

THE GLOBAL CHAMPIONS TOUR FINAL IN QATAR

THE NEXT BIG THING

By Khaled Assem



STARTING WITH A MAGNIFICENT DAY BENEATH THE SUNNY SKIES OF QATAR, THE GLOBAL CHAMPIONS TOUR (GCT) FINAL PURELY DEMONSTRATED THE MAGNIFICENT QUALITY OF PARTICIPANT INTERNATIONAL RIDERS. WITH A PREVIOUS WORLD-CLASS RIDER AND PRESENTLY RENOWNED COURSE DESIGNER, CONRAD HOMFELD INTIMIDATED ANY WHO WISHED TO WIN A GENEROUS SUM FROM TOTAL PRIZE MONEY OF 1,395,000,00 EUROS INCLUDING A GCT GRAND PRIX FINAL OF 900,000,00 EUROS AND AN ADDITIONAL GOLD HORSE HEAD SCULPTURE WORTH 8,000 EUROS. THE ROUND ARENA WAS SET TO PRESENT AN OPENING FOR A HORSE AND RIDER WORTHY OF

ANY ADDITIONAL CAPITAL ALONG THE EXCEPTIONAL DISPLAY OF FENCES, BEAUTIFUL FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS STYLED BY THOMAS DIETZ COMPANY, BLUEMEN ENK, AND A VERY PROFESSIONALLY DESIGNED EQUESTRIAN FACILITY.

THROUGHOUT THE 4-DAY EVENT, I MET AND SPOKE TO SEVERAL OFFICIALS AND RIDERS WHOM NOT SURPRISINGLY, HAD VIEWS TO SHARE ON THE EVENT ITSELF AS WELL AS ON QATAR AND THE PROSPEROUS FUTURE OF SHOW JUMPING IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THE GCT IS AN INTERNATIONAL SPORTING EVENT OF THE HIGHEST LEVEL INDEED, AND QATAR IS RICH IN CULTURE AND PRESERVATION OF ITS HERITAGE.



JAN TOPS, NETHERLANDS

President of the GCT, in cooperation with the Qatar Equestrian Federation:

"I've always been very passionate about show jumping and I've always loved business since I was very young; my priority was always buying and selling horses. When I was riding I was always thinking of how to improve the sport to the level it really deserves and after 30 years of competing at all the international shows, knowing all the events and all the organisers, I came up with the

idea of the GCT. As for the final taking place in Qatar, I've always known that the Middle East is very important and I have a lot of friends here. The Middle East has been an area with tremendous growth in the past couple of years and I'm very well aware of that, there are some riders with a lot of potential and that's why we are integrating it and some of its riders in our tour."



RASHID BIN ALI AL MANSORI

President of Qatar Equestrian Federation:

"Today we celebrate the enormous success of the GCT as it once again returns to Doha for the final competition of these world class series. Under the bright lights of this spectacular arena at the Qatar Equestrian Federation, the final

rounds will bring out the best show jumpers in the world competing for record prize money and the honour of taking home the gold medal. The Qatar Equestrian Federation is proud to have been the vital part of this prestigious

worldwide tour. The continuing support and attention of HH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani to all sports lays the foundation for Qatar hosting major equestrian events and world class competitions."

FRED VAN LIEROP, NETHERLANDS

Managing Director of the GCT:

"One of the articles in our contracts with countries we work with is to integrate the country's culture in the spirit of the show. I believe that all the riders need to get the feeling of where

they are, with the media putting a special emphasis on the issue of culture and its importance of creating a successful event. The public and the viewers all over the world should feel

that from different effects like the design of the fences and the general decorations at the show."



ON WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 11TH, Olympic champion Eric Lamaze was the first to spark the scoreboard in a time of 67.77 on his mare 'Take Off'. Bernardo Alves riding 'Kingly du Reverdy' almost caught up at 68.82 but it took a former triple World Cup winner to over take the Olympic winner; Rodrigo Pessoa who needs no introduction, riding 'Cazino',

was beyond sharp with great rhythm and finesse with a time of 66.59. Qatar's Ali Al Rumaihi finished 11th out of 37 starters on 'Ravena'. Sheikh Ali Al Thani was 14th on his new horse 'Santos'.

