



SAUDI ARABIA'S AL SHARBATLY
**A SHOW STOPPING
SILVER MEDALLIST**

By Khaled Assem & Lulu Kyriacou

ABDULLAH AL SHARBATLY TRAVELLED TO THE 2010 WORLD EQUESTRIAN GAMES (WEG) HOPEFUL THAT HE MIGHT HELP HIS COUNTRY, THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA, QUALIFY FOR THE 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES IN LONDON. HIS HORSE, SELDANA DE CAMPALTO, HAD MORE EXPERIENCE OF CHAMPIONSHIPS THAN HER RIDER; SHE HAD BEEN PART OF THE ITALIAN TEAM WHO WON SILVER AT THE 2009 EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS. AND ANYWAY, SHARBATLY AND HIS MARE HAD ONLY BEEN TOGETHER SIX WEEKS AND COMPETED AT ONE TOP LEVEL SHOW (MADRID) BEFORE SETTING OFF TO LEXINGTON. SO A MEDAL WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION, WASN'T IT? BUT THE SAUDI RIDER AND HIS MARE FAILED TO READ THE SCRIPT AS WRITTEN BY MOST EXPERT COMMENTATORS ON THE SPORT. A SUCCESSION OF CLEAR ROUNDS OVER CONRAD HOLMFELD'S MONSTROUS COURSES MEANT THAT THE YOUNG ARAB RIDER WAS IN THE TOP FOUR AS THE LAST DAY OF COMPETITION DAWNED. MEANING HE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE FINAL JUMPING ROUND TO DECIDE THE INDIVIDUAL MEDALS WHERE THE TOP FOUR RIDERS JUMPED EACH OTHER'S HORSES.

Sharbatly was lined up against three riders, two of whom need little introduction, Rodrigo Pessoa and Eric Lamaze. The fourth rider was Belgian veteran Philippe le Jeune who had already snaffled a team bronze medal the day before. Once again, heads nodded wisely and predicted that Sharbatly would finish an honourable fourth and as he and Seldana crashed through the final double to record their first faults of the weekend, it looked as if the critics would be right this time. Then he made a spectacular mess of the warm up jump on his next ride, Eric Lamaze's world beating Hickstead, and it did indeed look as if he was going to prove everyone's predictions correct. But once again Sharbatly did not read the same script as everyone else and the errors mentioned on his own horse were the only ones he made for the rest of the contest.

Clear on all three of the other horses, he reached silver medal position when Lamaze added a time fault to his total score whilst riding Pessoa's horse, HH Rebozo. Pessoa himself dropped down the leader board after having three fences down on Le Jeune's Vigo D'Assouillies. Le Jeune

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although probably only third favourite to win, had been clear on every horse and took the gold medal and the title from under the noses of two of the sport's great names. Sharbatly though, was now the proud owner of the first ever World Championship medal for an Arab rider.

THE HORSE & TRAINING:

I just bought her about two months before the WEG and rode her and trained for four to six weeks in total before going to Lexington. I now train with Stanny Van Paecshen, but I have been trained by Peter Charles and Franke Sloothaak in the past.

EXPECTATIONS & COURSES:

We all exert so much effort to prepare for a big championship such as the WEG and quite frankly, I was expecting to get a medal. My horse was in good form and together we trained well. We jumped big courses at a shows preceding the WEG and I had much confidence in her. The first round of the final individual round was extremely difficult. There was a triple combination where many top horses faulted.

THE WIN & HOW IT FELT:

This is my biggest achievement ever and also the biggest in the Middle East; it's the first time a rider from our region has been placed in the top four in the WEG. No one expected that result. Competitions at there are even more difficult than those at the Olympics, given that during the WEG, riders have to go through five rounds. Winning that medal was amazing. Simply amazing. I wanted to be a gold medallist but my mare looked at the shadows of the combination in the final round. But silver is good. It's nearly like gold! Thank God I'm a

proud Muslim Arab who proved to the whole world that we can win distinguished medals in horse sport. Certainly my mare was not the best of mares compared to other horses, but she did it. We did it. And we will do more. I remember during the Aachen WEG, Arabs just watched and rode with no results, which was a disheartening fact, but not for long. We are now working very hard to achieve more.

ASPIRATIONS & SAUDI RECACTION:

This win will not impede me from wanting to achieve more. I still want more medals and I still want to become a stronger competitor. I plan to compete at the next World Cup, Olympic Games and WEG. I thank the Saudi Equestrian Federation for welcoming me so warmly, hundreds greeted me at the airport, and His Royal Majesty King Abdallah awarded me with the King Abdullah Decoration. I'm a very happy person now and I won't rest until I win the gold medal. 🇸🇦

Photos by Cymon Taylor

