

HH PRINCE FAISAL AL SHALAN

DISCIPLINE, HARD WORK & TAWFEEQ

By Nada H. Abdelmoniem

COUNTRY: SAUDI ARABIA

DATE OF BIRTH: JULY 14 1987

PROFESSION: SHOW JUMPING RIDER, TEAM MEMBER OF SAUDI EQUESTRIAN, MANAGING DIRECTOR AT SAUDI ELECTRONIC COMPANY & C.F.O AT SANA CAPITAL GROUP

ONE OF THE MOST DISTINGUISHED AND ELOQUENT TEAM MEMBERS OF SAUDI EQUESTRIAN IS HH PRINCE FAISAL AL SHALAN. GROWING UP WITH THE PRESSURES OF HIS EARLIEST RIDING EXPERIENCES, HE CAME TO WHOLLY EMBRACE AND EXCEL IN THE SPORT OF SHOW JUMPING, WINNING MAJOR INTERNATIONAL TITLES AS WELL AS QUALIFICATIONS TO REPRESENT THE KINGDOM IN TWO OLYMPIC GAMES. A BUSINESSMAN AND A PRINCE, HE IS CONTEMPORARY AND OUTSPOKEN IN HIS OWN STYLE, YET DISPLAYS NOTHING BUT HUMILITY AND DIGNIFIED CONDUCT IN ALL OF HIS DEALINGS. HT SPOKE WITH HIM ABOUT HIS EARLY DAYS, HIS WINS, HIS HORSES, AND HIS ADVICE. HERE IS WHAT HE HAD TO SAY.





With Talan at the stables



Many of us know the story of your first show jumping mount as a youngster, the white English pony Snowdrop. Was that when you caught the ‘horse bug’?

I’ve had previous pony club experiences, but the first show jumping horse I had was Snowdrop and she’s the mare that won with me, so yes. Once you start winning you don’t want to stop, I guess I’m a competitive person.

In your formative riding years, who would you credit most for your development and passion for riding?

I grew up in very loving and passionate family. My dad and uncle are identical twins, so I grew up with two fathers that are the most important and influential people in my life. I’ve learned everything from them and am still learning every day. They

were loving yet tough on me. They trained me as a junior and helped me get introduced to good trainers as a child.

What were some of your early successes in the jumping arena? Which early wins do you treasure most?

I remember winning my first international Children’s World Championships in Abu Dhabi in 1999; that was an eye opener for me as a 12-year-old and for many in the Saudi Federation. Another special year was 2005 when I won two gold medals in the Islamic World Games and boosted Saudi Arabia’s medal count to first place in all sports. Other wins I treasure include:

- 2011 Pan Arab Games, Doha: team gold medal and individual bronze in on Aphrodite van het Texelhof.

- 2008 Beijing Olympic Games: 13th as a team and 58th as an individual on Wido.

- 2007 Pan Arab Games, Cairo: team gold medal and 6th as an individual on Torax.

- 2006 World Equestrian Games, Aachen: 70th as an individual on Uthago. I was the youngest rider to ever compete at the event.

- 2006 World Cup Arab League Standings: 2nd place and helped the Saudi Equestrian team qualify for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

- 2005 Islamic Games, Mecca: 2 individual gold medals.

- 2005 National Champion of Saudi Arabia

On to the Olympics, we take this opportunity to warmly congratulate

the Saudi Equestrian team on its show jumping team bronze medal win in London 2012. What a stunning achievement! How did it feel to watch your team mates compete even though you had qualified to compete with them?

I was very proud of my team; seeing them reach this level of horsemanship and riding was truly historic. And I was very happy with the support that we got from the Arab world; we are very proud to be able to inspire the youth and show them that hard work and dedication pay off.

HT has just published its hard-cover Olympic Edition, which features the Saudi Equestrian team winning the show jumping team medal. Some claim that Saudi riders have come a long way in a very short time; how would you comment to that?

