



SAMIR ABDEL FATAH

INSIGHTS

By Khaled Assem

ENGINEER SAMIR ABDEL FATAH IS THE CHEF D'ÉQUIPE OF THE NATIONAL EGYPTIAN SHOW JUMPING TEAM. HE WAS A VERY SUCCESSFUL RIDER DURING HIS OWN TIME AND LIVED IN YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND, FOR 20 YEARS. HE WAS ALSO THE OWNER OF ONE OF THE HORSES MICHAEL WHITAKER RODE AT THE 1984 OLYMPIC GAMES, AMANDA, AND HAS BEEN DEEPLY INVOLVED IN THE SHOW JUMPING FIELD. HE IS AN OLDER BROTHER AND A MENTOR TO A WIDE FIELD OF RIDERS IN EGYPT; SHARP, WITTY, VERY EXPERIENCED AND CAPABLE TO TAKE ON THE JOB OF TRAINING THE EGYPTIAN TEAM, WHICH IS QUITE THE CHALLENGE. ENGINEER SAMIR GIVES HORSE TIMES HIS INSIGHTS ON THE BANNING OF HORSES TRAVELLING IN AND OUT OF EGYPT, EGYPTIAN SHOW JUMPING RIDERS, AS WELL AS THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION WITH THE EGYPTIAN EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION.

What is happening in Egypt regarding the banning of horses travelling in and out of the country?

As far as I know, and even though I do not possess any documentation to back what I will say, although I was in a position to listen to opinions from various sides, I came to the conclusion that, unlike in Syria where there is a horse disease, the problem in Egypt is more administrative. European Commission in Dublin was made aware of some discrepancies when horses entered Europe with health certificates that indicated the presence of an influenza or vaccination containing a banned substance. As such, it was brought to the attention of the Commission that they ought to visit Egypt in order to inspect the quarantine regulation and implementation altogether. They came in May 2010 and tried to coordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture on how to control that matter. The group were shown many locations and parts of

various stables existing within various clubs which they found unacceptable. Eventually, they went back to the concerned authorities in Europe while providing a directive stating that regulations should be strictly followed in Egypt. It's clearly an administrative issue; it should be done, followed up upon and completed. But who is accountable for such implementation? Nobody knows.

To my knowledge there are now two problems: the administrative part and the vaccination issue. It is said that Egyptian Arabian horse breeders are also not allowed to export their horses even though the quarantine process is completed in the Egyptian Agricultural Organisation which is a different entity from the Equestrian Federation. Does this mean that Egypt is banned for quite some time? Some say indefinitely; not just upon completion of the paper work and inspection parties coming in.

All I know is that they used the wrong vaccine. This should not have happened and this should not happen again. I have not heard of the banning being indefinite. However, if it's going to be for a certain number of months, and it has already been a year now, by the time they come to re-inspect, it will be another six months. So, come what may, we have to do what we have been asked to do, apply it, then we will see how many months are left before lifting the ban.

You travel with the Egyptian Equestrian team as the Team Manager; how many events have you been to in 2010, and as the Manager, how do you feel the team is doing at the moment? What, if any, change is needed for the riders in team competition?

The riders and I have been to the four CSI tours in the UAE, one in Syria, and one in Saudi; actually, quite a few. During those tours there were no team competitions. The





only one that required team work was the competition in the five star 2010 event in Ghantout, Abu Dhabi. We had only three riders competing; we could not fill the fourth spot. We do not have an excessive number of prepared horses and riders, although I know in the near future we will be participating in Nations Cup events coming up in the UAE and Qatar. Last year we had more applications than positions, but this year we have lesser riders than last year. If we are in a situation where a team is required to represent Egypt, then we usually allow the six best riders to fill the positions. So far, we are in need of horse power and certainly a good and professional administrative solution for transportation as distances are so far.

I have travelled with you in the past, and from my knowledge I understand that the Team Manager has a say in choosing riders who would be part of the team, and that it's not just by points; it's a question of which horse and who is ready. As such, do you feel that the present method of choice is the one that you would like to continue with? You, as the Manager, decide that or are there other external adopted standards?

To tell you the truth, I am lucky. The two situations in which Egypt had a

team was during the 2007 Pan Arab Games and Ghantout - although I will exclude Ghantout as we only had three who were capable of delivering, which they did, and two who wanted to commit suicide if they had joined the team; they were certainly not ready. That's another issue and it's no secret.

