEI regulations and the previously notified selection criteria. The petitioner states that, even among the rounds considered by EFI, his penalties were lower and his performance more consistent on average than that of respondent no. 3, and that he ought therefore to have been placed at Rank 1. He alleges that Selection Decision-II contains no explanation for the ranking of respondent no. 3 at rank 1, the petitioner at rank 2, or the other riders.

7. Aggrieved thereby, the present writ petition has been filed by the petitioner.

SUBMISSIONS BEFORE THE COURT

8. The **learned senior counsel appearing for the petitioner** argues that the impugned selection decision dated 27.08.2026 is contrary to the selection criteria notified by EFI and is liable to be set aside. It is argued that the FEI in May, 2026, had issued the regulations governing horse show jumping at the YOG, 2026. Thereafter, the EFI had initially notified its selection criteria on 08.05.2026. Where more than one athlete fulfilled the eligibility requirements or possessed the COC issued by the FEI, the athletes were to be assessed on the basis of technical difficulty and level of competitions, consistency of international performance, recency of results relative to YOG 2026, horse-rider combination stability and



2026:DHC:8030



championship readiness. The selection criteria was thereafter clarified by EFI on 10.06.2026, which referred to – objective assessment of recent performances, consistency of recent results, competitiveness at CSI1*/CSI2* level, and overall merit. Vide email dated 10.07.2026, it was clarified that “CSI1*/CSI2* within minimum 130 cm height only will be considered for MERs/performance consistency. The learned senior counsel contends that the impugned Selection Decision-II does not refer to the notified selection criteria, much less explain how this criteria was applied while evaluating the petitioner and respondent no. 3. The only vague reference is to “overall merit”, which was merely one component of the overall criteria and could not substitute the other notified parameters. It is submitted that EFI failed to consider the recent results for assessing consistency, despite having expressly notified “recent performances” and “consistency” as relevant criteria.

9. It is further contended that the relevant results, as per the notified criteria, were those involving a minimum height of 130 cm, at CSI1*/CSI2* level, and consisting of completed rounds, whether one-phase or two-phase. In the case of respondent no. 3, the results dated 27.06.2026 and 21.06.2026, involving 12 and 20 penalty points respectively, were omitted without any explanation. Both results were at heights of 130 cm and above, including 135 cm, at CSI1* level, and were completed rounds falling within the category of results eligible for consideration. In contrast, the petitioner had no penalty above eight points in any of his results at a height of 130 cm. The



2026:DHC:8030



learned senior counsel submits that there can be no meaningful assessment of “consistency” in recent results unless all relevant results within the period fixed by the Selection Committee are considered; and that EFI could not selectively omit the unfavourable results of respondent no. 3 while relying upon selected results to place him above the petitioner. Therefore, it is argued that the EFI was required to apply the criteria which it had itself notified in advance, and that it could not disregard relevant results or selectively choose results so as to arrive at a pre-determined conclusion.

10. The learned senior counsel for the petitioner also argues that EFI could not have prioritised the number of rounds attempted by an athlete, since – (i) the athletes were neither required nor directed to submit a fixed number of results so as to enable a “best of” comparison; (ii) the “number of rounds” was never notified as a selection criterion; and (iii) in the Youth Olympic Games, each rider attempts the jumps for each competition only once and thus, number of rounds has no relevance to the actual format of the said Games. It is submitted that if the number of rounds was intended to be a relevant factor, the petitioner would have submitted more results. However, the number of rounds was neither notified nor communicated to the athletes as a relevant factor and could not, therefore, be used subsequently to justify the selection of respondent no. 3 over the petitioner.

