



SYRIA 2009

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THE 14TH AL WAFAA FOR BASSEL AL ASSAD EVENT

By Nada H. Abdelmoniem

Step into Syria and a gash of stimulant breeze hits your face. It is beautiful country with beautiful sights and sound inhabited by the most hospitable and beautiful people who cook and serve the “most amazing cuisine”. Simply said; all the required ingredients for a great holiday and an exciting equestrian show!

The name Syria formerly comprised the entire region of the Levant, while the modern state encompasses the site of several ancient kingdoms and empires, including the Eblan civilisation of the third millennium BC. In the Islamic era, its capital city, Damascus, was the seat of the Umayyad Empire and a provincial capital of the Mamluk Empire. Damascus now is widely regarded as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

**“COMING TO SYRIA IS
ALWAYS LIKE COMING
HOME”**

*Rob Jansen, International Course
Designer*

◀ *Abdullah Al Humaid, UAE*

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AL WAFAA FOR BASSEL AL ASSAD EVENT:

An event in itself with a colossal opening ceremony held in memory of a very passionate horseman, Bassel Hafez Al Assad, show jumping is currently a sport very much supported by the Syrian Equestrian Federation. The Arab League show jumping season consists of 11 events held in Egypt, Qatar, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and finally, Syria. Accumulation of points from participations at each show

will help Arab riders have the opportunity to participate at the World Cup. Al Wafaa alone hosts up to 300 riders with more than 150 horses. This year's 14th edition of Al Wafaa held outdoor Children Competitions and Jumping Challenge Competitions that would also help riders qualify for the FEI World Jumping Challenge. For the second successful year on the run, Dressage competitions were also held.

“AL WAFAA ALONE HOSTS UP TO 300 RIDERS WITH MORE THAN 150 HORSES”



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▲ *Dancers at the Opening Ceremony*

SAMIR DARWISH,

Former President of The Syrian Equestrian Federation & former Syrian National Team rider:

“Thirty years ago it was a dream for Syria to have a club such as Bassel Al Assad Shooting & Riding Club and it was also a dream for us to host such an event. Looking back, what I see today is really a dream come true. Syria has many equestrian facilities now although this club is the biggest due to the keen interest in developing its facilities.

Al Wafaa event always reminds us of the late Bassel Al Assad’s birthday; March 23rd. This is the 14th year the event is held and every year I think it becomes more international.

I first met the late Bassel when he was 8 years old. He was such a disciplined rider and if I choose a word to describe his

passion for riding, I would say he had a mania. He had loads of energy and I imagine his passion for the sport is what spread the sport in Syria. He was an engineer and he designed this club and supervised all the tiny details of this beautiful arena. Every time I come to this arena, I see Bassel in every corner; I see his charisma and his passion”.

“FROM ALL THE INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENTS I HAVE PARTICIPATED AT, THIS IS MY FAVOURITE TOURNAMENT AS IT IS VERY SPIRITUAL AND EXCITING”

Egypt's Daa Amr Bisheer

Al-Agghar indoor Arena ▶



© Jacques Toffi

▲ *Anwar Hnedi*

BASSEL AL ASSAD EQUESTRIAN CLUB:

Hosted at the Sheraton Hotel, riders and officials would have breakfast and head off to the club, located 30 minutes away from the capital Damascus. A short drive in from the gates would lead you to what would be thought of as initially a striking and well looked after flowery park! Step out of the car and to the right, see riders warming up with their horses in an outdoor warm up arena and just on the side a riders lounge where trainers and chatters are enjoying the cool breeze and sunny day over a cup of very sweet Syrian tea! Grooms running around and horses being bathed, 3 tiny terriers and Lassie the collie dog looking for some attention, and finally a familiar scene, Mr. Anwar Hnedi, the Syrian Equestrian Federation Show Jumping General Steward furious about riders who should be

attending their horses for the vet check but are not there, adds intrigue to the experience of being at the club.

