



THE NEW WAVE OF DRESSAGE

IN THE MIDDLE EAST

By Diana Al Shaer

THE WAVE OF DRESSAGE IS SLOWLY, BUT CONFIDENTLY, APPROACHING THE MENA REGION.



IT'S ABOUT TIME FOR THIS BEAUTIFUL OLYMPIC EQUESTRIAN DISCIPLINE TO CONQUER THE HEARTS OF OUR PEOPLE.

Dressage is a classical equestrian discipline with a long history, ancient roots and traditions. The main goal of dressage is to develop the natural potential of horses; their movements and fitness to its perfection; as well as to achieve the highest level of harmony between horse and rider. Apart from being a sport discipline, dressage can be compared to art and even philosophy. Its main ingredients are beauty, grace, perfection, technique and patience.

Dressage is a new developing discipline in the Middle Eastern countries yet some individuals have already managed to raise their flags at the biggest international events. Morocco, for example, was represented by Yessin Rahmouni at the **Olympic Games 2012, 2020** and the **World Equestrian Games 2014, 2022** and by Ismail Jilaoui at the 2018 World Equestrian Games. Palestine was represented by Christian Zimmermann at the **Olympic Games 2020** and World equestrian Games 2016 and I had an honor to compete at the **World Equestrian Games 2022**.

Until now it was more about the individuals, but I believe that major development or big success is only possible to achieve with a team spirit within the community.

The increasing number of people interested in dressage brought up the idea to create a dressage committee in **FEI Regional Group 7 (MENA)** in **2021**, since that moment the dressage movement started slowly to gain its structure. I was honored to become a chairman of the committee and the first step for me was to identify people who could join the team.

Our committee consists of successful riders and equestrian entrepreneurs who have dedicated their time and efforts in development of the discipline in their region. Collectively, we set out to identify the demand for dressage and its target audience – and

after doing some research we were surprised with the results.

Apparently admirers of the sport have been present for some time, but felt lonely on that journey and didn't have the chance to develop the practice further. Therefore, creating a community was our initial motivation and after studying the requests, we cooperated with national federations in order to arrange educational clinics throughout the region.

Good thing that we can currently do it on a regional level, this is something that helps move dressage forward as well as builds bridges between our countries. As I come from a diplomatic family, I believe that sports can be a powerful tool of public diplomacy and when neighboring countries focus on building something together it can be considered as a step in the positive direction. We are working with the **FEI Solidarity Department** on educational and sport programs that will be implemented on the regional level. The aim is to guide and support riders on their dressage journey and gain attraction of this wonderful sport in a new part of the world.

An upcoming plan is to arrange a **MENA Dressage Tour** with classes for different experience levels including easy tests - which we hope will spark interest to join the discipline. For example, jumping riders can try to do these dressage tests with their horses - this will improve their rideability and, who knows, they might change their mind and become dressage riders. I have three students, now in training, who changed from jumping to dressage and they just felt that they wanted to go further on that path.

Dressage is not just a sports discipline; it gives much more to one's life than you can expect - it's a philosophy, it's a lifestyle. It develops a lot of self-discipline, patience, focus and even emotional intelligence. If you can't control your own state of





mind and your body, you won't be able to control your horse; if you can't achieve harmony with yourself you won't be able to achieve it with the horse either. This discipline will get you out of your comfort zone, but if you work and stay consistent you will achieve harmony not only in riding but also in other spheres of your life. Dressage is all about details and this is why harmony and perfection are crucial – if you get there, you will take them with you far away from the riding arena.

The greatest part of all about dressage and equestrian sports is that it doesn't matter how many years you ride... you can still learn all your life. There is no routine and it never gets boring.

We have a beautiful growing community in **MENA** and everyone is welcome to join this exciting dressage journey. 🐾

About the author:

Diana Al Shaer - Athlete, public figure, sports, and cultural diplomat.

International Grand Prix dressage rider representing Palestine, the first Arab woman who competed at the World Equestrian Championships in dressage. (ECCO FEI World Championships in Herring, 2022) .

Diana combines sports and a diplomatic career as her main goal is to build bridges using the most efficient tools of public diplomacy - sports and culture.

She has work experience in different international organizations as a former co-chairman of People's Assembly of Eurasia, current president of the International Association of Equestrian Amateurs, and chairman of the Dressage Committee in FEI regional Group 7(MENA).



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