

Champion Jockey Tadhg O'Shea - Always Looking Ahead

The team of jockey, Tadhg O'Shea, trainer, Ernst Oertel, and owner/breeder Khalid Al Nabooda were a winning force in the 2018/2019 UAE race season, with a grand finale of picking off the 2019 Kahayla Classic win with AF Maher, a home-bred from Nabooda's UAE stud farm. In the process, all three were awarded the UAE Champion titles for Jockey, Trainer, and Owner for the racing year.

O'Shea's galloping enthusiasm and constant forward motion is evident in our interview. He speaks in positives peppered with what must be his favorite words, amazing and fantastic.

"First of all it was a great first season in general from the very start being retained rider to Khalid Al Nabooda, and obviously it was magical," said O'Shea. "Then to cap it off, winning the Kahayla Classic on AF Maher for all of the team made the year!

O'Shea thinks Oertel is an amazing trainer. "I know it's an old cliché but his attention to detail and determination is second to none," said O'Shea. "The most important thing I find riding for Ernst is his horses hold their form throughout the entire season which is not an easy thing to do. I have ridden for many people who struggle to do this but Ernst seems to have it off to a fine art which is why he deserves to be champion. The support and confidence I receive from Khalid and Ernst is fantastic and it is a big team effort from the bottom up."

O'Shea had picked AF Maher as his Kahayla ride early on. "I always held AF Maher in the highest regard and was actually blaming myself for his defeats in the early part of the season, but I did tell Ernst in October he was going to be my Kahayla ride. I had the choice of AF Al Sajanjle on which I won the Mazarat Al Ruwayah G 2 by 10 lengths at Meydan in February, so it was a tough choice, but thankfully I kept the faith with AF Maher and it paid off."

The young jockey from Dromahane, County Cork, Ireland, arrived in Dubai in 2001, after being sponsored by Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum on an Apprentice Jockey scholarship. The 37 year-old has spent the last 18 years setting goals and breaking records. In 2019 he reached the goal of winning over 500 races and made it his seventh year to win the UAE Champion Jockey title (2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018).

"Dubai has been amazing for my career and my family, and it was fantastic to numerically become the winning most jockey and to win seven championships, but I'm not one to rest on my laurels, as there is always someone waiting to pounce.

"For now, my main goal is to stay healthy and fit, and to reach 1000 winners would be fantastic! This is not an easy goal but we need goals and to be self disciplined to reach

them. If you don't have something to aim for you loose the hunger and will to win."

O'Shea won his first Kahayla Classic in 2008 on Mizzna. "Mizzna's win at Nad Al Sheba in 2008 was an amazing night, especially as it was my first World Cup winner. However, I probably appreciated the win by AF Maher more as I now know 11 years later on how difficult it is to win on that night. Hopefully I don't have to wait another 11 years for the next win.

I ride a lot more Arabians than Thoroughbreds as retained rider to Khalid, but I love riding both. I do think Arabians are definitely more intelligent and unique, but put me on top of either and Tadhg O'Shea is happy.

O'Shea had a hero that inspired him as a jockey, and has advice for young riders who wish to become top jockeys. "As a kid growing up my inspiration was Michael Kinane. He was the best by far both on and off a horse, a true professional and he won many Jockey Championships. My advice to any young rider is always to stay grounded. You are only as good as your last ride and we are never the finished article. Remember we all make mistakes but the main thing in racing is to learn from them and try to minimize them in future."

Editor: Michale Kinane is a former Irish flat racing jockey who competed for over 34 years winning the Breeders' Cup four times, as well as races on almost every continent. Michale was born to the racing family of Tommy Kinane in 1959. All four sons became jockeys. Michael retired in 2009.

~ Pamela