11. *Conversely*, the **learned counsel appearing for respondent no. 1/EFI** argues that the present petition is devoid of merit and that



2026:DHC:8030



the impugned Selection Decision-II does not warrant interference. It is stated that, by order dated 18.08.2026 passed in W.P.(C) 11935/2026, this Court directed EFI to decide the petitioner's representation within two weeks and, in case of an adverse decision, restrained the uploading of the names of other applicants for three days. EFI complied with these directions. Even prior thereto, the Ad-Hoc Committee had suspended Selection Decision-I dated 06.08.2026 by issuing an Addendum dated 16.08.2026 and inviting representations from all riders. The Selection Committee thereafter reconvened on 24.08.2026, heard the petitioner's father and representatives of the other riders, considered the written representations, including that of the petitioner dated 19.08.2026, and re-tabulated and verified the results against the FEI database. Its reasons were recorded in the Minutes, and its recommendation was accepted by the Ad-Hoc Committee through Resolution dated 27.08.2026. The decision was communicated to all COC holders, while its public disclosure was withheld for three days in compliance with this Court's order. The grievance that no reasons were recorded is, therefore, contrary to the Minutes. The learned counsel further submits that selection of sportspersons to represent the country falls within the domain of the concerned National Sports Federation and its expert selectors. A writ court does not sit as an appellate authority over sporting merit or substitute its own assessment for that of the experts. Interference would be permissible only if the selection is shown to be mala fide, perverse, or contrary to binding criteria, none



2026:DHC:8030



of which has been established by the petitioner.

12. The learned counsel appearing for EFI further submits that the selection criteria for YOG, 2026 was uploaded on the EFI website on 08.05.2026. Where more than one athlete held a valid CoC, the criteria, *inter alia*, required assessment on the basis of technical difficulty and level of competitions, consistency of international performance, recency of results relative to YOG, 2026. The email dated 10.06.2026 reiterated that selection would be based on an objective assessment of recent performances, consistency of results, competitiveness at CSI1*/CSI2* events and overall merit, with 25.07.2026 fixed as the cut-off date for submission of results. The email dated 10.07.2026 further clarified that only CSI1*/CSI2* results at a minimum height of 130 cm would be considered. The petitioner does not dispute the aforesaid criteria. It is argued that this very criteria was applied by the Selection Committee during reconsideration and while passing the impugned Selection Decision-II.

13. The learned counsel contends that none of the criteria dated 08.05.2026, 10.06.2026 or 10.07.2026 provided that riders would be ranked on the basis of the arithmetic average of their penalties or that penalties would be the principal determinant of the order of merit. According to EFI, it is the petitioner herein who seeks to introduce an unnotified criterion by relying upon the format of the competition at the Games. It is stated that one of the notified criteria was “consistency”, and that consistency cannot be assessed merely on the



2026:DHC:8030



basis of an average which may reward a rider for participating in fewer competitions. The learned counsel submits that the petitioner himself has pleaded that consistency of performance essentially means repeatedly securing low penalties, at or below eight points. This was precisely the basis adopted by the Selection Committee. On that basis, respondent no. 3 had more qualifying performances than the petitioner. It is submitted that the Selection Committee adopted a uniform methodology for all seven CoC holders. It (i) fixed the assessment window from 08.05.2026, being the date of publication of the Selection Criteria, to 25.07.2026, being the notified cut-off date, and also counted the CoC result of each rider; (ii) considered all FEI CSI1*/CSI2* and higher results at 130 cm and above, giving equal weightage to 130 cm and 135 cm classes; (iii) excluded two-phase competitions where the rider had jumped only the first phase and had not completed the full course; (iv) treated a completed round involving not more than eight penalties as a qualifying performance, which was also the standard prescribed by the FEI for a CoC and relied upon by the petitioner himself; and (v) re-tabulated and verified every rider's results against the FEI database. These principles were applied uniformly to all the riders. On this basis, respondent no. 3 had five qualifying performances, the petitioner had four, and respondent no. 4 had three, and the petitioner, who had stood third under the previous decision, consequently moved up to second upon reconsideration.