During the Pan Arab Games, I was given a short list of 15 riders only three weeks before the event which was a short period for change and training. I devised a good system and mentioned it to everyone involved. We planned together on approving stamina, consistency, and readiness. As the Manager, all I needed to see was the rider who would compete in three major competitions: either two grand prix and one qualifier or vice versa, or one from the last training show as well as one qualifier and one grand prix so that if one couldn't attend two certain shows, he could attend one as in the case of Nael Nassar. Nael was put to me as a contender while he shouldn't have been chosen. Having said this, I always have to accommodate political aspects. A Chef d'Équipe always wants to choose the best team to represent a country but politics plays a big role. Nevertheless, I still feel that I do my part somehow. Some countries try to use selection committees but they failed as they ended up with

litigation cases in court. Take the USA, their system of trial and points exhausted their horses and for three or four championships they did not win a single medal. Personally, I think it should be a combination of two factors; I have to keep an eye on who is "prepared" at that point, whilst not ignoring the competitions, performances and points - an indication of how horse and rider have done. Transparency is also important; a trainer should be transparent and strong enough and know his job however long it takes in convincing the other side that when all's said and done, we should be reasonable in choosing riders.

We know that there are some riders who wish to change administrative features in the Equestrian Federation for some reasons. If we discuss that, in respect of the claims or demands, what are some of the things that you would like to see changed there, and what would you tell management? There is a gap between us and other Arab countries and for some reason this gap growing. Where are we and what do we lack? Horses, funds, management or professional riders? What clues would you give riders?

Long question. Part of it I will not be involved in; the political part. I used to



front revolutionary ideas since 1980. Now I'm 61 and a technocrat – a man who wants to apply and work with the technicality of the game. I'm too old now. The youngsters on the other hand, if they want change they are entitled – for better or for worse it will be their responsibility. They already proved on January 25th that they are clever as well as broad minded. I owe the youth of Egypt an apology; I was not expecting them to do what they did...write a new history for Egypt. I ridiculed their behaviour but they proved that they know much more than I gave them credit for.

As far as Egypt is compared to other Arab countries involved in equestrian sport, I do not think we are behind and I always believed that we could beat them any day with a touch of cleverness by simply using our resources correctly. We have done so for the last 20 years before they appeared on the scene. Technically, I think we have five riders who could beat them. We have history and heritage and I don't mean this rubbish that everyone uses to describe us, "we are Pharaohs, we built the Pyramids". By heritage I mean that, for example, in Saudi, there would be around 15 good riders behind the top three who, I would say, are Khalid Al Eid, Ramzy Al Duhami and Abdullah Al Sharbatly. We, on the other hand, would find 50 behind our top four. We have a wider base, that is. Some

would argue that we need better horses, but we are in a country that can produce horses. I see potential; we just need better management and knowledge. When I came back from England in 1996, there was only one trainer, but now we have plenty. You are a rider and a certified trainer along with several others too! That's a step in the right direction. It's also argued that not everybody has the talent to be a trainer; we can't see results immediately of course! In the Gulf they bring in ready-made trainers and horses, here we are working with self-made trainers.

I like how you analysed the formula. You are talking about a separation between the top class sport where you have three to four riders and maybe one or two can be added from the local scene, that could already provide a very strong base for you, and then you are in favour of working and cultivating horses and trainers from inside, developing the sport from within, correct?

The Federation cannot look after all aspects, believe me! I lived in Europe and I saw the systems they follow; we should somehow be imitators with regard to several factors so as to learn from the best. There is nothing wrong with that; they have succeeded in developing the sport, so why can we not learn from that? We don't have

to follow all of it, but actually take what suits us best and from there on develop it on our own. The sport should be run by established and knowledgeable institutions, and not a Federation with many administrative struggles. The Federation should just be referred to, if you ask me, just as the FEI is referred to on the international scene. The FEI does not run all events.

An important asset that was of added value to equestrian sport in Egypt, was the two FEI Certified Coaching workshops. As a trainer, it was useful to have practiced before, but it was also useful learning more details from the course. The Federation should be in charge of top sport, and clubs, under the umbrella of the Federation, should keep their own activity going on; would that help?

We run the CSI*** event in Sharm El Sheikh under the umbrella of the FEI, but what does that mean? It means that we choose judges that are qualified by the FEI. If clubs want to run shows on their own, that's possible, and the Federation can send Stewards. Judges are individuals with integrity and can do well. I hope that during this wind of change our region is witnessing, our sport does not suffer or go backwards, though I am optimistic that it won't. 🍀