

HORSETIMES EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH ABDULLA AL MARRI

By HT team

WE AT HORSETIMES FEEL VERY LUCKY TO HAVE THE INTERNATIONAL SHOWJUMPING RIDER ABDULLA MOHD AL MARRI WITH US TODAY. WE HAD THE CHANCE TO FOLLOW YOUR CAREER, MAKING HISTORY SINCE 2008; NOW YOU ARE HERE AND WE FEEL VERY PROUD FOR YOU TO REPRESENT THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE EQUESTRIAN SPORT.



“Thank you always for having me, it’s been a pleasure for me to be on HT again, and I know how much HT follows the big achievements from Arab countries in the equestrian sport, and it’s always a pleasure to represent my country on such a global platform” Abdulla Al Marri



Congratulations on making history as the first team to qualify for show jumping from the UAE! How does it feel to be representing your country at the Olympics?

It still feels surreal to be honest, It’s a long term goal for a lot of riders, but you never know when it will happen in your career, and It’s an event that happens only once every 4 years, which adds to the pressure for sure when it comes to qualifying, but we made it now & that’s what matters the most for our country. My next goal is to be part of the team that will be attending the Olympics in Paris, and hopefully I can fulfill that dream also. We are a small country as you know, but when it comes to horse riding, I think have always produced good riders, and the fact that we managed to qualify to the Olympics only proves how much the UAE supports & loves equestrian sports in general, and I would like to thank specially **Shaikha Fatima Bint Hazza Al Nahyan**, the owner of Al Shira’aa stables and the main supporter in our country for the Show Jumping sport in general.

What was your reaction when you found out you had qualified?

My reaction was crazy, I was sitting next to my wife in the stadium in Qatar (**Al Shaqab**) after finishing my 2nd round in the team as I was the first rider in, and by that time there was Two more riders left from each country & the pressure started getting to me for sure, we knew few results need to come our way for us to qualify & we needed a bit of luck for sure. By the time the last riders from each country were coming in, we knew exactly what was happening, and gladly we qualified before our last rider needed to jump, which was a big relief for all of us, and happiness at the same time.



What was your family's reaction to your qualification?

My family is special to me, my wife also rides & she was with me in Qatar, so she had to go through all the stress specially handling me on daily Basis at the event. My father & brother are sports athletes and they follow me continuously, which was a great achievement for all of us having one of our family members qualify to such a big event. My mom on the other hand is not much of a sportsperson, but she is a big supporter of our dreams, we are lucky to have her there for us always.

What are your goals for the Olympics?

All riders would love to share a podium moment one day in the Olympics, and that would be our main goal, but also we want to show the elite riders that we belong there by performing at the highest level in all rounds and hopefully be competitive in each event.

Who are your biggest competitors?

Regarding our competitors, I think most countries will be at their peak going to Paris, so for sure it's going to be tough for all, but I believe the European countries & The USA have more experience than us which will give them the edge for sure, but we are already trying to make up for it in our preparation for the games by competing against them in European competitions. We also know that the Saudi Team is also tough & have been successful more than once at the Olympics, so they would be our closest competitor within our region.

What is your favorite part about show jumping?

My favorite part of Showjumping is the journey, and creating special partnerships with these special creatures. Having a bond with your horse is so special, and it's something we cherish so much.

What is the most challenging part about show jumping?

I think the sports is challenging in so many ways as any other sport would be specially at the highest level, but to those who don't know much about horses, you know that our horses are unpredictable, so it's an internal challenge before the external challenge, and getting them consistent is not an easy feat at all, plus in events the course designers who build the courses in events are always finding new ways to challenge us riders, so to find that consistency is key to everything in my opinion, specially with so many unknowns. Not forgetting how to deal with other challenges like weather forecast and the external competition you will face at the show.



What is your training routine like? What are you currently working on?

Our routine is quite the same, as it's one of the things we try to maintain in our schedule, we try not to jump the horses a lot at home, unless we are trying to solve a problem that faced us in an event. We usually do a lot of flat work with our **Olympic Trainer Khaled Al Eid**, and he always analyze our rounds in the show and also in practice, and he tries to improve us regularly in hopes to reach perfection in our riding. We also train Young horses which have a different routine, as they need to gain a lot of experience from seeing new things regularly, which helps them develop their skills & abilities faster.

How is your relationship with your teammates?

It's great honestly, we are different age groups, but we all blend very well together, as we share the same goals, it's also healthy having so many good riders around you, it keeps you on your toes and you always seek improvements from your daily workouts, which helps riders improve a lot.

What would you say are the top 3 qualities that will help your team succeed during the Olympic Games?

The top 3 qualities are very simple,

#1 Having the right support system, which we are lucky as Al Shira'aa stables provided the UAE the perfect platform to achieve the impossible, they invested in Experienced & Young riders at the same time, plus they invested in Experienced & Young talented horses for the riders. They also had the right infrastructure to support such a big operation, and they injected that with the right people with the right experience and background, finally we have a leader in Shaikha Fatima who knows exactly what she wants, and she pushes all of us to perform at the highest level and help us reach our full potential.

#2 Having the right trainer in place, who can analyze your strengths and weaknesses, and understands you as a rider & helps you improve by combining you with the right horses that will help you shine.

#3 Unconditional support & love from the outside, by that I mean family & friends. Doing the sport at the highest level takes a lot of sacrifice and suffering from your side & your family & friends, and they need to know that & keep supporting you anyways, because you as a rider will face a lot of challenges, ups & downs, and you need something consistent to fall back to, and nothing is like family for sure.



What is your favorite memory from your career?

I have been lucky enough to have experienced few heights in my career, for example winning the Arab League in 2008, and few Grand Prix wins along the way, but for sure representing my country with the team is definitely special & being a crucial part of that, and in that winning the Challenge Cup in Barcelona 2017 & of course qualifying to the Olympics in 2023 will be the best achievements by far.

What advice would you give to aspiring equestrians?

It's a beautiful sport, and one of the best parts of it is the long careers we have, which means you can always improve and achieve new goals along the way, but also always keep learning, there is too many ways to be successful, and there is loads of information you can learn along the way, but it's not only the riding part that matters, there is also horse management skills, breeding, producing horses, adding value to horses, teaching & training & learning the ins & outs of your horses and what are their needs in order to perform at the highest level, because every detail counts.

What is your favorite thing about the UAE?

My favorite thing about the UAE is that it, by itself, **nothing beats home honestly**, we have everything we need when it comes to family & horses, and we are lucky as we have the best life style here, we are lucky to be part of it.

What is your favorite thing about Paris?

Paris is special, I actually rode in Paris a few times already and a lot of my summer camps were in France, it's truly one of the capital cities of the world, which makes the Olympics even more special. Plus their food is so good, especially their pastries.

What are you most looking forward to at the Olympics?

I think the experience itself is something I am looking forward to. I have done two Asian Games & hopefully a 3rd one in October this year in China, which is so special being at an event with different athletes seeking excellence. It is a way to motivate you honestly, and I love following other spots personally.

What are you most nervous about at the Olympics?

I think the new format for the team with no drop scores, it's a lot to handle especially with the first riders going in, cause the pressure will be huge, specially with different owners & athletes involved. The risk is huge & the riders need to be able to handle such kind of pressure.

What is your message to the people of the UAE?

We want their support in order to achieve great things at the Olympics, and we already feel it since the qualification happened. 🇦🇪