

KAMAL BAHAMDAN

A NEW MEMBER OF THE FEI JUMPING COMMITTEE

By Khaled Assem

SAUDI EQUESTRIAN'S OLYMPIC CHAMPION KAMAL BAHAMDAN HAS RECENTLY BEEN SELECTED TO JOIN THE FEI JUMPING COMMITTEE FROM 2013 UNTIL 2017, A POST WELL DESERVED. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF ISSUES THAT NEED REVIEW, NEGOTIATION AND UPGRADING WITHIN THE SPORT AND HERE IS WHAT BAHAMDAN HAD TO SAY ABOUT THIS TO HT.

Let me first start by offering you my congratulations for your appointment and for also winning the GCC Grand Prix at CSI3*-W Riyadh Arab League Tour this month. What are your comments on being selected as a member of the FEI Jumping Committee?

While watching the sport as a rider and a show organiser, as well as a friend of all officials and the fact that I never spent a day in my life since I was seven years old without being around horses, I feel that the show jumping is currently at a turning point. Matters could go either way; negatively or positively. I do feel that one has to contribute back to the sport, and as such I thought I would give this position whatever I can.

Tell us about the Committee and what you plan to offer it?

I am a member of a five-man Committee, a good combination of people. I come from a part of the world where the sport is rapidly emerging. I competed in the American circuit for 15 years and in Europe the past seven or eight years. I believe that I can bring to the Committee that historical perspective, one that I understand very well due to my experience. From the sport in the very mature to the emerging parts of the world, there are many issues which need to be addressed in the best ways possible.

Where is the Middle East and the sport in that equation?

Since the inception of the Arab League, show jumping has reached huge and new heights whether in the Kingdom, Qatar, the UAE, or Morocco. The quality of the horse and rider combination, as well as that of the officials, regional judges, course designers and top organisation during the League's three or five star shows, has improved exponentially and is as good as any in the equestrian world. This is the result of years of work, but still, there are other nations in Asia such as China, Korea and Japan, and in Eastern Europe, that need ambitious plans for development. Our sport is around 115 years old and so hopefully show jumping can capitalise on newcomers who will create a strategic momentum and a possible shift in the sport as a whole.

What are some of the Committee's priorities?

To move the sport forward through implementing several technical issues such as the ranking system for five star shows. We need to find a formula to elevate the quality of shows in all areas, not just in prize money but in matters such as footing and all conditions dealing with the welfare of horses, and we want to use the energy and momentum in the emerging region to do so.

Is Saudi Equestrian impacting the world of show jumping, in particular in relation to emerging countries in the sport and young riders? If so, how?

The achievement on the top level by the Saudi team in the London Olympic Games just shows all the emerging regions that "it can be done". This will initially give hope for everyone, more young people will realise that if they give it everything they will have a chance. You can actually see the numbers increasing. The wait list for people to join the Federation is by the hundreds.

Also, international riders help younger ones although not yet in an organised formal manner but still we all help. Khaled, Ramzy, and I feel that it is our duty to help. The young riders are the real success and continuation of the sport.

Tell us about the interconnection between the Saudi Equestrian Fund and the KSA Equestrian Federation?

HRH Prince Nawaf bin Faisal, the President of the KSA Equestrian Federation, is also a trustee on the board of Saudi Equestrian so the connection has always been there. There is enough coordination between them to ensure efficient and effective implementation of the national team's goals and priorities. 🏇



Photo by Cymon Taylor