In the second class, Conrad Homfeld was just a little too kind with 10 riders clear out of the 37 starters. In the jump off, the oxer

out of the double took out both Eric Lamaze on 'Hickstead' and Robert Whitaker on 'Darco' out of the winning picture and Kevin Staut on 'Le Prestige de St. Lois' hit the second last. On the other hand, the Irish combination Jessica Kurten and 'Cosma' were an unbeatable couple. Albert Zoer came in 2nd and Daniel Etter in 3rd place.



SHIEKH ALI AL THANI, QATAR:

"It is a tremendous success to host such a huge event here in Qatar, I have to thank HH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani for his support and for making it possible to have such facilities here. I jumped a good round with 4 faults in the Open Championship of Qatar which qualified me for the 2010 World Equestrian Games. I have 2 good horses and I will concentrate on jumping in the Arab League and then I will return to be based in Belgium for the spring."



JESSICA KURTEN, IRELAND:

"It's my second time here and it changed a lot in a positive way. Everything is made for the rider to feel the importance of this competition. The stadium is great and looks just perfectly organised for such a big final. From the beginning, we feel we are in a championship that will be hard but very exciting which is good for our motivation! As for 'Cosma', she was a star just when everyone was thinking I was coming on young horses!"



ALBERT ZOER, NETHERLANDS:

"The 2008 final was very good and the championships continue to stay in its same levels of competitiveness. I did take one stride too many into the last, but I am getting better.... Last week I got beaten by four tenths of a second, today though, just 3!"

DANIEL ETTER, SWITZERLAND:

"It is great and of course nice to win money on the first day. I think the accommodation for horses is good but for us, it is super nice. The hotel is amazing!"



THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12TH: Six horses out of 33 who started for the Grand Prix qualifier, qualified. Albert Zoer riding 'Sam', Marcus Ehning and 'Sabrina', a daughter of his champion horse 'Sandro Boy', Daniel Deusser on 'Aboyeur', Robert Whitaker and 'Draco', Denis Lynch on 'Nabab's Son' and Jessica Kurton on 'Castle Forbes Myrtille Paulois'. The golden Irish couple

won with Denis Lynch in 2nd place and Robert Whitaker 3rd.

Talking to most of the riders, it was very interesting to know some more about their personal experiences along their paths to success and more of their thoughts on show jumping in the Middle East where the sport is progressing, and how should we shape or structure this development.



DENIS LYNCH, IRELAND:

"I am very happy to have qualified for the GCT final as winning here in 2008 was a great experience. And I also knew that organisation would be super. It has improved given that all the best shows do, and the GCT has certainly lived up to the standards."



RODRIGO PASSOA, BRAZIL:

"A couple of years back more countries in the Middle East were competing at big levels starting with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan. These are good signs that the Middle East is developing well. There are talented riders who come to Europe to train and improve their skills. I believe that their countries have great things to offer as

what we see here. Personally, I think that if a rider wants to seriously stand out, stay competitive and motivated, he has to stay focused and work hard. I would want to do what it takes to stay at a good level and not fall back and become a tourist, so I really mean to give it my all."





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SERGIO ALVAREZ MOYA, SPAIN:

"I'm happy to be here at this event participating with many experienced riders. I always looked up to John Whitaker, he is amazing with the way he can ride every horse and he'll never get old as a rider. I rode in the Netherlands for 7 years with Albert Voorn who is a super trainer; he is very good in training and you can learn a lot from him. He always taught me to keep thinking of the rhythm and the position on the horse. If you are riding against the clock it doesn't mean that you have to be fast with your body but you just have to speed up the horse, you have to stay cool and ride the same."

