



ABDESLAM BENNANI SMIRES IS AN INTERNATIONAL SHOWJUMPING RIDER NOTORIOUS FOR HIS INFECTIOUS ENTHUSIASM AND RADIANT SMILE THAT LIGHTS UP MANY ARENAS HE COMPETES IN. WITH A PASSION FOR ARABIAN HORSES AND A DEDICATION TO SHOWJUMPING, SMIRES (PRONOUNCED SMEERS) HAS ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS A PROMINENT ATHLETE IN THE MOROCCAN SHOWJUMPING COMMUNITY. HIS UNWAVERING COMMITMENT AND SKILL CULMINATED IN A MOMENTOUS WIN AT THE MOROCCAN NATIONAL SHOWJUMPING CHAMPIONSHIPS THIS JULY, WITH HIM CLINCHING THE 'HM KING MOHAMMED VI GRAND PRIX' TOP SPOT. WHETHER IN THE SADDLE OR AMONG FANS, HIS WARM PERSONALITY AND SPORTING SPIRIT ATTRACTS EQUESTRIAN ENTHUSIASTS ACROSS MOROCCO AND BEYOND.

Abdeslam, so you're Morocco's National Tell us about your champion horse? **Showjumping Champion?**

Yes, I am! I won the National Showjumping Championships for seniors!

How's the feeling?

It's fantastic, but I'm cautious about celebrating too much. I lost my father just three weeks before the Championships. I worked tirelessly throughout the season to prepare for this, and while it all paid off, I wasn't sure if I was in the right mental state to compete. In the end, I managed to do it - and I did it for him. Everything came together so perfectly, especially with my horse, Mister D'Eclipse. He's an exceptional partner.

So how do you pick up and keep yourself motivated and focused?

I draw inspiration from the values my father instilled in me. He used to say, "Never give up. Life goes on." I trained for this Championship all season. Once I'm in the saddle, motivation just kicks in. I also wanted to win and dedicate this title to him. Honestly, for the first time, I wasn't overly focused on the results; I just let go and trusted my horse. That's when everything tends to fall into place.

Mister D'Eclipse is a 12-year-old BWP stallion by Diamant de Semilly and out of a Caretino mare, owned by the Federation. He had an injury that made many experts think he couldn't compete anymore. I was determined to give him another chance. Over two years, with the help of our national vet, Dr. Sandrine Serfati, and a dedicated team, we worked tirelessly, doing everything from rehab to beach exercises. Now, he's sound and capable of jumping four courses over three days in a championship.

Who is your trainer?

I currently train with Thierry Klein, our national trainer. His methods resonate with me and I find myself aligned with his instructions. In the past, we trained with World Champion Philippe Le Jeune, but his approach was more restrictive. Thierry's style suits me much better.

Who do you turn to for advice?

Well, I joke and say ChatGPT! But seriously, I rely on close friends. I stay in touch with our former national trainer Philippe Rozier. I also work closely with Jerome Guery, as we co-own horses. My stable



neighbour, Ali Al Ahrach, is a good friend, and El Ghali Boukaa is also someone I consult regularly.

Are you always based in Morocco year-round?

The Royal Moroccan Equestrian Federation typically sends riders to Europe for six months during the summer to train and compete. This year I only participated in the Sunshine Tour before returning in March to compete at national shows. I have several horses, and I'm very pleased with the results I achieved this season.

How does the Federation decide which horses to pair with riders?

The Federation owns several horses that can compete at different international levels. Together with the national trainer and President Cherif Moulay Abdallah Alaoui - who's also a former rider and a true horseman - they select the best fit for each rider.

What's your opinion on rising entry fees at shows? Do you think this trend limits opportunities for amateur and aspiring riders?

The sport has become very expensive. Whether you're an amateur or a professional, the costs are overwhelming: entry fees, travel, accommodation, and more. Without sponsors, it's nearly impossible to participate regularly. For example, I own my horses, but to compete with them, I bear all their expenses myself.

If you could own any horse, which one would it be?

There are many I'd love to own, but if I had to choose, it would be Leoni Jei. He's an extraordinary horse; he's powerful with blood to win Grand Prixs.

We first met you in 2009 in Morocco, handling an Arabian horse. Do you still breed Arabians?

Yes, I do actually. While I don't show them internationally, I breed them at our Selman Marrakech stables. I prefer showjumping because it's straightforward, if you knock down a fence, it's a fault. Arabian horse shows, on the other hand, can be quite subjective, with judges varying from three to twenty.

