

# PERISCOPE ON ANDRE SAKAKINI

Date of Birth: May 23rd 1957  
Country: Egypt

By Nada H. Abdelmoniem



© Jacques Toffi

## Andre Sakakini:

He is a fan of romantic Italian music and of Italian actress Monica Bellucci! But who wouldn't be? She is gorgeous. He is a professional rider since the age of 10 who is always driven by talent, ambition, and persistence; he is a perfectionist. He is a criticised veteran rider that has achieved numerous goals, yet wants to achieve more. When watching him ride, you distinguish style, and when hearing him speak, you find it hard to tell if he is angry or calm because of his consistent tone of voice. Until you hear him laughing...and then, that is a different Andre Sakakini...

## What can you tell us about riding and how you feel about horses?

A horse is an animal that I love and grew up with. It has been years now and I cannot find a way to detach myself from them. I do not however drain myself like I used to before; it was rather hectic training and riding all the time, especially when I rode in Europe. These days I limit myself to a horse or 2 that I love; I ride, compete, and try to achieve. It is a big goal for me to win; it is the biggest actually and that is why I keep going. I cherish to keep my level of riding consistent. I do not ride as hectically as before since I live amongst my family here in Egypt and would like to make time for them.

## How did your passion start?

When I was a child I used to watch

veteran riders who were very much the source of my inspiration. To name a few, Gen. Gamal Harris, Gen. Selim Zaki, and Abarry Hammad. I started in 1966 in the Sporting Club in Alexandria and I gradually moved my life into a career of a professional rider, I left to Europe and stayed in Germany practicing for 23 years.

## Besides your numerous past achievements that, touch wood, would need pages to be listed, what are your latest achievements?

I just participated in the Arab League's CSI\*\*\* Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Qatar; I won 4 classes and came in 2<sup>nd</sup> during the Sharjah Grand Prix. I rode and stayed with young horses one of which is 'Miss Coreland', a mare owned by Mohamed Mansour, and 'Hope' also owned by Mohamed Mansour. 'Hope' was a good horse which Mohamed asked me to try out. I so believed in him; he is so excellent now and very much created into a Grand Prix horse. I did not go shopping in Europe...all the good horses I found here in Egypt; they came to me! I started with 'Miss Coreland' in June 2008 and she won her first Grand Prix in Germany which was surprising! She also won another 3 classes in Europe. She is really good, making her total wins to 8 since just last June.

## What do you do to familiarise yourself with a horse?

“A HORSE IS AN ANIMAL THAT I LOVE AND GREW UP WITH. IT HAS BEEN YEARS NOW AND I CANNOT FIND A WAY TO DETACH MYSELF FROM THEM”



I must say that this is a gift God gave me. It has to be a given to be able to accommodate oneself and win with a new horse. 'Miss Coreland' is not an easy horse but I still managed to find a way to familiarise myself with her and we got along very well from the start.

**You are a rider, but also a trainer at present; does your way of seeing things differ now?**

Things do not differ that much. Riding is riding and so is training. At the end of the day it is a sport; however I always come back and say that this sport in specific is a sport of many details. One can never disregard that and as a trainer, I think in order for a rider to achieve, he should always be attentive to those details. As a trainer, I admit that I am demanding because I like perfection... '85. which is maybe what has made me become successful since I am very conscientious to all sorts of riding details. I always expect my trainees to be the same. I do not expect results in 3 to 4 months, but in 3 to 4 years, and at the end, I create a real rider. It is not just about winning, it is about being able to school for example, to look professional in the ring.

**Do your trainees adapt well to your demanding expectations?**

In 2008 I trained the Army Club riders for a whole year and their results in the National Championships really speak for themselves. We came in 1st, 2nd

and 3rd in both A-Levels. The riders from the Army are talented but were missing some basics which I tried to help them with. They responded very well to my methods, and I am very pleased with the results we all achieved together. At the moment, I myself am competing again and do not have much time on my hand to train. I currently only have 2 trainees and one of them is Mohamed Mansour, a recreational rider and a business man who also does not have much time.

However we try our best to produce the best out of the situation without 110% dedication. I took riding as a career and Mohamed is taking it as a hobby and a passion. He has adapted to my methods and has improved very much and is achieving good results. We still have a thorough programme ahead of us though, but we will keep going until we achieve what we want. He is very efficient which is what counts.

**For many years you have been riding for Egypt, but now you are riding for another country. What are your affiliations as a rider?**