Walk further and on the left, see the beautifully constructed outdoor grass arena that held the first outdoor competitions for Children and qualifications for the World Jumping Challenge. For a quick coffee or bite, enter the Damas Village, constructed right in the middle of the club where tasty and luscious sweets as well as authentic nibbles are available for a peckish stomach. Across from the Damas Village, a huge brass monument of the late Bassel Al Assad stands in front of the horse shoe designed doors of Al Wafaa indoor arena.



الهيئة العامة
للتنشيط الرياضي

Sheikh Shakhboot Al Nahayan, UAE



COMPETITIONS:

Sixteen participating countries competed at Al Wafaa: Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Iraq, Palestine, France, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, and Canada to overall total prize money of nearly 220,000 US dollars.

FRIDAY MARCH 20TH:

At noon, the first competitions of Al Wafaa kicked off with the Medium Tour of a Table C 125cm height with the UAE's Salem Al Suwaidi coming in 1st place, Jordan's Hani Besharat coming in 2nd, and the UAE's Sheikh Shakhboot Al Nahayan coming in 3rd. The tour saw a very startling crash by Syria's Firas Jneidi's horse and a somersault-like air flutter for Firas; attended to and only a swollen hand would not stop Firas from

competing again. Following the tour, an entertaining and very colourful opening ceremony kept a huge crowd captivated to the sounds and music of poetic Syrian harmonies. In the evening, a Big Tour competition over 2 phases Table A 135cm height was also held with Saudi Arabia's Abdullah Al Sharbatly coming in 1st, Syria's Shadi Ghrayeb coming in 2nd, and Kuwait's Ali Al Khorafi coming in 3rd.



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▲ Shadi Ghrayeb, Syria



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▲ Hani Besharat, Jordan



© Jacques Toffi

▲ Ali Al Khorafi, Kuwait



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▲ Salem Al Suwaidi, UAE

SATURDAY MARCH 21ST:

The second day of the event held the 1st FEI Children's International competition over 2 non-identical rounds. A rainy and very cold day made it very difficult for the children to jump clear with the slippery grass; luckily they jumped safely. More outdoor jumping with the 1st World Jumping Challenge Cat A. Simultaneously at the indoor arena, a Dressage Elementary event was in display won by Turkey's Erdoghan Altan and a Dressage Advanced event won by the Honourary President of the Syrian Equestrian Federation Manal Al Assad. Trailing Dressage, the afternoon held the Medium Tour which also shocked the crowd with a horse leg getting caught on one of the arena railings! Horse and rider make it out fine; the tour goes on with once again, the UAE's Salem Al Suwaidi coming in 1st and Abdullah Al Humaid coming in 2nd, and also from the UAE Rashid Al Rumaithi coming in 3rd. More riders from the UAE with the Big Tour 1st place going to Mohamed Al Hajri, 2nd place going to Syria's Wassim Anzarouti riding Katakrit Laganscho, and also 3rd place to Wassim riding Katakrit Cyberboy.

SUNDAY MARCH 22ND:

Held early in the morning, the 2nd FEI Children's International Competitions started without any rain delays and with Syria's Hadi Nizam coming in 1st, Iraq's Hamza Al Khawaf coming in 2nd, and also from Syria, Mohamed Al Jabri coming in 3rd. To end the morning session, the 2nd World Jumping Challenge Cat A and Cat B competitions

illustrated a display of very beautiful riding with CAT A wins going to the future Ludger Beerbaum Egypt's Nael Nassar 1st. Kuwait's Khaled Al Marzooq 2nd, and the UAE's Sheikh Ali Al Qasimi 3rd. CAT B wins went to Jordan's Taj Al Din Barkat 1st, Syria's Abdelwahab Mansour 2nd, and Syria's Mohamed Al Hayek 3rd. Also indoors, simultaneously during

the outdoor jumping, the second and final Dressage Elementary and Advanced competitions were commenced with Turkey's Sevilat Cetin Camur coming in 1st place and Syria's Hazar Sabouni coming in 2nd place at the Elementary class, and Syria's Manal Al Assad coming in 1st and Bassam Anzarouti coming in 2nd at the Advanced class.