Abdeslam Bennani Smires is married to Yasmine and is father of Ammer and Chams. With his family, he owns Selman Marrakech, a luxury hotel that is also home to some of Selman champion Arabian horses.



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DARRAGH KENNY IS A STRAIGHTFORWARD SHOWJUMPING RIDER KNOWN FOR HIS GROUNDED AND PROFESSIONAL APPROACH AND BRILLIANT TALENT IN THE ARENA. CURRENTLY RANKED AS THE WORLD NUMBER 11 IN THE LONGINES FEI RANKINGS, KENNY HAS DEMONSTRATED REMARKABLE CONSISTENCY AND DETERMINATION THROUGHOUT 2025, ACHIEVING OUTSTANDING RESULTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE.

His impressive performances contributed to him grass after competing in a sand arena? being selected as part of the Irish team for the 2024 Paris Olympics, and some of his recent results include podium wins at Spruce Meadows and the Traverse City Horse Show with his horses Colibelle Hero Z, Lighting and Zero K. And just a couple of weeks ago, he secured a commendable seventh place at the Longines FEI European Jumping Championship in A Coruna with his gelding Eddie Blue, as well as a second place with Diaroubet at the \$75,000 CSIO 3* Traverse City Nations Cup.

With such focused dedication to the sport, Kenny is now planning to make a major impact at this year's Dublin Horse Show, aiming to add yet another significant victory to his already impressive career.

Can you tell us about the horses you'll be participating with?

I have LE Coridal, Zero K, and my good horse Eddie Blue here. Eddie Blue jumps in a small class the next few days and hopefully I'll be part of the team for the Nations Cup on Friday. They haven't announced the team yet, but I'm one of the five riders being considered. And then of course, also with Eddie Blue, I'll compete in the Rolex Grand Prix of Ireland this coming Sunday.

How do you prepare Eddie Blue for jumping on

This summer I took him to Spruce Meadows in Canada for two weeks to get him accustomed to jumping on grass. It helps him transition smoothly between surfaces.

Is there a specific routine you follow before a major event like the Dublin Horse Show?

Honestly, I keep it simple and consistent. I focus on ensuring the horses are fit, healthy, and happy. Since they're experienced horses, I believe that maintaining their usual routine and staying relaxed is the best approach. Preparation should be about consistency, treating the day like any other show, but with extra care for their well-being.

Do you seek technical advice from anyone?

Not typically. I handle most of the technical aspects myself at the moment. However my family is quite involved so if I need advice, I always turn to them.

Do you invest in mental preparation before big events?

I used to but not so much in recent years. For me, the key is to stay consistent and not overthink. I believe that maintaining the same mindset and



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success. Trying to do more or different often can be counterproductive.

You're known for your speed against the clock; what skills have you developed to ride so quickly?

I think smoothness is crucial. Many riders think they're going fast, suddenly become erratic, so they end up being slower. The best clocked riders make their speed look effortless which is the trick; speed combined with precision and fluidity.

Out of your horses, how did you choose Eddie Blue for this event?

This is a very important show for me, being at home in Ireland. I brought my best horses to compete here, and Eddie Blue is currently my top horse. I plan to ride him in both the Nations Cup and the Grand Prix because I believe he has the potential to perform very well.

You're the owner of Oakland Stables in the USA. Are all your horses owned by you or do some have other owners?

Most of my horses are owned by a wonderful group of owners I'm very fortunate to work with. I own a few myself, but the majority are owned by others.

Is there a message you'd like to share with your owners through this interview?

Absolutely. I'm incredibly grateful for my owners, they're a fantastic group. I truly appreciate their

treating the show like any other helps ensure support and trust. Their backing means everything to me and my team, and I'm thankful for their continued partnership.

> You're often referred to as Ofally's Darragh Kenny in Irish publications. Is there a distinction between counties in Ireland?

> Yes, that's correct. It's a reference to where I'm from. It's simply where I grew up, my childhood home. It's part of my identity and background.

> Beyond showjumping, what are your other interests?

> Right now I'm very focused on the sport. But I do enjoy relaxing with good dinners, spending time with friends, traveling, and enjoying quiet moments at home. When I'm not competing, I like to unwind and recharge.

Have you ever travelled to the Middle East?

I've only been to Doha, Qatar.

Do you think there's a question we should've asked you but didn't?

No, I think you covered everything quite well.

Was a pleasure speaking to you Darragh and many thanks for your time. We'll be watching you and all the best! 🍙

Photos by FEI/Benjamin Clark

