



HRH PRINCESS HAYA AL HUSSEIN... HAS A SAY

By Ina El Kobbia, *Germany*

ELECTED 13TH PRESIDENT OF THE FEI IN MAY 2006, SHE COMMITTED HERSELF TO THE MODERNISATION OF AN ORGANISATION THAT HAD COME INTO CRISIS LONG BEFORE. SHE HAS CARVED OUT A HIGHER PROFILE FOR THE FEI PRESIDENCY THAN ANY OF HER PREDECESSORS AND HAS WORKED HARD IN HER ROLE TO ENSURE THE GLOBAL REACH OF EQUESTRIAN SPORT - YET HER PRESIDENCY HAS NOT BEEN FREE FROM CRITICISM. IN NOVEMBER THIS YEAR THE EQUESTRIAN WORLD WILL VOTE FOR A NEW PRESIDENT WITH PRINCESS HAYA BINT AL HUSSEIN ANNOUNCING HER INTENTION TO RUN FOR A SECOND TERM, AND WHILST BEING CHALLENGED BY TWO EUROPEAN CANDIDATES: THE CURRENT FEI VICE PRESIDENT, SWEDEN'S SVEN HOLMBERG AND THE NETHERLAND'S HENK ROTTINGHUIS. THIS IS AN EXCLUSIVE HORSE TIMES MAGAZINE INTERVIEW WITH HRH THE PRINCESS IN VIEW OF THE UPCOMING FEI ELECTIONS



▲ Princess Haya relaxes with her 14 year old gelding, Olanar. Newmarket, Summer 2010

Your Royal Highness, when I see you in the international circuit, I cannot but think of your late father King Hussein of Jordan, one of the world's greatest politicians who made history and is deeply missed in the Middle East. May God bless his soul.

Remembering the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany, hearts and minds went out to you from all sides: the public, the riders, the officials and the media. To those especially from the Middle East, you have been a delightful and radiant representative of the Arab World and one which has made us proud as the first ever elected Arab FEI President. Looking back, how would you describe the past years being in this position? Moreover, what were your happiest and your saddest moments, in addition to your greatest challenges during your term so far?

You are so kind. I have truly loved this job, and it has been such a great

privilege to serve the sport that has given me so much over the years.

There were some magical events, such as the World Equestrian Games in Aachen in 2006, which I will hold close to my heart forever. And those events were a wonderful reminder of what this job is about; serving our wonderful sport.

There were so many gratifying moments behind the scenes, too; moments where all of the hard work came together and contributed to an outcome that would serve the future of our sport. There was the day that the FEI Statutes were modified to better suit the organisation's current need. There were milestones in reducing the turnaround time in testing, and there was the point at which the Athletes' Commission became a reality and I knew that finally, our Athletes had a formalised voice within our organisation. There were the fantastic moments when HSBC and Meydan signed on as sponsors and we were just thrilled to see all of the work we'd put into elevating the sport and increasing

its commercial potential bear fruit. And recently, I was thrilled when the Development Task Force, something that had been in the pipeline for four years, became a reality. There were so many more moments; big and small victories - too many really to mention.

I think the common thread is that the most gratifying points were those in which, having traversed some often difficult decisions and issues, we began to see green shoots of the future appearing and starting to flourish. I have taken most satisfaction from those moments in which the future of our sport has felt brighter than ever before.

The challenges have really all been about growing pains. Change is never easy, but I knew that when I took the job; I knew that the FEI needed a leader who could be an ambassador for the sport on the global stage and at the top tables of international sport, but it also needed a leader with the strength of their convictions, someone with a thick skin who could

stand firm and always ensure that the sport's best interests, rather than those of any one region or discipline, remained at the heart of decisions.

There have been learnings along the way, and I'm human; so of course there are things which, with the benefit of hindsight, I might have done differently, but I believe we have come such a long way and truly, I have loved the job; the highs have really outweighed the lows and even the difficult times have mostly been about forging a way forward.

How free have you really been in your decision taking; meaning how far were you bound by the given facts of an institution like the FEI?

Our International Federation, like most others, has strict rules and regulations and checks and balances in its Statutes. No one person can act alone in the FEI – certainly not as President – decisions are made with Vice Presidents, the Executive Board, Bureau and Secretary General.

I recall that during international press conferences, especially those at the beginning of your term, you were often enough confronted with questions about how open the Arab society generally was, particularly towards women and women riders. To which extent, your Royal Highness, has the fact of being an Arab woman made action and decision taking in your work as President of an international body difficult for you, with regard to either side, the Western and the Arab World?

When you take up a post like the Presidency of an International Governing Body, you must give up your own personal identity and lineage. In order to make decisions in the best interest of the Federation, and the Sport, both the fact that I am a woman and that I am Arab had to be put aside. I earned the job because of credentials, and those credentials were the tools I promised to use and have used in my time as President. Certainly there was interest in my heritage and background, especially when I was new to the job, but if the fact that I was an Arab woman had

come into play in any way when it came to actually doing the job, I would feel that I had definitely failed.

Did you feel you were able to have an impact on how the Arab society is being viewed in the world?