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NAEL NASSAR:

"It feels very good to win and I was very pleased with my mare as she is very quick and hard to beat if she goes clear; thankfully she jumped well during both jumping challenges. The Syrian Federation did a great job to prepare the grass arena that I think met international FEI specifications. The warm up arena was very good as well; we had lots of space and many riders were practicing together".

"CAT A COMPETITIONS ILLUSTRATED BEAUTIFUL RIDING BY THE FUTURE LUDGER BEERBAUM EGYPT'S NAEL NASSAR"

◀ Mohamed Al Hayek, Syria
Sheikh Ali Al Qasimi, UAE ▶



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KARIM BADARO

*International Judge & Isjc
Regional Representative:*



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"I am here at the 14th Al Wafaa event as a show jumping judge and commentator. I am also here as a foreign judge for the Jumping Challenge Competition held outdoors.

Something that has to be said is that on annual basis the Syrian Organising Committee exerts a lot of effort in putting together this show to make it one of the top shows of the Arab League; I have been to 7 out of 10 events from the Arab League 2008/2009 season and Al Wafaa is one of the best organised events.

As for the Jumping Challenge Competitions, they are very important competitions because the best 2 riders from each country zone will go to the final of the FEI World Jumping Challenge. The results were very good given that this was the first time Syria holds a jumping challenge qualifying riders to the WJC.

On the children's competitions, they competed outdoors as well and I think it was a little difficult for them because it was raining and so the footing was a tad slippery. However since this is also the first time for such young competitions to be held, their results were quite good".

THE AFTERNOON SESSION started with a Medium Tour Accumulator with a Joker directly against the clock with the Saudi veteran rider Khalid Al Eid coming in 1st, Kuwait's Bandar Jumaah coming in 2nd, and also Saudi Arabia's Fares Al Shaalan coming in 3rd.

Afterwards a Big Tour Top Score Competition started with Khalid Al Eid also coming in 1st, Shadi Ghrayeb coming in 2nd, and Bandar Jumaah coming in 3rd. Finally, an Open Class 6 Bar competition kicked off with 130cm height and 19 riders

competing. Upping the fences to 145cm and then finally 160cm, the 1st place went to Abdullah Al Sharbatly and 2nd place shared by Egypt's all so graceful Daa Amr Bisheer and Syria's popular Wassim Anzarouti.

MONDAY MARCH 23RD, MINI GRAND PRIX & GRAND PRIX:

THE FINAL DAY of Al Wafaa event and as always, the beautiful indoor arena is packed with a huge crowd all coming to watch a display of very beautiful horses and poised riders. The Mini Grand Prix consisted of 1 round and 1 jump-off in case of equality for the 1st place in penalties at the height of 135cm. The national anthem of Egypt is heard with the 1st place win going to the young talent Nael Nassar, the 2nd place to Abdullah Al Sharbatly, and the 3rd place to Ali Al Khorafi.

IN AN EFFORT to promote Dressage in Syria, a demonstration completed by the Syrian Equestrian Federation's Dutch trainer was in display to a big crowd watching and learning about the disciplines of dressage. Freestyle Dressage also was performed to add to the atmosphere of the whole event.

AT THE HEIGHT OF 160cm and prize money of 20,000 US Dollars and a Range Rover, 20 Arab riders saddled up to compete at a very tight and intimidating arena full with a crowd of enthusiasts and Syrian supporters. Expectations and tension along with silence gave the atmosphere a very exhilarating feel. Red is the colour of the Syrian rider jackets and 5 Syrian riders were amongst the top list of competitors. First to jump clear was Syria's Mustafa Al Zindaki followed by a roar of cheering from the crowd. Firas Jneidi galloped in all nervous and tensed missing out on qualifying for the jump off and so did Yasir Sharif and Wassim Anzarouti. Heavy weight on the shoulders of the only Syrian rider remaining Shadi Ghrayeb who regrettably took a ghastly crash to a course on his horse Tyson, eliminated just to the crowd's dismay.

