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EL FATEH 27TH INTERNATIONAL SHOW JUMPING COMPETITION

By Merit Fanous

LIBYA, A LAND WITH BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPE AND GRAND HOSPITALITY, HELD AN EVENT FOR THE WORLD CUP QUALIFICATIONS WITH A 3 STAR SHOW FROM OCTOBER 20TH THROUGHOUT THE 23RD. UPON ARRIVAL TO THE SHOW GROUNDS WHERE SHOW JUMPING COMPETITIONS WERE HELD, A DISPLAY OF NEARLY 100 ARABIAN HORSES RIDDEN BY LIBYAN RIDERS IN THEIR WHITE TRADITIONAL ATTIRES WERE IN ACTION REMINDING A SHOW STADIUM OF 3,000 DAILY SPECTATORS OF THE GREAT MOVIE OMAR EL MOKHTAR. THESE ARE THE RIDERS OF EL JAMAHIRIYA WHO REPRESENT A SPORT VERY POPULAR IN THE COUNTRY.

Mohamed El Amari, President of the Olympic Committee states that more than 10,000 municipal riders from different Libyan tribes participate in equestrian sport in general. Wael Fahmi, President of the Show Commission explained that the level of the 2009 show has risen to a 3 star event as it was a qualifier for the Arab League and for the World Cup to be held in Switzerland, Geneva 2010.

The 2008 show promised a total of 75,000 US Dollars and with the support of the government, the prizes were increased with an extra 15,000 US Dollars and a car. Along with the big support of the President of Libya General Moamer El Qadaddfi who quotes, "sports are to be joined and not only to be watched", TV channels broadcasted nearly 20 hours a day of LIVE coverage enabling other Arab countries to follow the event as well as allow the public to learn about the sport.

The Libyan show jumping team was far from international competitions due to the country's embargoed regulations, but with a good structural plan, the team aims to recover quickly and present talent on the show jumping circuit. European riders were present at the show with participations from the 2004 Athens Olympic gold medallist Ireland's Cian O'Conner, Britain's William Whitaker, along with participations from Japan, Brazil, and the UAE.





▲ Wael Fahmi presenting a trophy to William Whitaker, GB



▲ Eiken Safo, Japan

Cian O'Conner, Ireland, winner of the Grand Prix





▲ Abdulfatah Militan, Libya

Course designer Atef Shawki and his assistants Kamal Abo Soud and Ashraf Abdallah designed the courses to match international standards. He quotes, "We put into consideration the horses and the level of riders as well as the footing which is very good at this arena. We also provided the riders with many options as to make their decisions between fences; some distances had the option of executing 5 to 6 strides depending on the speed of the horses and the type of fences they are jumping. Some distances varied with short strides and long ones; we did not go for more than 12 fences as to give the horses some rest in between."

The jury consisted of international judges Mrs. Fahima Sebiane (Algeria), Karim Badaro (Lebanon), Ashraf El Leithy (UAE), Maher bin Rashid (Tunisia), and Hussam Zummit (Libya). Paul De Benedictis, UAE Foreign Judge, says, "The competitions are becoming very strong in the Arab

Arab League and riders with their horses are improving. You see quality with the organising committee. I think 2 riders from the Arab League are not enough to qualify for the World Cup, there should be more."

Karim Badaro, Head of Jury and International Judge states, "This is the second time I come to Libya and I see that the show has developed with a lot of experienced technicians and officials from the Arab region and Europe. Of course, the riders add up to the whole event. The courses were not too big to bring out the best of the riders, but the show was still exciting."

A competition without a speaker has no meaning and no taste with the warm voice of Akram bin Greid, speaker of the show and Event Director. "Our Libyan riders are still developing and we aim at having them participate at more international events in order to gain experience. For the start of the Arab League, I would

suggest that competitions start from Morocco going in further east to Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt and so on as travelling would be easier. Unfortunately this year we only had a few Arab riders from the UAE, and we certainly would love to see more Arabs next year."

Head of the technical delegate was Germany's Olaf Peterson, one of the very well known international and Olympic course designers. "I have had the privilege of coming here since 1981. My last time was 2 years ago and it's a pleasure to see the improvement in riding and horses".

The all so hard working Syria's Anwar Hneidi FEI Show Jumping Steward, states "It is my first time in Libya; I heard about the show as many people mentioned the big improvements and prize money compared to years before. The show also became a qualifier for the World Cup and I think its an attractive event and next year, riders should try to make it."

HOSSAM ZUMMIT

Show Secretary:

"This year we worked hard to improve the show; however the difficulties we faced were when placing the schedule so as other Arab League countries can coordinate. Unfortunately, it was very difficult for more riders and horses to travel since they were just in Sharm El Sheikh and had plans to head to Saudi Arabia. We hope the Tripoli event will be the first event of the calendar by 2011 as to have more international presence."

CIAN O'CONNER

Grand Prix winner & 2004 Athens Olympics gold medallist:

"It is really nice to be asked to come to Libya for the first time and I had the luck to come in 1st on the first day. Technically, the show is similar when compared to worldwide events in terms of the arena, the footing, and the level of course building. I believe that the Libyan riders are close to developing at international levels and I think if Abdulfatah Militan receives good training and competition, he can become an Olympic rider. I am impressed with what I have seen as well as the warmth from the Libyan people and their genuine hospitality; I would love to come again."

VENISS PEDRO:

"Five years ago I was here so it's my 2nd time and I certainly see improvement and good horses. I am currently training with Nelson Pessoa in Belgium who is advising me plenty on my preparations for the 2010 World Equestrian Games in Kentucky."

WILLIAM WHITAKER

First place winner day 1 & 2:

"I am 20 years old and riding at my uncle Michael Whitaker's stables. I am enjoying my stay in Tripoli; it's a very nice show, the arena is very good and it's a great experience to come here. I never came to Africa before so it's my first time! I am lucky to have done well; I think I was fast enough and planned the course very well, so it's nice to go back home with some money!"



▲ Akram bin Greid & Hossam Zummit, Libya



▲ Veniss Pedro, Brazil

MOHAMED MAHMOUD BAKIR

President of the Appeal Committee:

"A very good show but unfortunately there aren't many Arab riders. The schedule is tight and if Group 7 arranges competitions to start from the west going further to the east, it will be easy for horses and riders to travel and compete in almost all Arab countries." **HT**

Merit Fanous, Egypt ►

