

A professional portrait of HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein. She has long, wavy brown hair and is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a dark grey or black blazer over a light-colored top. Her arms are crossed, and she is wearing a watch on her left wrist. The background is plain white.

METAMORPHOSIS OF  
THE EQUESTRIAN SPORT

# 2008 OLYMPIC GAMES

HORSE TIMES  
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH

# HRH PRINCESS HAYA BINT AL HUSSEIN

PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION

By Nada H. Abdelmoniem

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In light of all the political, economical and technological change, the only aspect that would eradicate attention is the pure pleasantness of sports. In general, to feast the eyes of the young and the old with a win by a favourite athlete of any sport would be a true pleasure; just as the amount of pleasure people enjoyed from watching the 2008 Beijing Olympics that presented a variety of enjoyable, heart-touching, magnificent, and unexpected achievements.

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THE EQUESTRIAN EVENTS, FIRST INCLUDED TO THE OLYMPICS IN 1912 AND THE INVOLVEMENT AND PROGRESS THEY HAVE BROUGHT OVER THE DECADES BY AVID RIDERS ARE STILL ATTRACTING A SENSE OF CONTINUITY AS WELL AS CONTROVERSY. FROM AN UNEXPECTED GOLD MEDAL GOING TO CANADIAN ERIC LAMAZE AND CONTROVERSIES REGARDING ALLEGATIONS OF NUMEROUS DOPING CASES, TO THE NICHE OF WHERE THE SPORT STANDS IN THE UPCOMING 2012 LONDON OLYMPICS.

Horse Times Magazine had the honour of conducting an exclusive interview with the President of the International Equestrian Federation HRH Princess Haya bint Al Hussein in order to shed light and perception on where the sport stands and the future of its development.

**Your Royal Highness, from the perspective of you being an international rider and the President of the FEI, what is your overview on the 2008 equestrian events being held in Hong Kong (facilities, stabling, organisation and grounds)?**

As we anticipated, the equestrian events in Hong Kong were provided at the highest possible level both in terms of infrastructure and personnel. The equestrian events have never enjoyed better facilities at an Olympics, or at any equestrian event, than they did in Hong Kong and the quality of competition was undoubtedly a reflection of the venues in which our athletes performed. The partnership we enjoyed with BOCOG, the Equestrian Company and the Hong Kong Jockey Club was superb as was the tireless work of the officials in the 2 years leading up to the games. Really we couldn't have asked for more.

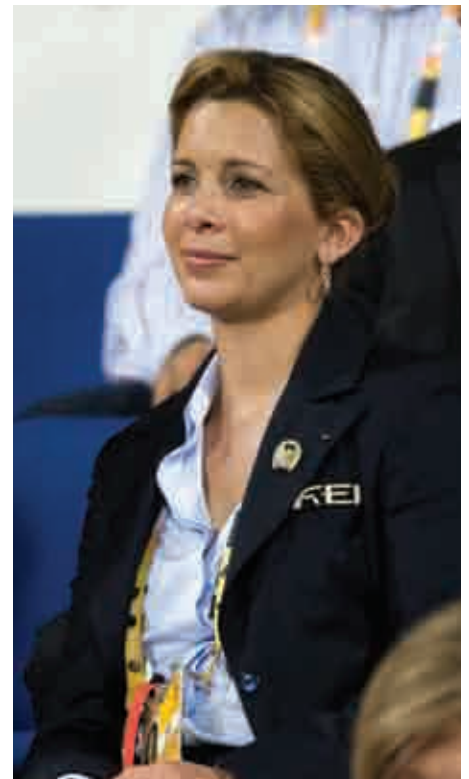
**What were your expectations regarding the performance of the top international riders who participated vs. the outcome and the results, as for example Norway coming in 3rd place as a team? And does that illustrate the local planning and**

**management of the sport in one country vs. the other?**

I think the great thing about the Games was the wonderful stories that lay behind so many of the medallists. To take Heinrich Romeike, who won the individual and team gold in Eventing, it was so reassuring to me that in the 21st century, horse sport can still uphold the true ideals of amateur sport. Here was a man who is a practicing dentist, with only one horse and one that he owns himself. His was an extraordinarily refreshing achievement that showed that not only can amateurs and professionals still compete side by side in equestrian but that they can win the highest accolade in sport whether they are amateur or professional.

