

McDonald's... in the sports business

It is said that "Living might mean taking chances, but they are worth taking". Any business investment involves risk, or to be more professional, an extent of "opportunity cost"; especially investing in sports. It certainly takes a particular level of guts, boldness, character, and a speculative spirit to get involved in the Egyptian sports business.

McDonald's Egypt has been one of the most important and significant sponsors in the Egyptian sports field. During the most recent Olympics in Athens, McDonald's was sponsoring both the Egyptian wrestling team, as well as Andre Sakakini, Egypt's only equestrian representative in the Games. In this interview we talk to Mr. Mohamed Mansour junior, Vice president of McDonald's Egypt, and a renowned horse back rider, about the sports business in Egypt, trying to find out if the risk of investing in the equestrian sport is "worth taking". The interview went as follows:

Horse Times (HT): How did the idea of sponsorship come to McDonald's to invest in the sports field?

The idea was a whole corporate direction that we should sponsor certain sport fields or certain athletes in the country that had Olympic promises. So basically, McDonalds' Corporation is a major sponsor in the Olympics and we were just taking it down to the country level and applying the strategy of the mother company.

HT: You mean that as a franchise you "have" to do this?

No, we do not have to do this but here in Egypt for example having not won an Olympic gold medal for 60 years, it could be a good idea to sponsor and try to help sports, and to help someone win. Although, we did a wrong choice! But we tried.

HT: Within the sports field, we know that you sponsored weight lifting and show jumping, why did you choose these two sports? (Knowing your passion for horses and show jumping in particular was it the only motive?)

Nahla Ramadan was a very promising athlete, when it came to weight lifting in Egypt; she had a very good record. She had done all what you have to do for the Olympic Games to be one of the medal caliber winners in the Olympics. So we said ok, weight lifting we will go with that. And of course because of my passion for horses and show jumping; I threw it on a table in a meeting, "we only have one equestrian rider from Egypt qualified for the Olympics and why don't we sponsor him. And having seen his results in the previous Olympics in Sydney with "Careful", I personally thought he stood a very good chance of winning a medal.

However, no it was not only my passion for horses that was the only motive after this decision. It is of course a calculated decision; if he was in the top 25 in the Olympics four years ago in Sydney, then four years later after all this training if he competed again he would have a good chance of winning; so that was basically the idea behind investing in show jumping. Andre with his experience in the international field, and his results in the previous Olympics in Sydney then he had all the experience needed to win, and his horse had all the experience needed to enter. It's like betting when you come right down to it, so we decided to try sponsoring Andre, and he was the only one representing Egypt, that's why we took this step.

HT: Why the chosen sports are individual not team sports?

Well, it is very easy, just do the math! If it is one athlete the cost



will definitely be lower than sponsoring a team of athletes.

HT: But, isn't it less risky since the team sports like for example football, is more popular in Egypt?

Yes, but it depends; I mean, when did our handball team win in the Olympics? I cannot even remember! At that time maybe we could have thought about it, but now to sponsor for example the Egyptian soccer team, no! we wouldn't consider it because results is what matters at the end of the day; especially when it comes to business, money, and building marketing campaigns. So results are one of the most important basics upon which we make our decisions. Obviously, we took the wrong decisions regarding this Olympics, if we did our homework right; I believe we should have sponsored the "wrestling team".

H.T: What is the Motto that McDonald's wants to come up with behind the big financial investments they put in the sports industry?

Part of what McDonald's has taught me was that to be successful, one has to give back to the community that one operates in. In effect, the idea of sponsoring sports in the country for McDonalds, is to get involved in our community, we are an Egyptian company, and we help our Egyptian athletes. For glory, winning, or whatever it is that they achieve but principally 'that we are behind the country and that we are Egyptians behind the Egyptian Olympic athletes'.

H.T: So does it have to do with consumers banning American products including McDonald's?

No, not really because you know McDonald's anywhere in the world, you have the corporation where they can tell u for example "you can have a big Mc, but you can not have a double big Mc". But when you come down to the country level, every McDonald's in every country is doing the same thing. Like for example, if you go to McDonald's in England you will find that McDonald's also sponsors English Athletes for that region. It's part of the strategy of the mother company to build McDonald's into each national fiber. McDonald's corporation value the local expertise, their experience, and also the reputation of their local partners; that also makes McDonald's stronger in the country, that's their strategy everywhere.