It's good that people think that. The truth is that we always had top riders who have started riding since the

80s and 90s. They've worked hard for decades and have sacrificed a lot of time and money. The thing that we as Saudi riders have lacked though was a serious budget to buy top horses and more professional infrastructure to take us to elite levels of competitiveness. To be great in show jumping was possible for many Saudi and Arab riders, but the ability to be the best and go to the next level was lacking, and the Saudi Equestrian Fund was the missing piece of the puzzle. That's why to many people it felt as you said – that they have come a long way in a very short time - but in reality it's a lifetime of hard work and dedication for all riders.

Following an agreement reached last year, the FEI Nations Cup has come under the sponsorship of the Saudi Equestrian Fund and has been renamed 'Furusiyya FEI Nations Cup'. This is a big step for the Fund. Can you please tell us how that came about?

Since the inception of the Saudi Equestrian Fund, the essence of its

mission was to preserve and develop equestrianism and the celebration of the horse. We tried to find a way to reach our goals as riders and at the same time give back to our society. It's our duty in the Saudi Equestrian Fund to sponsor equestrian activities for their nobility. Not only in the narrow sense of their history and heritage, but rather in the cultural and behavioural aspects that surround the sport, and celebration of the horse. It instills chivalry, honour, valour, and virtue.

At the Furusiyya FEI Nations Cup Jumping in Wellington, Florida in early March 2013, the United States team won the \$75,000 prize in grand style. The team was prepared and energised and gave it all. You must have felt proud to represent Furusiyya at this event. How was the atmosphere there?

It is a very humbling experience to see the most influential people from the equestrian world and American business world so grateful for what we (the Saudi Equestrian Fund)



3rd place with Talan during the Furusiyya FEI Nations Cup in Wellington, USA



At the second leg of the Furusiyya FEI Nations Cup in Wellington, USA

are giving back to the sport. It says a lot about our character as Saudi people, and emphasises the depth of our relationship with horses. The connection between man and horse is universal, and we are fortunate that the horse is so noble and allows us to share its strength and passion. The sport is a melting pot, and a vehicle to shape those global and diverse ideas. This interaction creates the ideal promotion of cultural diversity and world peace.

We really enjoy watching videos of your competitive rides, for example in the recent Winter Equestrian Festival series, and in particular watching your mount Talan. Of your current and past horses, who is/was your favourite?

My all time favourites are Nonplus Ultra and Rathwan, both have taken me to the 160 level in 2005/2006, and had won and placed in Grand Prix in The Arab League and Europe such as: CSIO5* Lucerne, CSI3* Lummen, CSI3* Munich and many more. Talan is a super horse but he's a very complex one. Once you have everything working for you then he's unbeatable, and I love him because of that. He really does make you think all the time.

It looks like you have a pretty busy

schedule this year and in the run-up to the World Equestrian Games in 2014. What competitions do you have coming up?

On my calendar now I have the 3 and 5 stars CSIs of Riyadh, then after we have Rome, Aachen, Gijon and Barcelona. In between these shows I'm going to be competing at other shows as well.

How do you prepare mentally and physically for an important show jumping competition?

Physically, I work out five times a week, three times boxing and twice weight lifting. Mentally, I try to be professional about it and think of it as a small task each class by itself. Trying to concentrate is the most challenging part to me, not the pressure. I do like the pressure as it makes me feel sharp.

Beyond show jumping, are there any other horse sports that you enjoy, such as polo or dressage?

I like polo. It's the closest thing, which I can imagine, to my ancestors' battles on horses. Although dressage is an imperative part of show jumping, I'm not its biggest fan. But I definitely take flat work very seriously.

In addition to being a professional rider you are a professional businessman. How do you juggle all of this?

The key to success in life is discipline, hard work, tawfeeq (Arabic for luck from God), and being very organised. If you're organised this shouldn't be a problem.

With all of your experience and successes, what words of advice would you give young riders?

The biggest gift that I can give to our young riders is to tell them to never give up on your dreams and passions. I want you to thrive on challenge, to reach success. We face challenges as human beings and riders every day, and what separates the good from the less fortunate is your attitude and fighting spirit. Chase perfection and get excellence! 🏆

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