BEN MAHER, GREAT BRITAIN:

"The show is fantastic, excellent atmosphere, and everything is 5 stars; the stables, the arena, everything is just fabulous. This is my first time in the Middle East and I feel the people are keen to develop the sport; given more interaction with Europe, it'll go better for both."



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MARCO KUTSCHER, GERMANY:

"The show was really good; I was also here last year and I have to say it keeps getting better. The facilities for both the horses and riders are excellent. The only thing that is missing so far, is that I have not won that much!"

CONRAD HOMFELD, USA:

"When I think of designing a course, I think of safety first, that of the horse and of the rider. On the other hand, any course designer

wants it all; an exciting and challenging class along with good and positive results as well as a level of difficulty to match the prize

money. Consequently I consider all the factors along with the environment and the setting; I put all those elements in perspective when I work."

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14TH,
THE FINAL ROUND AT THE
HEIGHT OF 1.60M WITH A JUMP
OFF AND PRIZE MONEY OF
900,000,00 EUROS**

ROGER-YVES BOST, FRANCE, *before the class:*

"The class today is very big; it's like those at the Olympic Games. But classes with that kind of money are usually very difficult. Conrad has put a very big triple combination at the end of the course when horses are more tired. If my stallion jumps like he did yesterday, maybe he'll do well today."



ROBERT WHITAKER, GREAT BRITAIN, *before the class:*

"It's a very big course! Quite technical, and going to be very difficult; coming out of the combination is very short, which I think is going to cause lots of problems. Also the double, it's a very tall vertical. I think horses like 'Hickstead' and 'OkiDoki' have a very good chance at this level."





▲ During the jump off of the final round, Michel Robert riding Kellemoi de Pepita jumped clear in 49.76 seconds to come in 1st place, followed by Belgium's Jos Lansink riding Valentina van t Heike jumping clear in 49.89 seconds to come in 2nd. Brazil's Alvaro de Miranda riding AD Picolien Zeldenrust came in 3rd with 4 faults in 46.52 seconds.

▼ Michel Robert's philosophy is to keep his horses away from any kind of medication, as well as himself - staying true and fair to the concept that stands behind the sport



ALVARO DE MIRANDA, BRAZIL, after the final round:

"It was really impressive to be here in that beautiful round arena. It was great for the horses, riders and sponsors. One year later, something that was very good became excellent. It's important to have shows on this side of the world. I am proud to be here as the energy is very good. The course today was very hard, Olympic Games level and very cleverly put by Conrad. You could do faults everywhere especially the last line, water jump to combination, and the distance was very difficult."

THE WINNER OF THE FINAL OF THE GCT IS MICHEL ROBERT ON HIS MARE 'KELLEMOI DE PEPITA' WHO WAS SIMPLY BREATH TAKING WITH HIS GRACIOUS TECHNIQUE AND AMAZING FINESSE. HIS JUMP OFF WAS AS REGULAR AS A HEARTBEAT ALL; A RIDER WITH 2 BOOKS UNDER HIS COAT AND DECADES OF EXPERIENCE THAT AT HIS AGE, IS UNRIVALLED.

MICHEL ROBERT, FRANCE, after winning:

"My horse was simply very good today. She's 11 and I'm 60. I always try to follow a very natural way so I give my horse no medication or treatment at all, just food, water and the same goes for me. I try to have a simple uncomplicated approach to everything I do with my horses and my life. I believe that everyone needs to have a philosophy; we need to know all the time why we are here and for what purpose, to take consciousness of everything around and in our minds. I am very happy today to have won with no medication what so ever so I can give the world a message of how we should treat our horses. They need more space and more understanding."

JAN TOPS, after the final round:

"I am happy with what I have seen tonight, a spectacular level of competition. Fantastic performance by all the riders! An outstanding facility comparable to the top ones worldwide and incredible cooperation from the Qatar Equestrian Federation. This is fantastic for the sport; the best horses, Olympic level of show jumping and great performances." **HT**