14. The learned counsel submits that the petitioner's allegation



2026:DHC:8030



regarding the omission of respondent no. 3's round involving 20 penalties is untenable, inasmuch as a round involving 20 penalties was not a qualifying performance under the applicable standards and was not counted for any rider. Similarly, the petitioner's own results which did not satisfy the same standards, including two-phase competitions in which he had completed only the first phase, were also excluded. It is argued that the petitioner cannot insist that his own non-qualifying results be excluded while requiring respondent no. 3's non-qualifying results to be counted against him. The petitioner's tabulation of average penalties is, therefore, selective and is based upon a criterion which was never notified. It is contended that the petitioner's plea that he would have submitted more rounds is also not tenable. All riders were asked by the email dated 10.06.2026 to submit their latest competition results and performance records by 25.07.2026. In any event, the Selection Committee did not confine itself to the results submitted by the riders but independently verified the same against the FEI database, which records every start by every rider. The petitioner's international results during the assessment window [i.e. 08.05.2026 to 25.07.2026] consisted of a single tour at Esposende, Portugal. Respondent no. 3, on the other hand, participated in competitions in Italy, France and Hungary and secured qualifying results at CSI events in France and Hungary, at both 130 cm and 135 cm. Both of respondent no. 3's qualifying competitions were Grand Prix events, whereas the petitioner participated in a medium tour. The Selection Committee was, therefore, entitled to



2026:DHC:8030



consider respondent no. 3's results as demonstrating greater consistency, competitiveness and technical level, all of which were expressly included in the notified criteria.

15. *In rebuttal*, the **learned senior counsel appearing for the petitioner** argues that the explanations advanced by EFI are neither supported by the record nor consistent with the selection criteria notified by the EFI. It is argued that the explanation of EFI that respondent no. 3 participated in competitions of greater technical difficulty than the petitioner is factually incorrect. Technical difficulty is determined by the CSI level of the competition. Under the FEI Jumping Rules, CSI5* represents the highest level, while CSI1* represents a lower level of technical difficulty. Even in the results considered by the Selection Committee, the petitioner's performances were at the CSI2* level, whereas the performances of respondent No. 3 were at the CSI1* level. It is, therefore, submitted that the petitioner had participated in competitions of a higher CSI level than respondent no. 3. The reference to "Grand Prix" by EFI is misplaced. "Grand Prix" is merely the name given to the competition conducted on the final day of an event, generally carrying higher prize money. It does not, by itself, determine the technical level or difficulty of the competition. Further, the EFI's explanation that respondent no. 3 had participated in more 135 cm events cannot be accepted, since priority to higher jump height was admittedly not a notified selection criterion. In fact, the impugned selection decision itself records that equal weightage was to be given to the 130 cm and



2026:DHC:8030



135 cm classes and that all results above 130 cm were to be considered. The learned senior counsel further contends that the explanation of EFI that respondent no. 3 had performed better than the petitioner in a common competition is also irrelevant, since performance in a common competition was never prescribed as a selection criterion. If such a criterion was intended to be applied, all athletes ought to have been required to participate in the same competitions. EFI cannot, therefore, rely upon performance in a common competition as an additional criterion after the selection process has concluded, particularly when the athletes were never informed that such a comparison would determine their ranking.

16. The learned senior counsel for the petitioner argues that EFI is bound by its own notified selection criteria and cannot introduce new considerations at the stage of selection or during the hearing of the petition. He submits that Clause 33.3 of the Interim Constitution of the EFI, relied upon by EFI itself in its reply, expressly provides that selection shall be made strictly on the basis of objective criteria published in advance and disclosed to all potential candidates. The learned senior counsel stresses upon the fact that the criteria notified by EFI referred to technical difficulty, consistency, recency of results, horse-rider combination, championship, competitiveness at CSI1*/CSI2* level and overall merit; and it did not refer to the number of rounds, performance in a common competition, participation in Grand Prix events, or priority based on higher jump height. EFI could not, therefore, justify the impugned selection



2026:DHC:8030



decision by relying upon considerations which were neither notified in advance nor disclosed to the participating athletes. Therefore, it is prayed that the present writ petition be allowed.