The Individual Jumping gold for Eric Lamaze of Canada was also an exceptional story of redemption through sport. He has been through some very difficult times in his life and has missed the 2 previous editions of the Olympic Games because of disputes over use of drugs. He cried on the podium when receiving his medal and said those tears were those of happiness and sadness. I nearly cried with him. This medal has brought him back to the international circuit in a very significant way and he is now 2nd on the Rolex Rankings (2nd best in the world).

Team silver for Ian Millar of Canada, who at the age of 61, was the oldest medallist of the entire Olympic Games. He has a record number of 9 Olympic participations and is already thinking of London 2012!



You asked about my thoughts on the Jumping team bronze awarded to Norway. At the time this was really a great moment for Norway and if the case that is still pending mars that performance, then that would be sad for the country and sad for all of us.

**Concerning Arab riders, what is your overview on the level of their performances given that you are an Arab rider yourself whom has competed formerly at the Olympics? Furthermore, what would your thoughts be regarding LIVE TV commentators stating the following?**

*“Karim Elzoghby won the silver medal during the Pan Arab games which were held in Cairo, in 2007 but anyway, there is not much competition there”.*

*“The Saudi's have great horses and spend millions of dollars on getting better horses, but at the end of the day, money will not buy them a win”.*

I was so proud of the riders from all of the emerging nations but of course the performances of the riders from the Arab world have a special place in my heart and I am really pleased that I managed to watch all of them compete and had the chance to talk to many of them in the





▲ HRH Princess Haya, who is an IOC Member, taking part in the Torch Relay at the Beijing Olympic Games

stands before and after their competitions.

I understand your concern about the remarks from the commentators and I share them but in the end it is the performances that will have spoken for themselves and I am certain that these remarks will have been made before the riders started and before they saw how well they rode! If the commentators didn't say anything afterwards then I can only assume that the quality of the performances took their breath away.

**Do you think that some measures can be taken to further upgrade the possibility of Arab riders performing and achieving better?**

I think the key is to provide athletes not only with the opportunity to compete but

with the opportunity to compete at international levels and by doing so they will be up against the leading athletes and horses in the world. It is through these experiences that our riders will gain not only from the competitions and rounds themselves but also from the opportunity to watch riders at that level. Certainly that was how I gained a huge amount of experience. Every time I went to an international show it was like attending a Master Class and you could gain so much by just watching in the warm up areas, talking to the riders, watching their rounds, you can't gain those experiences anywhere else. As President I see my role very much as opening up the opportunities to international competition for athletes from emerging countries and

I hope that through this work I will be able to help Arab athletes.

**Regarding doping results, what is the stand of the FEI on that aside from the withdrawal of medals, especially with the negative impact this carries for the sport?**

As a Governing Body, it is our role to provide an equal playing field for all. In terms of the process we only have one mission and that is to do what is right. There is no agenda, no under-currents, just an ultra transparent organisation. That is all. In order to achieve our goals though I think we need to work with the current athletes and with the generations who will follow them to be very clear about what it is we are working to achieve. We







▲ *The President with Olympic Course Designer Leopoldo Placios (L) and Captain John Roche (R), Director of the FEI's Jumping Department*

▼ *HRH Princess Haya riding Come On, Frankfurt 1998*



need them to come with us on that journey and in the end we must ensure that athletes understand that they are the people responsible for the animals that they ride and that the welfare of the horse is the most important aspect of the sport.

**On the topic of what has been heard about the 2012 London Olympics not including equestrian sports, what do you have in mind in terms of handling that issue? How can international magazines, like Horse Times, help you achieve this cause?**

The 2012 Games will include equestrian sports but its up to the FEI family to show not only the IOC but our own stakeholders how committed we are to addressing the

issues. The important point is that we are learning from the issues that surrounded Hong Kong and the key difference between now and the old FEI was that they didn't learn the lessons. Now we have an excellent volunteer body and open minded athletes, supported by a creative and flexible team in Lausanne who are all driving forward with one goal, which is to deliver the highest level of sport for both our athletes and our audiences in a context which sees the welfare of the horse as paramount. **HT**

*\* Pictures courtesy of the FEI/HRH Library*