MAISA ALSAIDI

EQUINE LAW BEYOND THE HANDSHAKE

TODAY, WE ARE EXCITED TO MEET AND INTERVIEW A PROMINENT LEGAL PROFESSIONAL WITH A UNIQUE NICHE PRACTICE SO IMPORTANT TO OUR EQUINE INDUSTRY. PLEASE MEET MAISA ALSAIDI, FOUNDER AND MANAGING PARTNER OF EQUEST LAW LEGAL CONSULTANTS IN ABU DHABI GLOBAL MARKET, THE FIRST FIRM IN THE MIDDLE EAST SPECIALIZING IN LEGAL SERVICES FOR EQUESTRIANS, PROFESSIONALS, FEDERATIONS, AND BUSINESSES IN THE EQUINE INDUSTRY. SHE HAS REPRESENTED MULTIPLE INDIVIDUALS, FIRMS, AND FEDERATIONS IN THIS SPECIALIZED FIELD, WHETHER IN DISPUTE RESOLUTION OR IN EQUINE BUSINESS, COMMITTEE FORMATION, AND CORPORATE STRUCTURING, INCLUDING HELPING THE EQUINE INDUSTRY FORMALISE THEIR RELATIONSHIPS FROM SIMPLE HANDSHAKES TO DOCUMENTED AGREEMENTS AND TRANSACTIONS.

WITH OVER 15 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, MAISA HAS BROKEN NEW GROUND AS A PIONEER IN SPORTS, MEDIA, ENTERTAINMENT, AND EQUINE LAW ACROSS THE UAE AND THE MIDDLE EAST.

Welcome, Maisa. As a lawyer and horsewoman myself, I am fascinated by your career focus on sport, and equine sport in particular. How did you come to specialise in this area? What inspired you?

I came to specialise in Equine Law after I saw a rising demand from the equine industry for more formalised relationships in terms of dealings, whether at an athlete level, management level, or even in business, horse sales, and horse management. The need always arises when disputes in a certain industry rise to a level where you need an expert legal advisor in this field, either to try to resolve the matter between the parties involved or to handle it through litigation, either in court or arbitration.

Having horses myself and having my son, Fares Azouni, compete at a top showjumping level, in addition to attending shows in both the Middle East and Europe, inspired me to start my specialty in Equine Law.

In the Equine Industry, in addition to being an experienced lawyer, you need to understand the horses, the industry, and the parties involved to be able to provide comprehensive legal advice.

Have you always had an interest in horses?

Yes, horses are family to me. I started to have my own horses after my son got involved in the sport. To have horses in your life is a blessing, and to treat them well is another blessing.

Where did you start your career arc?

I started my career in the United Arab Emirates, where I worked in multiple international firms and media houses as a legal consultant until I established my own firm seven years ago.

What types of services do your firms provide to equestrian clients?

We specialise in Sports Law, mainly Equestrian. We also specialise in media, corporate, real estate, and wealth planning.

What are the most common disputes or legal matters your firm handles on a day-to-day basis?

We handle agreement drafting and negotiations, whether related to sports, media, corporate, or real estate. We also handle dispute settlement and litigation at all levels.

What's the most important piece of advice that you would give to someone considering buying a horse?

For buying a horse, there is always a process that all equestrians in practice follow, starting from a horse trial, to conducting the pre-purchase exam by a certified vet, and continuing to invoice and payment. We advise always having a sale and purchase agreement in place, as it will add the most necessary terms in relation to the purpose of purchase, warranties, handover, taxes (on cross-border transactions), shipping, delivery, and the specific date when the buyer and seller each assume liability. We understand that the market practice for buying a horse is going through invoice and payment without agreements, but we can see the rising number of disputes in relation to matters that were not disclosed by the seller and the level expected from the horse. If you do a sale and purchase agreement, you have to mention the purpose for which the horse is purchased. If the horse is supposed to be at Grand Prix level, then this should be mentioned in the agreement. If after the sale the horse is at a much lower level because of reasons that were not disclosed by the seller, then this could be a reason for a dispute between the buyer and seller.

What are the most critical legal risks when conducting remote or online horse sales in the Gulf region?

The number of online remote sales is growing in the region, especially when there are reasons affecting the buyer's travel plans, such as pandemics or regional political conflicts affecting travel. These circumstances and others sometimes prevent the buyer from traveling, and so they rely on remote purchase. Unfortunately, these buyers rely completely on videos and pre-purchase exams conducted by a vet. Most of these buyers are first-time buyers, and they are victims of fraud. After the horse is transported to the buyer, the horse does not perform at the same level seen in the video. Additionally, sometimes another horse is shipped to the buyer - not even the horse that was in the video. We see these cases a lot in purchases of ponies. Other cases involve the height difference between the horse and pony. We also have cases related to online auctions and embryo sales.

We know that you are very dedicated to youth sport development. Please tell us about your youth sport development initiative.

I truly like to focus on youth in equestrian sport, as they are the next generation and the reason for this sport to continue in all disciplines.

Having experience in horse management, athlete management and attending shows all around the world made me understand the current issues faced by our youth equestrians today.

We appreciate the role that the FEI is doing to support the youth. On the other hand, there is a lot to be done to support the next generation of equestrians.

We are a group of private individuals who are passionate about the sport and at the same time would like to address the current issues faced by youth in equestrian sports from the ages of 16 to 21, trying

to find the basis to support them educationally and financially. At a certain level, we are trying to support in various ways after certain assessments are made of certain athletes who demonstrate horse love and understand horse welfare; both are key components to the selection of youth who will represent our initiative. There will be education and financial support to certain athletes to be able to spread our initiative.

What are your wishes for the future?

Every athlete has a dream; every team has a dream, and every nation has a dream. In the steps toward achieving our goals and dreams, we should hear our horse, feel the horse, and work with the horse not against him. Your horse is giving all his heart and energy to make you achieve your goals. We have always to remember throughout our journey that horse welfare is always a priority.

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