17. The **learned counsel appearing for respondent no. 3**, Sresth Raju Mantena, submits that the present petition is the second challenge raised by the petitioner, who has been placed as Reserve Rider No. 1, to the selection of respondent no. 3 to represent India in the Show Jumping discipline at the YOG, 2026. Without prejudice to the objection that the relief sought is beyond the scope of judicial review under Article 226 of the Constitution, the learned counsel argues that the composition of the Show Jumping Selection Committee was enhanced from three to five members *vide* Addendum dated 16.08.2026 and all the five members are national show-jumping riders possessing the requisite expertise and technical knowledge of equestrian sport. It is argued that the Selection Committee had heard the parents of all the concerned athletes holding a CoC, considered their written representations and recorded its deliberations in comprehensive minutes. The grievance that the petitioner was not afforded an opportunity of hearing or that the decision was taken without reasons is, therefore, incorrect. It is stated that the recommendation of the Selection Committee was thereafter accepted by EFI. It is contended that the criterion applied by the Selection Committee while selecting respondent no. 3 was traceable to the following – (i) the email dated 10.06.2026; (ii) the email dated 10.07.2026; (iii) paragraph 5 of the Selection Criteria dated



2026:DHC:8030



08.05.2026; and (iv) the FEI standard of not more than eight penalties for a qualifying performance, and the petitioner herein has not challenged the validity of the said Selection Criteria. It is, therefore, submitted that the criteria applied by the Selection Committee was neither new nor introduced after the commencement of the selection process. It is stated that as per Selection Criteria, since more than one athlete fulfilled the mandatory eligibility requirement, the Selection Committee proceeded under Clause 5 of the Selection Criteria, which required assessment on the basis of – technical difficulty, consistency of international performance, recency of results relative to YOG 2026, horse-rider combination stability, and championship readiness. It is submitted that, for assessing technical difficulty and horse-rider combination stability, the Selection Committee fixed the minimum height at 130 cm. For assessing recency and consistency, it fixed the qualifying period from 08.05.2026 to 25.07.2026. For assessing championship readiness, it considered qualifying scores involving not more than eight penalties, in accordance with the applicable FEI standard. The same methodology was applied uniformly to all the riders. In respect of respondent no. 3, such results involved 8, 4, 0, 6 and 4 penalties, totalling 22 penalties over 05 qualifying performances. In respect of petitioner, such results involved 4, 0, 6 and 4 penalties respectively, totalling 14 penalties over 04 qualifying performances; and in respect of respondent no. 4, 03 qualifying performances were considered, involving 8, 4 and 0 penalties. On the basis of the aforesaid uniform methodology, respondent no. 3, having



2026:DHC:8030



05 qualifying performances, was selected. Further, it is argued that the Selection Committee did not give preference to 135 cm results over 130 cm results, and equal weightage was given to 130 cm and 135 cm, and all results above 130 cm were duly considered. It is further submitted that the Selection Committee excluded two-phase competitions where the rider had completed only the first phase and had not completed the full course. This principle was applied equally to all riders and was not used selectively against the petitioner. The learned counsel further contends that the notified criteria did not provide for ranking the athletes on the basis of the arithmetic average of their penalties. The criteria referred to “consistency of international performance” and not to an average penalty calculation. It is argued that the petitioner is seeking to introduce a new criterion by insisting that the riders be compared only on the basis of average penalties. Such a criterion was never notified and cannot be substituted for the assessment undertaken by the expert Selection Committee. It is also argued that consistency cannot be assessed merely by calculating the average of a limited number of results, particularly where one rider has participated in fewer competitions, more so since an *average* rewards a rider for competing less. On the petitioner’s arithmetic, a rider who jumps one clear round and stops would defeat a rider who jumps five qualifying rounds across three countries. Therefore, the number and spread of qualifying performances are relevant to assessing whether a rider has consistently performed at the required level. The learned counsel



2026:DHC:8030



further submits that the petitioner's reliance on one of the results of respondent no. 3 involving 20 penalties is misplaced, as the performance involving 20 penalties did not qualify under the applicable eight-penalty standard and was not counted for any rider. The same methodology was applied to the petitioner's own results which did not satisfy the qualifying requirements, including his Small Class rounds which were below the notified minimum height of 1.30 m, one of which, on 18.07.2026, carried 12 penalties and was consequently not counted. Therefore, it is prayed that the present petition be dismissed.