H.T: How do the results of the Olympics, especially what happened with Andre Sakakini, affect your sponsorship plans for the sports industry in general?

Of course, you cannot put your money behind something and say that you have to win because you never know what could happen. If it is a soccer team, your best player could break his leg. If you are a show jumper, the variables are even more. There is the rider, and there is the horse; many things could go wrong. You can never put a condition that X or Y have to win or have to come up with the following results, it could never happen because only God knows what happens in the future, not me, not the rider, not even the federation.

H.T: But, didn't you sponsor the children's football league in different sports clubs?

Yes, but these we consider something else. This is geared towards children and helping in bringing those young generations up. It's not marketing, it also has to do with 'community relations'. I mean a big part of our clients base are children, so we feel it's our obligation to give back to these children by sponsoring their local clubs and their local team events like Soccer, Basketball, and Swimming.

So sponsoring athletes in international events is one thing, and sponsoring children-related sports is another; it is an ongoing thing for us, it is a very strategic initiative we have in McDonald's Egypt.



M. Mansour on his horse

H.T: As for weight lifting; what were the results in the Olympics? And do you have any future plans regarding this field of sponsorship?

Well the results were not so good, I don't know why. We were sponsoring the team and there were three very good athletes, very promising weight lifters, on the team. It may have been that they had too much pressure on them! I don't know exactly what went wrong, but the results were not good at all; maybe not as bad as show jumping though.

The deal with the weight lifting federation was for one year, 2004. However, if there is a world championship or any big event like that, we might consider sponsoring. But as for now, at the end of this year our sponsorship to the weight lifting team would be over.

H.T: Do you think the risk involved in sports sponsoring is worth its cost?

Well, basically we sponsor sports when there is a big event, a big world event. For example if Egypt would enter the world cup, that for us would be an opportunity to sponsor the Egyptian athletes. If we have athletes participating in the Olympics for example, that for us would be an opportunity to sponsor them. So that would be basically once every four years, or when there is a big international event, it's not an ongoing program; so we minimize the risk.

H.T: What are the main difficulties businessmen in Egypt face when they are investing in sports?

It is mainly that the only sport that provides audience is Soccer. I mean if you were to see show jumping shows abroad, you have many sponsors. That is because you have a lot of people watching the shows because many people are interested in the sport. That is mostly what business people really care for; if I put my logo on a T-shirt were 100,000 people would see, or if I put my logo on a saddle were only 25 people will see.

H.T: Why do you think this is the case?

Because at the end of the day show jumping is a very special sport. The time and effort needed to be one of the top riders is maybe eight to ten hours of riding everyday. Plus, you have to have a horse worth maybe five hundred thousand pounds to a million and a half pounds. So us being 'not a rich' country it is very difficult to accommodate that. Where as in Europe because of the numbers of sponsors, audience, and the wide interest in the sport; it is easy to get top sponsors like Audi, to sponsor riders and get them good horses.

Mainly in Egypt, there is no awareness for the sport. If you go to Syria for example, because of Al Asad's ^{sep.} **HORSE** ^{times} **2** interest in the sport there, it is one of their national sports. I went to a

Competing in...

the Arab League

Based on an interview with: Engineer Samir Abd El Fatah

In an Interview with Engineer Samir Abdel Fatah, he talked to Horse Times about the competitions held in Syria and Lebanon and the new Arab league. According to Eng. S. Abdel Fatah, the Arab League is a newly developed idea that is put into action for the first time this year. The league consists of a series of qualifying competitions that would make the riders eligible to enter the world cup on the end of May 2005. It is made up of a twelve competition series; the competitions held in Syria and Lebanon were the first two in that league.