I am very proud to be an Arab woman, but also, and most importantly in this role, I am someone who wants to give back something to a sport that has given me so many wonderful experiences. In order to make decisions in the best interest of the Federation, and equestrian sport, the fact that I am a woman and that I am Arab really had to be put aside. I wanted to put my heart and soul into working to the advantage of our sport. And there was so much work to be done, that you couldn't achieve anything at all if you spent the entire time worrying about who you are. It's what you achieve that makes the

difference and I would rather that people remember my achievements than my gender or origin – but if in some small way, any of my work, either for the FEI or elsewhere, has had a positive impact on perceptions of Arab society, that would be a wonderful by-product and certainly I am very proud of my heritage.

One of your first announcements as FEI President was the insertion of Para Equestrian into the FEI family; meaning that Para Equestrian forms part of the regular equestrian sport and is no longer isolated. The World Equestrian Games in Kentucky this year will be the first to prove this new decision. It is undoubtedly a great achievement for disabled riders and their teams. Will and can the FEI at all play a role model here and take influence in order to allow Para sport in general to become part of the regular Olympic Games?

▼ *Princess Haya speaks at the opening ceremony of the 2010 Sport Accord International Convention, a 5-day gathering of 1,500 leading representatives from international sport. Dubai, April 2010*



The Paralympic Committee stands alongside the Olympic Committee; the two operate side by side as part of one family, sharing the same values and goals; they work in wonderful harmony. With that said, one of the things we are very proud of at the FEI is that we're one of the only International Federations that regulates able-bodied and disabled athletes under the same umbrella. No disabled athlete feels that they are any different from able-bodied athletes and as an International Federation, we treat all of our athletes the same.

The FEI has been strongly criticised for its doping and medication regulations, issued after the General Assembly in Copenhagen, especially by big European Federations. Criticism at first has gone so far to some calling it the end to equestrian sport. The FEI has partly reacted already by implementing sharper rules. Yet, the controversies in this important area have not been completely overcome and overshadow the clean sport campaign. How would you meet this criticism?

The FEI took a clear and unequivocal stance against doping when the General Assembly approved the new Equine Anti-Doping and Controlled Medication Regulations and the Clean Sport recommendations by a 95-5 vote last November. No-one in our sport publicly advocates the use of performance enhancing drugs.

We are unique in the Olympic Movement in that we have human and animal athletes. That greatly complicates our task. There is strong disagreement over non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). We have to rely on science to tell us whether NSAIDs can provide therapeutic benefit for horses without enhancing their performance or putting them at risk of injury. However, this is a debate that cannot be viewed purely from a scientific perspective; ethical values and legal issues also have to be taken into account.

We have certainly made strides in the right direction against doping, but we do not have the clarity we need on

prohibited substances or complete agreement on the proper procedures to detect and punish violators.

Doping is always going to be a sensitive, complex and difficult issue. So many opinions exist about what constitutes doping and what constitutes medication. It is precisely because of these differences that it is important for us to examine and, ultimately, agree on the best way forward for the sport. I cannot force agreement on this issue. We have to work together in a calm and rational way to forge a consensus based on science and common sense, and I am hopeful that the recent NSAID Congress in Lausanne created a bridge towards exactly that.

Your Royal Highness, we all expect you to run for a second presidential term; what measures are you taking to potentially ensure the success of your second run?

I know that, ultimately, the National Federations will judge me on my performance, not my rhetoric. So the most important thing for me to do in the lead-up to the General Assembly in November is to continue to give my all to the job at hand. But I also know that it is important to bring the same amount of energy, enthusiasm, passion and ideas to a re-election campaign as it was to have those qualities in my first campaign. I am developing specific policy proposals by soliciting suggestions and ideas from National Federations, athletes and other stakeholders. I am carefully considering those views, as well as the lessons learned in my first term, to develop a detailed plan to collaboratively build on the progress made over the past four years.

If I am re-elected, my second term will focus on consolidating the progress made over the past four years while bringing more unity to the FEI. I recognise that, following periods of significant change, you need to allow time for everyone to take a breath, consolidate the gains and allow the dust to settle. I am very aware that new systems and procedures need time to percolate and become routine. New approaches aren't embraced by all overnight.

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Maintaining unity is critically important for the survival of our sport. We have to stick together to remain valued members of the Olympic Family and to meet the many challenges facing our Federation and equestrian sport. Together, we can build on the progress we have made.

What are your hopes and wishes for the international horse sport?

I still dream of seeing our sport return to the top 10 international sports, and that vision drives many of the policy proposals that I have for the development and growth of our sport. I feel so strongly that it is important for us to reach for the stars, and the fact that horse sport was once a prime-time sport tells me that it could one day be that again.

In terms of milestone goals, over the coming 12 months I would like to see a Framework for Development as an output from the Development Task Force, and a five-year plan.

I would also like to see a solid commercial transformation, moving from sponsorship packages to partnerships, and I would like to see the restructuring process through, with athlete representation on the board.

From a longer-term perspective, over the next four years I would like to see a period of calm, marked by the consolidation of the structures and programmes that we have already put in place. 

Princess Haya speaks at the 78th OIE (World Organization for Animal Health) General Assembly, calling for a more rational approach to international trade requirements for the transportation of competition horses. Paris, May 2010

