

KAMAL BAHAMDAN

COMMITMENT TO BUSINESS PASSION FOR SHOW JUMPING

By Nada H. Abdelmoniem

COUNTRY: KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

DATE OF BIRTH: 12 FEBRUARY 1971

STAR SIGN: AQUARIUS



WHAT WOULD YOU CALL TRAVELLING TO INDIA FOR A BUSINESS MEETING AND THEN BACK TO ABU DHABI WITHIN 24 HOURS TO WIN A 3-STAR GRAND PRIX ARAB LEAGUE QUALIFIER? SOME WOULD SAY IT'S EXCELLENT TIME MANAGEMENT AND VIGOROUS MENTAL FITNESS TO BE ABLE TO CARRY OUT SUCH A SCHEDULE. I PERSONALLY WOULD SAY IT'S CONSPIRING WITH TIME! THOUGH ONE WISHES TO BELIEVE THAT IT'S POSSIBLE FOR A DAY TO HAVE MORE THAN 24 HOURS, THE RESOUNDING CONCLUSION IS THAT THERE AREN'T ENOUGH HOURS IN THE DAY; SO HOW DOES KAMAL BAHAMDAN SUCCEED IN DOING ALL THAT HE WANTS IN THE ALLOTTED TIME PERIOD?



Bahamdan & Mashalla Rivaal during the 2008 Olympics



▲ Bahamdan & Casita during the 2004 Olympics

A 4-time Olympic rider, serious but very soft-spoken active investor and an avid show jumper – Bahamdan runs a holding conglomerate, travels up to 150 days a year, rides horses three to four days a week, competes for Saudi Arabia locally and internationally, and enjoys building investment platforms. "I wish I had more time to spend in the saddle", he says longingly. This 39 year old visionary, a graduate of Manufacturing Engineering from Boston University, co-founded and managed BV Group in 1994 in the USA, and in light of his strategic views

of the changing economy and markets, as well as to address the needs for a new breed of investment houses arising from the last financial crisis, he established Safanad in 2009, a company with a unique approach to investments specialised in real estate, private equity, and marketable securities - based in Geneva and New York, and soon in Saudi Arabia. Even with such a full work agenda, Bahamdan manages to keep his business life completely separate from his show jumping career, but somehow the latter trickled into the world of finance by naming his

new company Safanad, described in the mystic times of Prophet Solomon as the horses/pure breed who absorbed him from his daily chores.

Growing up in Saudi Arabia, Bahamdan credits his parents who supported him fully in his business and show jumping career. "I consider myself very fortunate as I am able to combine my passion with my profession. I am an entrepreneur who enjoys building companies but I am also a rider who enjoys every aspect of the equestrian sport. I have been able to pursue both careers hand in hand and am thankful to my parents who have been supportive from the beginning. I come from a large family; I'm one of six siblings and an uncle to eight lovely nieces and nephews."

Besides his business endeavours and next to show jumping, Bahamdan enjoys playing golf, football and skiing. "I am very serious about my skiing! And I've played football since I was a child", he says. Football caused him a knee injury which prevented his taking part in a whole show jumping season. In regards to his show jumping career and his passion for horses, he adds, "Show jumping has been part of my life for as long as I remember. I started at the age of seven and competed mostly in Saudi Arabia and occasionally in Europe until I moved to the USA for college. There I took part in the East Coast Circuit until 2003 when I moved my horses back to Europe. They are based there where I frequently travel to train and participate at show jumping events. I have been lucky enough to take part in four Olympic Games and three World Championships as well as three Pan Arab Games where I won four team gold medals and one individual gold. However, competing in the Olympics is an experience like no other, which is unique and memorable everytime. What makes every Olympic experience unique is being there with athletes from all over the world, competing in all disciplines; they dedicated their whole life for this moment, creating a unique energy. Each game indeed has its own flair and is different from the other and is equally memorable, a common denominator being that the Olympics is the ultimate experience."


As for sponsors and trainers (two core elements in this ever demanding sport) Bahamdan again credits his family effusively. "Due to my business commitments, I cannot have sponsors. However, my family has been my most important sponsor throughout my career. On my training, it's been with many great trainers: Anne Kursinski, Beezie Madden, Nelson Pessoa, and currently with Jan Tops. I travel a great deal, and naturally I find much difficulty with time management, and often have to sacrifice my training time for work. When travelling, I always plan ahead of time and I try to work or sleep on the plane to maximise my time at the country I am travelling to and to be more efficient."

On his horses, he further adds, "In today's sport, courses are very technical. Therefore I go for blood, agile, and careful horses. Currently, I have 2 very nice Chestnuts: Mashalla Rivaal and Pinochetta. Mashalla Rivaal is a horse with great character, careful with a lot of fight in him yet sensitive. Outside the ring, he has a very calm personality, is very sociable, and very pleasant to

ride. When he steps into the ring, he grows a foot taller and gets an adrenaline rush, which is so high that he often spends more time bucking between the first few jumps until he starts concentrating. However, his great ability and agility compensate for his playfulness. On the other hand, Pinochetta is a very spooky and hectic mare outside the ring but the minute she steps into the ring she is all business: very focused and competitive. While she is not as scary as Rivaal she is a very fast and careful mare. My ideal horse is rideable with blood, careful with heart, and scary however these are very hard to find. Of course when one picks a horse, he should always keep the job in mind: meaning if a young rider needs a horse to help him move to higher classes, more emphasis should be placed on rideability, scope, and experience, and less on carefulness."

On upcoming aspirations and his short-term plans, Bahamdan is preparing for the WEG in Kentucky in October of this year. His preparation plans include taking part in the Global Champions Tour this summer.

In regards to whether Bahamdan could influence the show jumping sport and the decisions that he would take, what would he change? He answered, "I would focus on further increasing the popularity of the sport by bringing the sport to the people through having more shows in major cities, which would increase its visibility. In the Middle East, horses are part of our history and heritage; we should cherish it and continue developing this heritage as a key sport to our generations. My advice to young riders would be: everytime you sit on a horse at a competition or while training, start by embarrassing your love to the sport and horses and hold that feeling until you are done."

On defining success in the show jumping sport versus success in life in general – and how to combine them to achieve the same end result, he states with conviction, "Success is about fulfilment. It's about achieving personal goals, albeit in sport or life in general. In my opinion, one is only successful if he is able to fulfil his personal goals whilst finding a fine balance in all other important aspects of his life, which is a goal in itself." 

▼ Bahamdan receiving his 1st place trophy for CSI** Abu Dhabi 2010 from Adnan Sultan, GM of Abu Dhabi Equestrian Club