Four riders to the jump off: Saudi Arabia's Abdullah Al Sharbatly and Khalid Al Eid, the UAE's Sheikh Majed Al Qasimi, and finally Syria's Mustafa Al Zindaki.



▲ Syria's Wassim Anzarouti, 2nd place 6 Bar Competition



▲ Egypt's Nael Nassar, Mini Grand Prix winner



*Egypt's Daa Amr Bisheer,
2nd place 6 Bar Competition*



© Jacques Toffi

▲ Wassim Anzarouti riding Cyberboy

▼ Rakhshan Radpour, Iran

RAKSHAN RADPOUR

International Course Designer:

What can you tell us about the footing of the indoor arena?

The footing was done perfectly.

Is the footing a contributing factor in making the event a success?

Definitely. Good footing helps the horses jump better and safer.

What kind of challenges did you face when designing the courses for Al Wafaa 2009 event?

We did not have all the top horses and riders from all the Arab league countries, but at the same time we had to design the courses to match the standards of a 4 star show and so I think creating a balance between these two factors was not very easy. Having said so, I think the result of the Grand Prix was perfect.



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“WHAT IS NICE ABOUT COURSE DESIGNING IS THAT EVERY COURSE DESIGNER HAS HIS OWN IDEAS AND IMPLEMENTS THEM ACCORDING TO THE ARENA AT HAND”

What can you tell us about the technicalities of the courses?

A I Wafaa indoor arena is a tricky arena for the horses and riders who are usually accustomed to mostly jumping outdoors. The Grand Prix was quite exciting because riders had to jump in front of a crowd of 6,000! But I believe it was enough what we asked from the riders and horses. The courses during the final day were not too big, but were somehow technical. I believe the courses were fair for the combination of riders and horses. The result for Mini Grand Prix and the Grand Prix was an almost perfect 20-25% of the total riders who participated in the class; clear rounds are what we are normally looking for. During the first day, we designed a Table C which I really don't like to start the show with because it is

purely a speed class which had a lot of turns. I then decided to design a forward course with a few options like a Table A against the clock. What is nice about course designing is that every course designer has his own ideas and implements them according to the arena at hand. I myself live to design twisty Table C courses full of options especially in outdoor arenas. On the second day, the 6 Bar Class, and because the arena is too small for the first round, we had 2 fences in one side of the arena and 4 fences in the middle which is normally implemented in many shows. However that did not appeal to the judges hence we put only 4 fences in the middle of the arena. Finally, during the third and final day of the event, I believe I gave a lot of options (in and out turns) for the accumulator which by nature is a speed class.

▼ *Ali Al Khorafi, Kuwait*



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We have seen a lot of falls and crashes to the fences; were the courses designed to trick the horses or the riders?

In the Arab league we have a mixture of top and medium riders but because of the high level of the show we couldn't build courses for average level riders and so in this case, during all leagues you see some falls or crashes. It is like in the Olympic Games; you have riders from all over the world with different levels. Although many of the riders were qualified before the event, those courses were built for the top ones! Sometimes you can not avoid having falls or crashes, we are not magicians!