In Syria there was a Nation's Cup competition, as well as a qualifying round. Five nations participated in the competitions in Syria: Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. While in Lebanon there were only three nations: Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria. The Egyptian team consisted of six senior riders and two young riders namely General Ahmed Al Sawaf, Amr Magdy, Mohamed Osama Al Boraey, Dr. Karim Zohair al Sobky, Mohamed Sabry Abdel Maksood, Alaa Maysara, Ahmed Basiouny, and Shady Ashraf. A week before traveling to Syria Eng. S. Abdel Fatah was appointed trainer for the Egyptian team for both competitions. As indicated by him, the team rode brilliantly in both competitions, plus the atmosphere among the team members was a very positive and cooperative one. Moreover, the results of the Egyptian team were also outstanding; the team won first places in almost every competition they entered, and the really remarkable result was that of the team competition in Syria. The Egyptian team, consisting of General Ahmed Al Sawaf, Amr Magdy, Alaa Maysara, Dr. Karim Zohair, won the competition with ZERO faults. While the second place winning team, Turkey, had sixteen faults, and the third place winning team, Syria, had thirty three faults.

In Eng. S. Abdel Fatah's opinion, the Syrian team stands a very good chance in this league. He believes that the team is going through a transitional phase as they did a lot of changes since the beginning of this year. They have a newly appointed trainer, Ibrahim Bashar. Bashar has been living abroad, in Italy and Saudi Arabia, for a long time, and he seems to have a lot of elaborate plans for the team; if he is given the adequate space and time he will manage to get the team nicely established. To start with, he is planning to buy new horses for the team his year. As stated by Eng. S. Abdel Fatah "the Syrian team will be a force to be reckoned in the future competitions."

On the other hand, the only misfortunate result for the Egyptian team was during the Grand Prix in Syria. The first prize was a "Subaru" car, which was considered a very good motive for all the riders to win. The atmosphere in this competition was full of excitement, and the last to go into the arena was the Egyptian rider Alaa Maysara. Unfortunately, as Alaa was jumping over the last fence, it fell down, and Alaa ended up finishing third. The Lebanese rider, Karim Fares, won first place, a Turkish rider won second place, fourth was Amr Magdy, and fifth was Mohamed Osama Al Boraey. Eng. S. Abdel Fatah also believes that Karim Fares is a very good rider, and should be watched for in the qualifying competitions.

Alaa Maysara won at least two or three competitions in Syria, and another two or three in Lebanon; and all of the Syrian, Lebanese, and Egyptian papers were full of positive articles about him and the whole Egyptian Team. Also Dr. Karim Zohair al Sobky won at least three competitions in Syria and Lebanon, and won second and third places in a lot of competitions.

In Lebanon there was neither a team competition nor a Nation's Cup, only two supporting classes and the Grand Prix. Six Egyptian riders, General Ahmed Al Sawaf, Amr Magdy, Alaa Maysara, Dr. Karim Zohair, Mohamed Osama Al Boraey, and Mohamed Sabry Abdel Maksood, were supposed to participate in the Grand Prix. Nevertheless, on the first day of competition Dr. Karim Zohair fell off his horse and broke his leg after winning second place on that day, and he was then unable to compete on the two following days.

In spite of Dr. Sobky's very misfortunate accident, the other five Egyptian riders were very lucky concerning the results of the Grand Prix. All five riders did clear rounds, so "the Egyptian team had the Jump Off all to himself to win, and get the first five places." Alaa Maysara won first, Amr Magdy second, Mohamed Osama Al Boraey third, General Ahmed Al Sawaf fourth, Mohamed Sabry Abdel Maksood fifth.

So far, the status of the Egyptian team in the qualifying competitions is very good; we have the top three riders in the league, and we have another three riders in the top fifteen. Moreover, Eng. S. Abdel Fatah hopes that "the next two qualifying competitions in Alexandria and Sharm El Sheikh, will prove essential for the Egyptian riders who did not get the chance to travel and gain points in Syria and Lebanon."

At the end of this series, the two top riders with the highest accumulated points in six out of the twelve qualifying competitions will get the chance to compete in the world cup finals in May 2005. As said by Eng. S. Abdel Fatah, "It's a very big task for any of the Arab league riders to compete in the World Cup with the existing expertise and the available horse power; I believe it will take a couple of years more to get them ready for this kind of competition." It is very hard to acquire a horse that could jump the World Cup, as the finals will be over a 125 indoors course. Furthermore, the "indoors arena" is a completely different criteria for the Egyptian riders; they are not used to it, and "it will for sure take them time to adapt to it by getting the proper training." In Eng. S. Abdel Fatah's opinion "the important thing at this stage, i.e. the first two years of the Arab League, is not the finals, it's the qualifications, and to get used to the idea of riders traveling all over the Arab region and competing with different riders".