18. This Court has **heard** arguments addressed on behalf of the petitioner as well as the respondents, and has perused the material available on record.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

19. The principal issue which arises for consideration, on the basis of case put forth by the petitioner, is whether the Selection Committee, while undertaking the fresh selection, correctly applied the notified Selection Criteria to the performances of the eligible riders, and whether the Selection Committee rightly assessed the relevant parameters, particularly, the consistency of performance and recency of results. The question before this Court is also whether the Selection Committee was required to adopt the method suggested by the petitioner, i.e. to take into account every performance during the relevant period, and/or assess the riders on the basis of their average



2026:DHC:8030



penalty points.

20. Before examining the rival contentions, it would be appropriate to take note of the successive communications through which the Selection Criteria were placed before the eligible riders. The criteria dated 08.05.2026 sets out the following parameters:

- Technical difficulty and level of competitions completed
- Consistency of international performance
- Recency of results relative to YOG 2026
- Horse–rider combination stability
- Championship readiness

21. Thereafter, the email dated 10.06.2026 stipulated that the final selection would be based on the following:

“3. The final selection of the rider who will represent India at the Youth Olympic Games 2026 will be based on an objective assessment of recent performances, consistency of results, competitiveness at CSI1*/CSI2* events, and overall merit.”

22. The subsequent email dated 10.07.2026 clarified that – CSI1/2* with minimum 130 cm height only will be considered for MER’s / performance consistency.

23. In the opinion of this Court, a conjoint reading of the aforesaid shows that the selection was to be based on the technical difficulty and level of the competitions, consistency of international performance, recency of results, horse–rider combination stability, championship readiness, competitiveness at CSI 1*/2* events and overall merit. *However*, the criteria does not prescribe any particular formula for assessing these factors. Though the criteria identifies the



2026:DHC:8030



relevant factors for assessment, it, evidently, leaves it to the wisdom of the experts of the Selection Committee to determine the manner in which those factors are to be evaluated and weighed.

24. This Court notes that the initial grievance of the petitioner was directed against Selection Decision-I. According to the petitioner, although the email dated 10.07.2026 prescribed a minimum height of 130 cm, the Selection Committee had also considered results at 135 cm and had accorded preference to the higher-height results. It was on this basis that respondent no. 3 was placed at rank no. 1, respondent no. 4 at rank no. 2, and the petitioner at rank no. 3 since the petitioner had not participated in any 135 cm event during the relevant period, i.e., from 08.05.2026 to 25.07.2026. The petitioner accordingly had approached this Court by way of *W.P.(C) 11935/2026*. During the subsequent reconsideration by the Selection Committee, the Selection Decision-I was reviewed and it was decided that equal weightage would be given to results at both 130 cm and 135 cm. Thus, the earlier distinction between the two categories, to the extent it had resulted in preference being given to 135 cm results, was removed while passing the Selection Decision-II.

25. In the Selection Decision-II, as regards the submission that only 130 cm results should be considered, it was specifically observed that the email dated 10.07.2026 used the expression “minimum height of 130 cm”. The expression “minimum” indicates the lower qualifying limit; it does not mean that results at no height other than 130 cm could be considered. Consequently, in the fresh



2026:DHC:8030



selection, the Selection Committee considered the qualifying results of all eligible riders in both the 130 cm and 135 cm categories, without according preference to either category. On this basis, the petitioner was found to have four qualifying results, whereas respondent no. 3 was found to have five qualifying results.

26. The issue, therefore, is now whether the fresh assessment, as undertaken, was consistent with the notified Selection Criteria of the EFI.