AFTER EVERY CLEAR ROUND, music tracks would be played as a cheering factor for the rider. The jump off; Mustafa Al Zindaki with a containment





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of nerves jumped clear with no time faults. Jumping clear and taking unexpected twisty turns, the Olympic Bronze medallist and all so elegant and balanced Khalid Al Eid riding Al Riyad made it in 43 seconds. Following Khalid came in the all so determined Abdullah Al Sharbatly riding Quebeq with all the bets on his astounding horse. Silence and Abdullah riding quickly at 38 seconds...ready to jump the final fence. A music track was played loudly to shock the audience as well as Abdullah. With loss of concentration, Quebeq refuses the final fence. Seconds are passing and Abdullah had to jump the final fence clear just to make it in time for a 3rd place win. With the huge upset and the disappointment of the technical music mistake, Mustafa Al Zindaki showed chivalrous behaviour by passing up his 2nd place win to Abdullah Al Sharbatly.



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ABDULLAH AL SHARBATLY

3rd place winner of Bassel Al Assad Grand Prix:

“The courses were quite tricky and the riders who made it to the Grand Prix jump off had quick horses. It was so tight because Khalid Al Eid jumped clear in 43 seconds and Mustafa Al Zindaki was a few seconds behind and I had to beat those times. With the musical technical mistake that arose, my

horse refused the last fence and so I made it some seconds after Mustafa and I am very happy with my 3rd place win. The technical mistake was unfortunate, and Mustafa was kind enough to pass up his win, but I could not accept it. I came in 3rd and it was not meant to be that I come in 1st or 2nd, so I am happy to be 3rd”.



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MUSTAFA AL ZINDAKI

2nd place winner of Bassel Al Assad Grand Prix:

“I am so happy I came in 2nd! I just hope next year a Syrian rider will manage to hold the Bassel Al Assad trophy! Still, this is such a huge achievement for Syria and for myself! It is a very difficult competition and the courses were quite tricky, and we Syrian riders are continuously under pressure due to the high expectations. Nevertheless I tried to contain my nerves as much as I could and I am thrilled to be at such a position, giving back a little to the efforts that were exerted by Mrs. Manal Al Assad to develop show jumping in Syria through her emotional support and to the federation through its financial and horse support”.



KHALID AL EID

*1st place winner of Bassel Al Assad
Grand Prix:*

“This tournament holds a very special place in all our hearts and every single participating rider tries his utmost best to compete, yet even win the Bassel Al Assad trophy. Whilst growing up I used to hear about this show and I always love to compete here. Competition levels are very high and to compete here is technically crucial because we all receive points that will help us qualify for the World Cup. Moreover, every year this show has a different winner which builds up eagerness to attend, compete, and try to win the title.

This arena and this crowd is what makes this tournament so special. Sigh... the crowd gets excited and so do the horses. Tension and expectations are always in the air which makes the atmosphere simply so electrifying. The courses during the Grand Prix were not too big but were very technical; I was lucky to have a very experienced horse and the distances between fences were short which were good for him and so the course plus the horse were put together to simply make me lucky to win the Bassel Al Assad trophy”.



MANAL AL ASSAD

Honourary President of the Syrian Equestrian Federation:

Can you give us a brief history about Al Wafaa?

When Al Wafaa was first held in 1996, it had a special place in all Syrian hearts and minds because it was held on Bassel's birthday, and so as Syrians we honour him through Al Wafaa. Just like everything in life, Al Wafaa started small and grew bigger year after year until it became one of the most important events in the region.

What sort of challenges does the federation face in order to prepare for Al Wafaa?

The Syrian federation with the Organising Committee puts a lot of effort in order to host and organise

such a big event. Our staff works together every year in order to put everything in its place, and this begins at least 3 to 4 months prior to the event so as to get sponsors to cover the expenses of the show and the prize money since it is a 4 star show; this would need a big amount of prizes and heavy organising. With all the details within the show, it requires hard work to keep Al Wafaa on the same high level each year.

What can you tell us about the organisation of Al Wafaa?

It is a pleasure for every Syrian to be involved in this great show. Organising Al Wafaa became a part of our lives and, it is actually taking a great part in



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▲ 1st place Dressage Advanced Class winner, Manal Al Assad riding Sir Shoelling

our lives. The most important issue about organising this show is to see, feel and make sure all guests are happy and satisfied.

