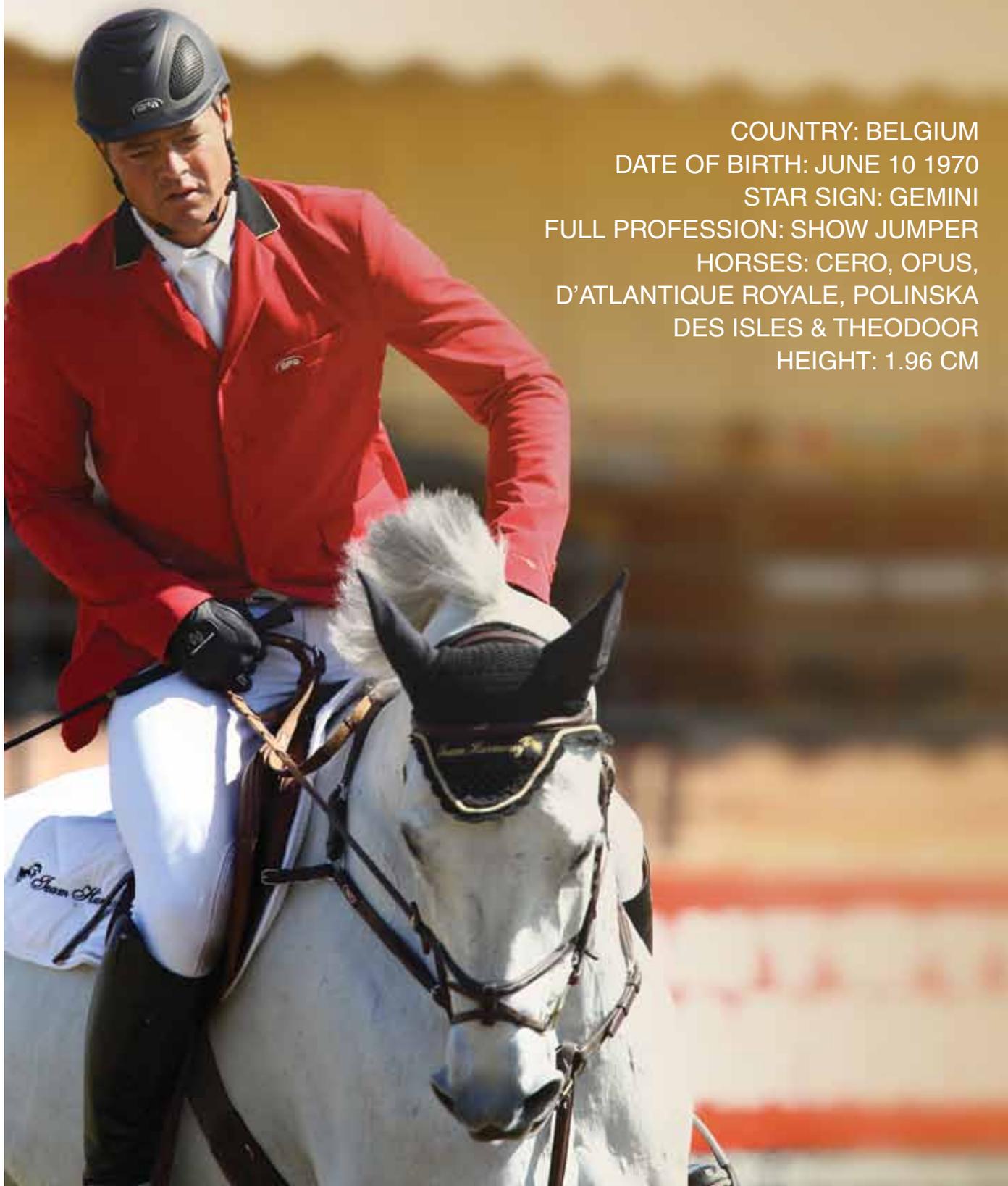


THE QUINTESSENTIAL FRANCOIS MATHY JR.

By Nada H. Abdelmoniem



COUNTRY: BELGIUM
DATE OF BIRTH: JUNE 10 1970
STAR SIGN: GEMINI
FULL PROFESSION: SHOW JUMPER
HORSES: CERO, OPUS,
D'ATLANTIQUE ROYALE, POLINSKA
DES ISLES & THEODOOR
HEIGHT: 1.96 CM

A SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL SHOW JUMPER AND ALL-ROUND ATHLETE IN HIS OWN RIGHT, FRANCOIS MATHY JR. IS THAT STRIKINGLY TALL, CHARMING, AND QUINTESSENTIAL RIDER THAT APPRECIATES HIS STATUS AS A SHOW JUMPER, AND PRESENTS NOTHING BUT COURTEOUS, HUMBLE, AND GRACIOUS CONDUCT TO THOSE WHO MEET HIM. HE TALKS NOTHING BUT PASSION ABOUT HIS HORSES AND SHOW JUMPING, HAS NOTHING BUT A SMILE ON HIS FACE, AND NOTHING BUT A SENSE OF HUMOUR ABOUT HIS HEIGHT!