27. One of the arguments of the petitioner is that, while assessing consistency and recent performance, the Selection Committee ought to have considered all performances during the relevant period, including those in which the rider had secured more than eight penalty points. In support of this submission, the petitioner has pointed out that, out of his five results in the 130 cm category during the relevant period, he had secured not more than eight penalty points in each event. It is further pointed out that respondent no. 3 had six results in the 130 cm and 135 cm categories, out of which two results involved more than eight penalty points.

28. This contention, however, overlooks the Selection Criteria dated 08.05.2026, which contemplated the consideration of qualifying performances and did not include scores involving more than eight penalty points. The Selection Committee applied this requirement uniformly to all the eligible riders. Thus, such scores were not excluded only in the case of respondent no. 3, but were not



2026:DHC:8030



considered in the case of any athlete. Therefore, the said argument is not of any help to the petitioner.

29. The petitioner has raised another principal objection to the manner in which the comparative merit of the riders was assessed. According to the petitioner, even if the five qualifying scores of respondent no. 3 and the four qualifying scores of the petitioner are taken into consideration, consistency and merit cannot be assessed merely on the basis of the number of qualifying scores. It is contended that the penalty points secured in each of the qualifying events must be considered and that the average of such penalty points should be taken into account for assessing the consistency of recent performances. The petitioner has illustrated this submission by referring to the penalty points secured by the two riders in their respective qualifying events. According to the petitioner, he secured 4, 0, 6 and 4 penalty points in his four qualifying events, aggregating to 14 penalty points. The average would, therefore, be 3.5 penalty points per event. Respondent no. 3, on the other hand, secured 8, 4, 0, 6 and 4 penalty points in his five qualifying events, aggregating to 22 penalty points, resulting in an average of 4.4 penalty points per event. It is, therefore, contended that, if the average penalty points are taken into consideration, the petitioner would have a better record than respondent no. 3, and this should be the method for assessing the eligible riders, and not just the number of events/rounds in which they secured qualifying scores.

30. This Court has already taken note of the Selection Criteria



2026:DHC:8030



dated 08.05.2026 and the subsequent emails dated 10.06.2026 and 10.07.2026. The criteria *inter alia* referred to technical difficulty and the level of competitions completed, consistency of international performance, recency of results relative to YOG 2026, championship readiness, and overall merit. It is however significant to note that none of these communications states that the average of penalty points secured by a rider in the qualifying events would be the basis for determining consistency or comparative merit. There is also no stipulation that the rider securing the lowest average penalty points would necessarily be placed above a rider who had secured a greater number of qualifying results. The criteria does not prescribe any particular method/formula, weighting or comparative index for assessing consistency or overall merit.

31. The petitioner's proposed method may certainly be one possible method of assessing the performances of riders. However, clearly, the expressions "consistency of international performance" or "recency of results" are broad enough in scope. Consistency may be assessed by considering the number of qualifying performances, the level and difficulty of the events, the ability to repeatedly complete qualifying rounds, the recency of such performances, the height at which the performances were achieved, and the overall record of the horse-rider combination. Similarly, "overall merit" cannot necessarily be reduced to a single numerical calculation.

32. For instance, a rider who secures four qualifying results with a lower average of penalty points, say 2 points, may not, on that sole



2026:DHC:8030



ground, be considered more suitable than a rider who secures eight qualifying results with a slightly higher average of penalty points, say 4 points. As to which factor should carry greater weight is a matter which requires knowledge of the sport, its technical demands and the requirements of the particular championship.

33. Likewise, the number of qualifying performances and the ability to produce such performances repeatedly, in separate international events in different countries, may also be relevant considerations while assessing the suitability of a rider for a particular championship, *which evidently*, found favour with the Selection Committee which passed the impugned Selection Decision-II.

34. The Selection Committee was constituted to assess the comparative merit and suitability of the riders for representing the country at YOG 2026. The members of such a Committee are expected to possess the requisite knowledge and experience of the sport. The criteria laid down by EFI identify the broad factors to be considered, but leave the assessment of those factors to the experts in the Committee. The Court cannot assume that, merely because one method of assessment, as suggested by the petitioner, is possible, the Selection Committee was bound to adopt that method only.