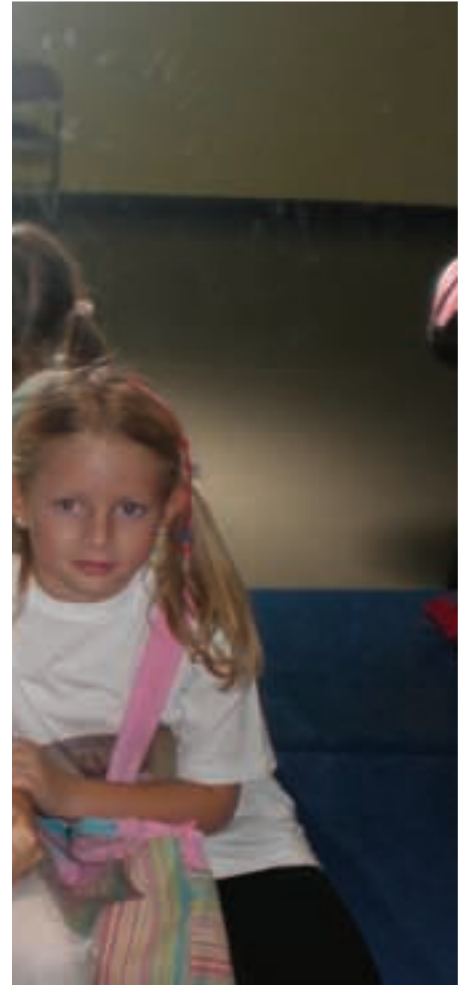
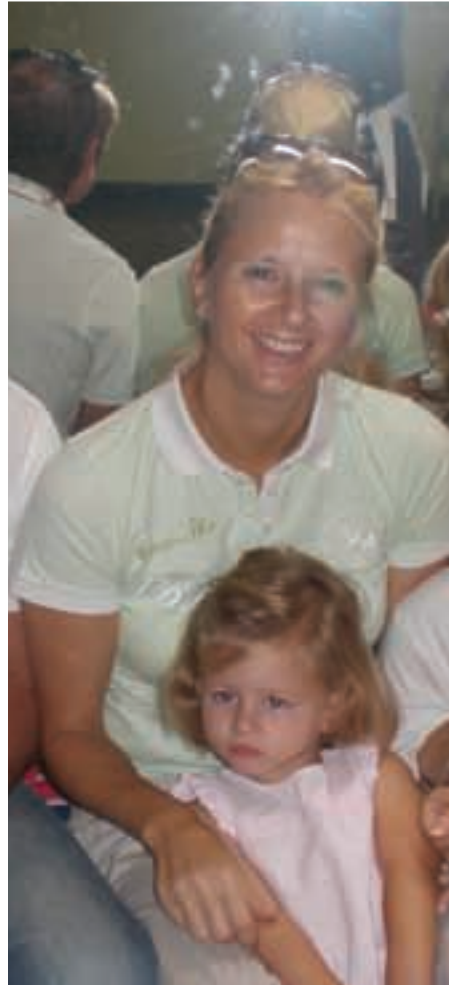
My affiliations are for riding. I have had problems with the Egyptian Equestrian Federation and for the past 3 years I have been riding for Italy. The Italian Federation treats me well and I think I will stick to what treats me well. My career as a rider has not changed and I am still the same old Andre. I just think it is a shame for Egypt because all the

▲ Andre & Mia

**“MY CAREER AS A RIDER HAS NOT CHANGED AND I AM STILL THE SAME OLD ANDRE”**







wins that I have achieved could have been associated to the country I was born in; Egypt...my country. But now they will be affiliated to Italy. No harm done however...I am still here and I still keep on going.

**You are being criticised for being an Egyptian riding for Italy, what are your comments to that?**

I did not leave to Italy, it's Egypt that sent me away. Egypt does not want Andre Sakakini anymore but I want and have to continue my career, or should I stop riding? Italy accepted me and is very happy with my representing it which I am very thankful for because in a very weak moment of my life, Egypt jolted me out, and another country took me in. I owe them a lot and I have to deliver.

**How do you think people are criticising you?**

People are entitled to do what pleases them, but they "should" not criticise me. Regardless of the technicalities and reasons behind this issue of my representing Italy now, I did not drop Egypt. I was dropped. This happened at the peak of my career and I think it was wrong to happen, nevertheless, I have to continue my passion.

**What can you tell us about your family?**

I am a father of 3 lovely daughters; Mia who is 25 and lives in Rome, Lara who is 7, and little 3 year old Emily. They are lovely! I do not push them to ride, but if they want to establish a riding career, I would love to see them doing it well, and not just doing it because they are the Sakakini girls. They have to want to do it and I will encourage them. Lara rides ponies, and she travels to riding camps in Germany often; if she wants to continue, I would encourage her.

**Besides Andre Sakakini as a show jumper, a demanding trainer, and a father, what is there that is more to Andre as a normal individual, than meets the eye?**

I love water skiing and I am an avid lover of Formula 1 (smiling). I met Formula 1 drivers Joel Schumacher and Fernando Alonso and I was very thrilled!! I was invited to meet them when they were once playing football in Monza, Italy, promoting charity for a Cancer Institute, and I was very impressed. If I could define the word professional, I would say these Formula 1 drivers: they are unbelievably efficient and are one-track minded about their jobs. Schumacher is exceptional, was

always a talent and a genius, and very admirable. I love football too and in general I like good sport; I would never miss the European Championships! I hate to cook (laughing). I was never a big eater and I am still not. I have always been very self-conscience about my weight and figure because of the sport hence I never gave much to neither food nor cooking. I eat light and that's all. What else about Andre? I love Italian music because I think it is very romantic and beautiful. In Egypt I love Amr Diab and all his songs. He is not a super and original talent, but his songs are very nice. I am also a fan of Monica Bellucci! And I know what my star sign is! I am a Taurus!

**If you had the chance to change something about Andre Sakakani, what would you change?**

I always ask myself this question, and I think if I had the chance to change something, I would actually start my life all over again, and not change something about it. I have been a happy man and what has only been hurting me for the past couple of years is this issue of my not representing Egypt anymore. It was hurtful and hard to go through the whole experience but I have moved on noW. I am fine again. **HT**