

YASSER CHARIF

# HE WHO SHALL NOT HEED

By Khaled Assem

A GENERAL TREND IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS TO FULLY CONCENTRATE ON JUNIOR AND UPCOMING TALENT AND AS A CONSEQUENCE, OVERLOOKING VETERAN RIDERS IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES, ONE OF WHICH IS EGYPT. INVESTIGATING THIS OCCURRENCE IN SYRIA, ONE WOULD FIND THAT YASSER CHARIF – NO QUESTION A VETERAN OF THE GAME – HAS BEEN COMPETING SINCE BEFORE THE 1987 MEDITERRANEAN GAMES IN SYRIA AND IS STILL GOING STRONG UP TO THE 2011 GCT IN DOHA. THIS POSES A VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION; WHAT IS THE WINNING FORMULA? A VETERAN RIDER WITH TALENT AND PLENTY OF MILEAGE, VERSUS A YOUNGER RIDER WITH SOME TALENT, ENTHUSIASM AND GROWING MILEAGE, OR SIMPLY BOTH, KNOWING THAT A NATIONS CUP – THE BEST REPRESENTATION OF A COUNTRY'S LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE – IS BASED UPON THE RESULTS OF A THREE-RIDER TEAM?







**How do you continue to stay part of competitive show jumping and how do you envision your future in the sport?**

I started young and quite frankly, I do not see myself stopping. I also still see myself competing in big levels. The Arab League events are great venues to keep riding at and are annually developing. We have top horses, top competitions and certainly top riders, and to compete there, it's necessary for me to keep up with the sport's pace.

**Your horse jumped extremely well during the GCT five star competitions; was he bought as**

jumps. I saw him with a friend of mine and felt we had a connection.

**If you get a good offer to sell that horse, would you take it?**

No, I wouldn't. I'm working hard to establish a relationship and understanding with him. However, this would differ from one rider to another; this sport was actually a "sport" to us once upon a time, but now it has changed and become more of a business, an industry. Having said this, we do need to keep up with what is happening. In the past federations paid for horses, now we have to manage on our own. Several Gulf States pay well for horses, and

do not, and I suppose this is also the case in Egypt, and certainly in Syria. So I'm sure, you as a rider and a trainer understand what it's like to find and keep a good competitive horse.

**Why do you think all federations in the Middle East do not fully support their experienced riders?**

European federations fully support the idea of sponsorship due to the fact that equestrian sport is popular there and viewed by a big variety of enthusiasts. It is a spectator sport there and so logistics are quite organised. In Syria for example, in a way our federation ensures a range of sponsorship such as promotion and



▲ Yasser & Gemini during the GCT of Doha 2011

**an experienced horse to jump such levels or have you used your long experience to prepare him?**

Gemini came to Syria at three years of age; he jumped small classes at first and gradually went up to 140cm

their money is not wasted; Saudi's Abdullah Al Sharbatly proved that. But unfortunately, not all Arab countries are rich! Arab riders are also fully dedicated to the sport; they train in Europe for six months and compete during the following six. I

televised events. At the end of the day, show jumping is not a popular sport; it comes last if compared to football, or basketball, or even anything that may be considered pragmatic to our government. It's different in our countries; the idea of commercialised

sponsorship is still not at its mature stage. It's also a tricky situation yet completely understandable. But as a rider, I do owe thanks to my country since over the years - put aside my experience - it has invested in my horses plenty. I am still here, aren't I? And it's great to be here in Doha, competing, upping my performance and experience. Nevertheless, I do think that federations in Egypt and Syria for example, should try to follow the footsteps of federations in some Gulf States which are to ensure that equestrian sport is a major activity of the country's sporting legacy.

**What happened in Europe 20 years ago was that companies under the title of sports marketing were established, they would sponsor riders under the auspices or organisation of the federation; do you see that happening in our region?**

Soon? Quite unlikely. The idea is still young in our rich yet developing countries. Many keep on saying that we, as Arabs, need to follow European trends. We can and we ought to when it comes to the technicalities of the sport, but other than that, try to put in mind, we as Arabs, are different in our traditions, our beliefs, and in prioritising how to spend our money and on which sport.

**You as an Arab are here competing in a very big event and you probably went through many individual logistics related to what you mentioned above in order to be here; you are developing your experience, the sport, as well as the name of the sport for your country, is that enough?**

Yes I am here on my own. But how did I get here? Over the years, my country has sponsored my past experiences which have enabled me to get to where I am now. I would not have been a veteran rider, as you described me, if my country did not formulate an investment in me. For 20 whole years, I rode three top horses provided by my federation and several times I have lifted the Syrian flag; that was a special feeling. But if



© Jacques Toffi

▲ Yasser & his team mates after winning the Team silver medal at the 2007 Pan Arab Games in Cairo


the federation cannot continue with such provisions, and my passion for the sport is still strong, I have to continue on my own.

**What is your opinion about the courses here at the GCT of Doha?**

These are big courses built to international standards, presented to top horses, and everything related to that is done meticulously down to the detail. But put all that aside and let me tell you, if a rider does not have an expensive and top horse with him here, then there is no use attending any of the GCT tours if he is looking to get some results. He will gain experience certainly. The prices of most of the horses we see at the tour range from three to six million Euros. Some of the horses at the Arab League are also bought at these prices. Being in the top world rankings allows Arab riders to compete here without going through many individual finances. I am not part of those top rankings but I am here because I want to compete, and horses are just in my blood, and you may call me self-centred if you wish, I just love to stay competitive.

**I would not call you self-centred, but I would tell you that in the Arab League, you are competing with riders that are from the top 200, and at the GCT you are competing with ones from the top 30 and ones riding the best horses**

**one could ever see; how can you relate to that?**

You are absolutely right and even though only a small number of riders competing at the Arab League have the calibre and horses that can be compared to those of the top 30, I am still here competing....all for the love of the sport. Some say that I have grown old and should find something else to do, but let me tell you, when I was younger, I used to watch, look up to, and dream about riding with France's Michel Robert. That same Michel Robert is still here competing, a star in his own right, and I am competing with him. This is a beautiful sport and I cannot get enough of it, enough said. No veteran rider can replace a young and upcoming rider and vice versa. Eventually, he who trains, rides, competes and continues, is he who would be worthy of being named a star or a champion. 

*Yasser Chairf has been competing for Syria for many years. He rode sturdy horses including Baher, Tima and Laganscho. He won the four star Grand Prix of Syria many times, has an individual silver medal from the Syrian Military Ward, a team silver medal from the 2007 Pan Arab Equestrian Games, and recently won the 2011 four star Grand Prix of Al Ein in the UAE. Yasser was born on May 12th 1971, owns a business, and is currently a part time trainer.*