35. In this regard, it is also necessary to bear in mind the limited scope of judicial review in matters involving the selection of sportspersons to represent the country. A Court of law is not an



2026:DHC:8030



expert in equestrian sport. It also does not possess the technical knowledge required to determine whether consistency is better assessed by the number of qualifying performances, the average penalty points, the level of the competitions, the height of the course, or a combination of these factors. These are matters which fall within the domain of the Selection Committee and the sports authorities.

36. The Hon'ble Supreme Court has repeatedly held that a Court exercising judicial review does not sit as an appellate authority over the decision of a duly constituted Selection Committee and cannot substitute its own assessment of the comparative merit of candidates. In ***Union Public Service Commission v. M. Sathiya Priya: (2018) 15 SCC 796***, the Hon'ble Supreme Court held that the manner in which candidates are assessed in the light of the relevant records and the norms to be applied in making the assessment are matters for the Selection Committee, which possesses the requisite expertise, and interference by courts is warranted only where the process of assessment is vitiated by bias, mala fides or arbitrariness.

37. Likewise, in ***Tajvir Singh Sodhi v. State of Jammu & Kashmir: (2023) 17 SCC 147***, the Hon'ble Supreme Court reiterated that it is not appropriate for courts to substitute their judgment for that of an expert selection body, and the Courts cannot enter into the merits of the selection process unless there are proven allegations of malfeasance or violation of statutory rules, in cases of inherent arbitrariness. The relevant observations are as under:



2026:DHC:8030



“37. Thus, courts while exercising the power of judicial review cannot step into the shoes of the Selection Committee or assume an appellate role to examine whether the marks awarded by the Selection Committee in the viva voce are excessive and not corresponding to their performance in such test. The assessment and evaluation of the performance of candidates appearing before the Selection Committee/Interview Board should be best left to the members of the committee. In light of the position that a Court cannot sit in appeal against the decision taken pursuant to a reasonably sound selection process, the following grounds raised by the writ petitioners, which are based on an attack of subjective criteria employed by the Selection Board/interview panel in assessing the suitability of candidates, namely, (i) that the candidates who had done their postgraduation had been awarded 10 marks and in the viva voce, such PG candidates had been granted either 18 marks or 20 marks out of 20; (i) that although the writ petitioners had performed exceptionally well in the interview, the authorities had acted in an arbitrary manner while carrying out the selection process, would not hold any water.

38. The same principle has been applied by this Court in matters concerning the selection of sportspersons. In ***Shumel v. Union of India***: 2010 SCC OnLine Del 4706, it was held that, in matters concerning the selection of the best possible candidate to represent India in an international sporting event, the Court ought not to interfere with the selection criteria laid down by the concerned National Sports Federation. The decision as to how the relative merits of different candidates are to be evaluated is best left to the experts.

39. The aforesaid principle was reiterated in ***Sushil Kumar v. Union of India***: 2016 SCC OnLine Del 3660, wherein this Court held that a writ court would not interfere with the exercise of discretion by a National Sports Federation or substitute its own judgment, except



2026:DHC:8030



where the discretion is shown to have been exercised in an arbitrary, capricious or perverse manner, or contrary to settled principles or practices.

40. In ***Sujeet v. Union of India***: 2023 SCC OnLine Del 5801, this Court observed as under:

“17. It is well settled that writ courts must not substitute their opinions to the opinions arrived at by the experts unless the court is satisfied that the decision taken by the experts is perverse or illegal. The function of the Court is only to see that the decision has been arrived at in a good faith and the experts have acted reasonably. It is not the function of the courts to sit in judgment over the decision arrived at by the experts, if the said decision has been taken in good faith and is not perverse, as it would be risky for the Courts to tread an unknown path while upsetting such decisions.”