What sort of pressure do you face as an Honorary President for the federation and as a dressage rider?

As long as you have a great committed team that knows exactly what to do and when, it is no pressure at all. As a dressage rider I always want to do my best in the show and put everything that I have learned and trained in the ring to know the level that I have reached.

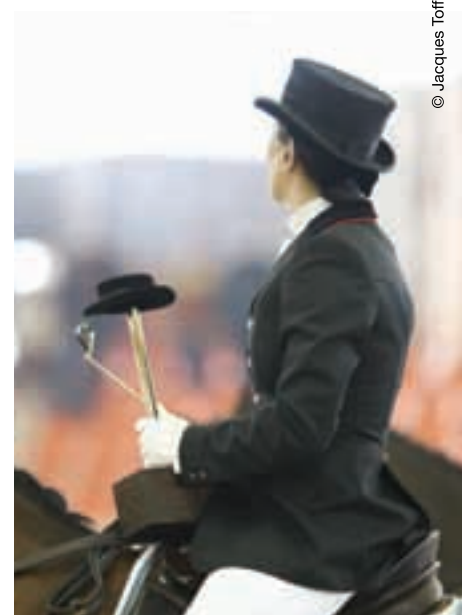
This is the second year dressage competitions were held within Al

Wafaa event; what sorts of measures are taken in order to have dressage continue and develop in Syria?

The Syrian Equestrian Federation's plan is to have more clinics for dressage in order to introduce this beautiful sport to as many riders as possible, so I am sure it will grow bigger year after year.

The demonstration of freestyle dressage on the last day of the event was very educational. How did the idea for that come about?

It was to explain to the big crowd what dressage is all about; it is an art, and music always attracts people; therefore, we thought it was a productive idea to combine the two together.



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Turkey's Sevilat
Cetin Camur, 1st
place Dressage
Elementary Class
winner

What was required to prepare for the beautiful outdoor grass arena and how difficult was it to host children riders this year as well as hold a challenge event?

During the annual Al Wafaa show, children competitions were always hosted. The children's class was thought of as an incentive for Syrian children because they had to participate and compete with foreign riders, and that motivated them to train harder the whole year around. The challenge I think was a very good idea for the youngsters within the region to have a chance to qualify to the FEI World Jumping Challenge final. Moreover we have the facilities to have more than one show at a time so why not do it!

What can you tell us about the competition levels of show jumping during the medium and big tours this year?

The levels were quite competitive and our riders did a good job and were placed every single day of the show. It was very nice to see that after training so hard every day, they were harvested with good results.

Numerous riders mention that one of the main reasons for participating at Al Wafaa is because it is very spiritual and the quintessence of the late Bassel Al Assad is in the air; what are your comments to that?

As Syrian riders we always feel that the soul of Bassel is around us and it is really nice to know that even other foreign riders share the same feeling. Wherever you move in the club, there is always something that reminds us of his presence, the indoor arena is named after his favourite horse Al-Agharr, his club house with all his personal belongings are still there, and the whole club is named after him. We are very proud of him; he made horse riding in Syria what it is today.

Congratulations for Syria's Silver! How did Mustafa Al Zindaki prepare for this year's event and what can you tell us about his horse NCG Catino?

Mustafa is a hard working rider. He is talented, with a good eye and a good feeling and above all, he has such a good heart and character. I think for a rider with all these qualities, he deserves to win the silver. We were all surprised by the performance of NCG Catino, because he was bought as a 140cm horse, but with the trust and belief of his rider he managed to jump the 150-160cm class easily; this I think is an achievement to be proud of. As for me, I predict a bright future with many more golds and silvers for this unique Syrian rider. **HT**



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▲ *Manal Al Assad with Children Champions*

▼ *Mustafa Al Zindaki exhilarated with his 2nd place win*



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