The next two qualifying competitions will be held in Egypt. The first one will be held on the 18th of November in Alexandria, and



Eng. Samir Abd El Fatah

... Syria & Lebanon

in Details

By: Ahmed Gamal

Ahmed Gamal was one of the riders that accompanied the Egyptian team in their very victorious trip to Syria and Lebanon. Gamal reveals to HORSE Times the high lights of the trip in details

"When all the team arrived to Damascus, it took us six hours by the bus to go to Latakia, the city where the competition was held. The bus wasn't that comfortable but we all enjoyed the company. The team consisted of Alaa Maysara, General Ahmed Al-Sawaf, Amr Magdy, Dr. Karim Zohair Al-Sobky, Mohamed Al Boraey, Mohamed Sabry, Ahmed Bassiouny, Shady Asraf, Mr. Hisham Hattab, Mr. Bkeir, Mr. Tarek, Colonel Mohamed Solya, Tomy, Amr Fawzy, Dr. Ashraf Al Kalla, and Dr. Mohamed Abd El Azziz; plus thirteen horses. On our first night in Latakia, the hotel was very crowded, so the whole team, around twenty two people, had to stay in only two rooms. However, by the second day this problem was sorted out. During the trip the riders felt very upbeat having Engineer Samir Abd El Fatah around; he added a very positive and favorable attitude, which definitely made a great atmosphere. We won the Nations Cup with zero faults, and Alaa Maysara won third in the small Grand Prix.

After we finished the Grand Prix in Latakia, the team split. Most of us went back to Damascus and took the plane back to Cairo except me, Alaa Maysara, Shady Ashraf, Ahmed Bassiouny, Mohamed Sabry, Amr Magdy, the two vets, and Colonel Solya. We stayed for a couple of days more then we took the horses in the horse trucks back to Damascus. We stayed for a week during which we had great time because of the remarkable hospitality of the Syrian team.

We then used the horse trucks again to go to Lebanon, it was a hectic trip, especially at the borders and when we had to drive up hill. General Ahmed Al-Sawaf, Karim Zohair El Sobky, Mohamed Al Boraey, Mr. Bkeir, and Mr. Tarek were already in Lebanon when we arrived. The riding arena was wonderful, so was the weather except for one day it was really foggy as the event took place in 'Fagra Club' 2,100 meters above sea level. We also had a great time in Lebanon and great results too; Alaa Maysara won both the big and small Grand Prix.

During the competitions in Lebanon Dr. Karim Zohair El Sobky broke his leg after the jump off on the second day. He was about to beat Alaa Maysara, but after crossing the finish line, the horse slipped (it was very damp because of the rain) and Karim fell down. Nevertheless, he stood up, said it was ok, rode his horse, and even won second place. After the prize ceremony General Al-Sawaf insisted that Karim sees a doctor in spite of his refusal, and he found out that he had a broken leg. Moreover, when he returned to Cairo he discovered that his leg was treated incorrectly, and would take more time to fully recover. Let's hope that he could compete in Alexandria and Sharm El Sheikh!"

Interviewing Alaa Maysara

After returning from these competitions, Ahmed Gamal had the chance of interviewing Alaa Maysara, asking him about his opinion of the Media coverage of the events in Syria and Lebanon.



Dr. Mohamed, Ahmed Bassiouny, Eng. Samir Abd El-Fattah, Shady Ashraf, Mohamed Al Boraey, Dr. Ashraf, Ahmed Gamal, General Ahmed Al Sawaf, Alaa Maysara, Mr. Tarek Khalifa, Dr. Karim Zohair, and Amr Magdy.



Alaa Maysara upon winning the Grand prix in Lebanon.



Ahmed Gamal on his horse, Green Wave.

Photo Gallery in "Spot Light"