41. Recently, the Division Bench of this Court in ***Anush Agarwalla v. Ad-Hoc Committee for Governance of Equestrian Federation of India and Others***: 2026 SCC OnLine Del 4965 has observed that Courts do not sit in appeal over the decisions of selection committees, nor do they reassess the relative merits of candidates. The relevant observations are set out below:

“32. It is well settled that Courts do not sit in appeal over the decisions of selection committees, nor do they reassess the relative merits of candidates. The determination as to who should represent the country in an international sporting event is ordinarily best left to experts in the field. In matters concerning selection for international competitive events, the Court would not ordinarily interfere with the selection criteria framed by the concerned expert body, or with the manner in which relative merit is evaluated, unless the decision is shown to be arbitrary, irrational, perverse or contrary to law.”



2026:DHC:8030



42. The above principles are applicable in the present case too, as it concerns the selection of a rider to represent the country at an international sporting event. The task of the Court, while adjudicating upon a challenge to the decision of the Selection Committee, is primarily to examine that the Selection Committee acts within the framework of the criteria and does not act arbitrarily or with mala fides. Undisputedly, it is not the function of the Court to determine which of two or more reasonable/possible methods of assessing sporting merit is preferable.

43. In the present case, the Selection Committee, while passing the impugned Selection Decision-II, considered the qualifying results of the eligible riders in the 130 cm and 135 cm categories and did not accord preference to one height over the other. It applied the qualifying threshold uniformly and considered the number of qualifying performances achieved by the riders, 130 cm and 135 cm categories, between 08.05.2026 and 25.07.2026. Pertinently, the petitioner also does not contend that the qualifying threshold was applied differently to different riders. The petitioner's grievance is essentially that performances which were otherwise qualifying should have been further compared by adopting a particular mathematical method, i.e. average of penalties. In this Court's view, this argument of the petitioner is a challenge to the manner in which the Selection Committee weighed the relevant factors, rather than a demonstration that the Committee ignored the notified Selection Criteria altogether.

44. On a broad assessment of the record placed before this Court,



2026:DHC:8030



this Court finds that the Selection Committee did not disregard the criteria dated 08.05.2026 or the subsequent clarifications dated 10.06.2026 and 10.07.2026. The petitioner has not been able to demonstrate that the Committee adopted a method which was expressly prohibited by the criteria, or applied a different standard to respondent no. 3, or excluded any relevant factor in a manner which rendered the decision manifestly arbitrary or perverse.

45. It is also not in dispute that the selection criteria were not challenged by any of the athletes, including petitioner, before the selection process was undertaken. All the eligible riders participated in the process with complete knowledge of the selection criteria. The petitioner cannot, after the outcome of the process, seek to replace the notified criteria with a different method of assessment merely because the latter may produce a result more favourable to him.

46. This Court is also conscious that even if the petitioner may have raised his grievance bona fide and that the selection has serious consequences for his opportunity to represent the country, nevertheless, a writ court has to examine only the legality of the decision-making process and not undertake a fresh assessment of the comparative sporting merit of the riders. The Court cannot enter into the technical question of whether the average of penalty points is a better indicator of consistency than the number of qualifying performances. That question falls within the expertise of the Selection Committee.



2026:DHC:8030



47. To conclude, the material placed before the Court does not establish that the impugned Selection Decision-II was mala fide, arbitrary, perverse, contrary to the notified criteria or based on irrelevant considerations. The Selection Committee had reconsidered its earlier decision, heard the representations and submissions of the concerned eligible riders/their parents, verified the results and recorded its brief reasons. The recommendation was thereafter accepted by the Ad-Hoc Committee of EFI. For the said reasons, this Court finds no merit in the petitioner's challenge to the manner in which the Selection Committee assessed the qualifying performances, consistency and comparative merit of the riders.

48. On the grounds raised in the present petition, the impugned Selection Decision-II does not suffer from any legal infirmity warranting interference by this Court.

49. The petition is, accordingly, dismissed. Pending applications, if any, also stand disposed of.

50. The judgment be uploaded on the website forthwith.

DR. SWARANA KANTA SHARMA, J
SEPTEMBER 17, 2026/A