

SAUDI EQUESTRIAN OLYMPIC VISION & MORE

By Nada H. Abdelmoniem



▲ Sami Al Duhami with HM King Abdullah bin Saud

OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF EQUESTRIAN SPORT IN THE MIDDLE EAST, ONE OF THE MAJOR SHOW JUMPING TEAMS TO EMERGE IN THE REGION IS THE SAUDI TEAM. BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A TEAM, THEY HAVE WON MAJOR INTERNATIONAL TITLES, MEDALS AND EVENTS THAT BROUGHT PLEASURE AND PRIDE TO ARABS AS A WHOLE.

IN 2009, 'SAUDI EQUESTRIAN', THE SAUDI NATIONAL EQUESTRIAN TEAM BRAND, WAS ESTABLISHED OWING TO THE VISION OF HM KING ABDULLAH AL SAUD WITH THE AIM OF COORDINATING THE TRAINING AND COMPETITION OF THE TEAM AND ITS HORSES. THE TEAM IS MADE-UP OF KHALID AL EID, RAMZY AL DUHAMI, ABDULLAH AL SHARBATLY, KAMAL BAHAMDAN, HRH PRINCE ABDULLAH BIN MITEB, AND HH PRINCE FAISAL AL SHALAN, AND TRAINED BY STANNY VAN PAESSCHEN. THEY ARE HARD WORKERS AND SOME OF THE MOST NOTABLE AND ARTICULATE ADVOCATES OF THE SPORT, AND AS A TEAM ALONG WITH HORSES THAT HAVE PROVEN THEMSELVES INTERNATIONALLY, THEY ARE CREATING A PRECISE WINNING FORMULA WHICH AIMS FOR PERFECTION. MR. SAMI AL DUHAMI - DEPUTY CHAIRMAN AND CHAIRMAN OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE OF FEI GROUP VII, TECHNICAL CONSULTANT OF THE SAUDI EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION, AND TEAM DIRECTOR OF 'SAUDI EQUESTRIAN', GIVES US AN UPDATE ON WHAT MAKES 'SAUDI EQUESTRIAN' WHAT IT IS TODAY.

What makes the Saudi show jumping team different now than it was ten years ago?

The Saudi Equestrian Federation was established in 1999 and was headed by HH Prince Faisal bin Abdullah. His sole vision was for the Saudi team to reach the Olympics. Back then, that vision was rather farfetched as none of the riders had any experience. Nevertheless, he felt that with them just participating, they would simply gain experience, which was a privilege. The riders faced no pressure naturally, until of course the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 when Khalid Al Eid won the bronze medal. In addition, the budget that was spent then was too small to mention; I remember a French journalist quoting, "The Saudi Team is the smallest team yet the rapidly growing one." The beauty of Khalid's achievement in so short a time span was very fulfilling to us all.

Afterwards, the team fell slightly back and I think it was due to our one-dimensional goal and ambition, which was simply, to win another Olympic medal even though other high calibre regional competitions were initiated. Also, the fact that sports sponsorship companies were not available was a disadvantage. It is understandable that equestrian sport is not mainstream, however it is a major sport and should be perceived as such. It represents culture and in particular, Arab culture. Horses have been around the Arabian Peninsula for nearly 9,000 years and we wish to embrace this history. Thus, due to the important role and historic background of horses in Saudi, HM King Abdullah established Saudi Equestrian; it was a "king's vision". His aim was to depict horses and equestrian sport as a culture and as a major sport, as well as to separate politics from technicalities. I think that aim is what makes the team

different today.

How well is Saudi Equestrian coming along?

During the 2010 World Equestrian Games, we presented the sport aspect of Saudi Equestrian as well as the cultural one; we had a big stand at the exhibition in Kentucky where we generated plenty of interest and visits. We were very happy with Abdulllah Al Sharbatly's silver medal win and the team's results during the Games; we were several steps ahead of some of the best riders and horses in the world only seven months after establishing Saudi Equestrian. Each individual rider from the team has had many achievements associated with his name; Saudi Equestrian's target is to bring out achievements as a team. I think our riders may complement and complete one another with each one following a specific and individual training



programme, whilst simultaneously, being mentally and technically prepared to eventually come together as a team. An individual win will bring us delight, as you would expect, but a team win will bring us more. This is what we seek to achieve in the near future, hopefully during the 2012 London Olympics.

Please tell us about that training programme?

The plan applies to all riders from Saudi Equestrian. We try to assign them to compete at different shows worldwide, and not have them all at one time in a specific event.

How hopeful are you about

the team's performance if they should qualify for the 2012 Olympics?

We are working on limiting "expectations". We have no expectations and we are simply going to train hard and to compete. If the team stands out, that will be a triumph, if not, we will keep on working harder and harder in order to present the team's best.

The Saudi team has covered wide ground in this sport ahead of other Arab teams; how would you comment to that, and why do you think this is so?

I don't think our team represents

only Saudi, I think it represents both the Arab and Muslim world as a whole, which is an honour that stands high on our shoulders. We as Arabs have many assets, resources, and pillars that can put us at the top of equestrian sport; our former Japanese trainer always said that Arabs were born on horse's backs, we need to believe that.

Would you like to add anything else?

I thank HORSE TIMES for all the efforts in promoting the sport in the region, and HM the King for his efforts to promote the sport and support the riders. 🇸🇦



▲ Abdullah Al Sharbatly



▲ Ramzy Al Duhami



▲ HRH Prince Abdullah bin Miteb



▲ Khalid Al Eid



▲ Kamal Bahamdan



▲ HH Prince Faisal Al Shalan