▲ During the 2011 Prize Ceremony of Salon du Cheval d'El Jadida

Son of Olympic medallist and renowned horse dealer Francois Mathy, the apple has not fallen far from the tree with a son securing a place on the show jumping scene ever since he was 14 years old when he became a Junior Champion for Belgium, and the 15 year old European Champion with a Team double clear. Growing up to become a skilled competitor, the Economics major and multilingual Francois Jr. put his name in the top 50 World Rankings, was a member of the National Team at the 1998 Rome World Championships, and has achieved many victories with many horses in international competitions as well as significant World Cups and CSIO Grand Prixes.

When Francois was born, he grew up to find horses, and only horses, around him. By the age of seven, he started to compete with ponies but he quickly grew in height and was simply too tall for those small creatures. He did not train with his father, but was a natural observer as he stated, "Learning about horses around my father was more similar to acquiring guidelines than being trained. But now when I contemplate the thought, it is a far-off notion that I did not "learn" from him. He was always providing guidance through the riders that were working with him

and encouraged me to travel and learn from different people."

Continuing to work on becoming a professional show jumper and shaping his future, Francois trained with the late Italian Guido Dominici whom he remembers, "Guido was such a good trainer for me. He was a hard worker and very strict with his methods. Most probably, he would be the one who had the most influence on me. But then again, I have been travelling around the world, riding in different countries and meeting all kinds of people. This has opened my mind to learning more about riding, horses, and people, and this is what I would say has shaped me."

Much taller than average show jumpers by far, how does Francois pick his horses and what do they have in common? "Ah, they have to be big! Then, I look for ones that have blood, heart, and would try to work with, and not against the rider. I have to balance my riding and achieve the best results simultaneously. Currently, and for the last 12 years, I ride horses that belong to a Belgian lady, Ingrid Norman, and to HRH Princess Haya. Two of these horses are sturdy and very promising eight year old horses that I think will be important for my show jumping aspirations as it has been a while

since I rode a quality horse after Kannan, who was also owned by Ingrid Norman. HRH Princess Haya bought D'atlantique Royale when he was five at which he won the five year old horse championship in Belgium and this year had a good season, being placed in 2* and 3* CSI Grand Prixes. He has so much power, is extremely careful and is all blood; all I need to do is control his energy. The other horse is a French mare, Polinska Des Isles, who has also shown good results this season; she was placed in five 2* and 3* Grand Prixes. Those two horses will really pull my strings I think. Cero, a stallion, is an older but important horse for jumping bigger classes, and also belongs to HRH Princess Haya. He was second in this year's Grand Prix of Arezzo, was placed in five Grand Prixes, and was all clear in the Nation Cup of Drammen for the Belgian Team. HRH has been busy so has kindly allowed me to ride him until she has time." Francois stormed to Grand Prix victory with Polinska Des Isles at the CSI3* World Cup qualifier in El Jadida, Morocco, back in October and some of their results for the season include coming in third place at Rabat's CSI3*, and fourth at CSI2*Ebreichsdorf.

Keen to find out Francois's secret to success, we ask him what his magic



▲ Team Harmony: Jos Lansink, Francois, Abul Said & Ibrahim Bisharat

trick is. "I might just have been lucky, especially with my background with horses," Francois says with a big smile. "As I mentioned, I try to choose the best horses. I am also lucky to have good sponsors behind me. My horses and I work well together and we try to get the best out of every competition. I adjust to them and together we try to get the best out of every competition," he adds. And on the road to the 2012 London Olympics, Francois explains, "I am not yet prepared but planning to, starting with the early 2012 season at the show in Comporta, Portugal and following with other major European events. If my horses come out in good form afterwards, I'll keep my hopes high regarding being part of the Olympic team."

While Francois's height is a sight to see, what about his achievements? Thoughtfully, he replied, "I would say I had many good achievements in the past years, but certainly the best one would be my Grand Prix

win in San Patrignano's CSI which was a memorial for Guido Dominici; he won this Grand Prix in 2008 and passed away in 2009 at the same week of the event. The show holds a big place in my heart as it has a very special atmosphere due to the fact that it is the main event and window of the San Patrignano community. It is just the perfect show."

Coming from a horsey background and being the son of an Olympic medallist, are there any negative effects? "I never thought and still don't think it's a disadvantage. On the contrary, it was all beneficial to me. My father's reputation helped me when I was young. Everyone welcomed me as the son of Francois Mathy and showed nothing but friendliness. The only difference between my father and me is that he prefers the business behind the sport, and I prefer the sport itself and its competitions. Jumping is my main passion. Not just that, I actually play squash, tennis, golf, I run, and I ski.

In simple words, sports are just good for me."

Francois is the father of two young daughters, Alix who is nearly three years old and Elena who is nearly five. "It is so hard for me to be away from them, especially at this young and very crucial age. I try my best to be with them between shows and I try to be home most of the time when I am not competing."

Does Francois have any regrets and is there anything that he would like to change about himself? We ask anyway and he laughingly answers, "Maybe I would change my height as it's too big for the sport?! No. I am simply joking. Truthfully, I think I've been doing what I wanted to do. I am happy with my life and appreciate it. I only regret the fact that we had to sell Kannan. It was a perfect Olympic horse, unique and unmatched. If I have any regrets in my career, it would be not being able to keep that horse for longer. 🐾