



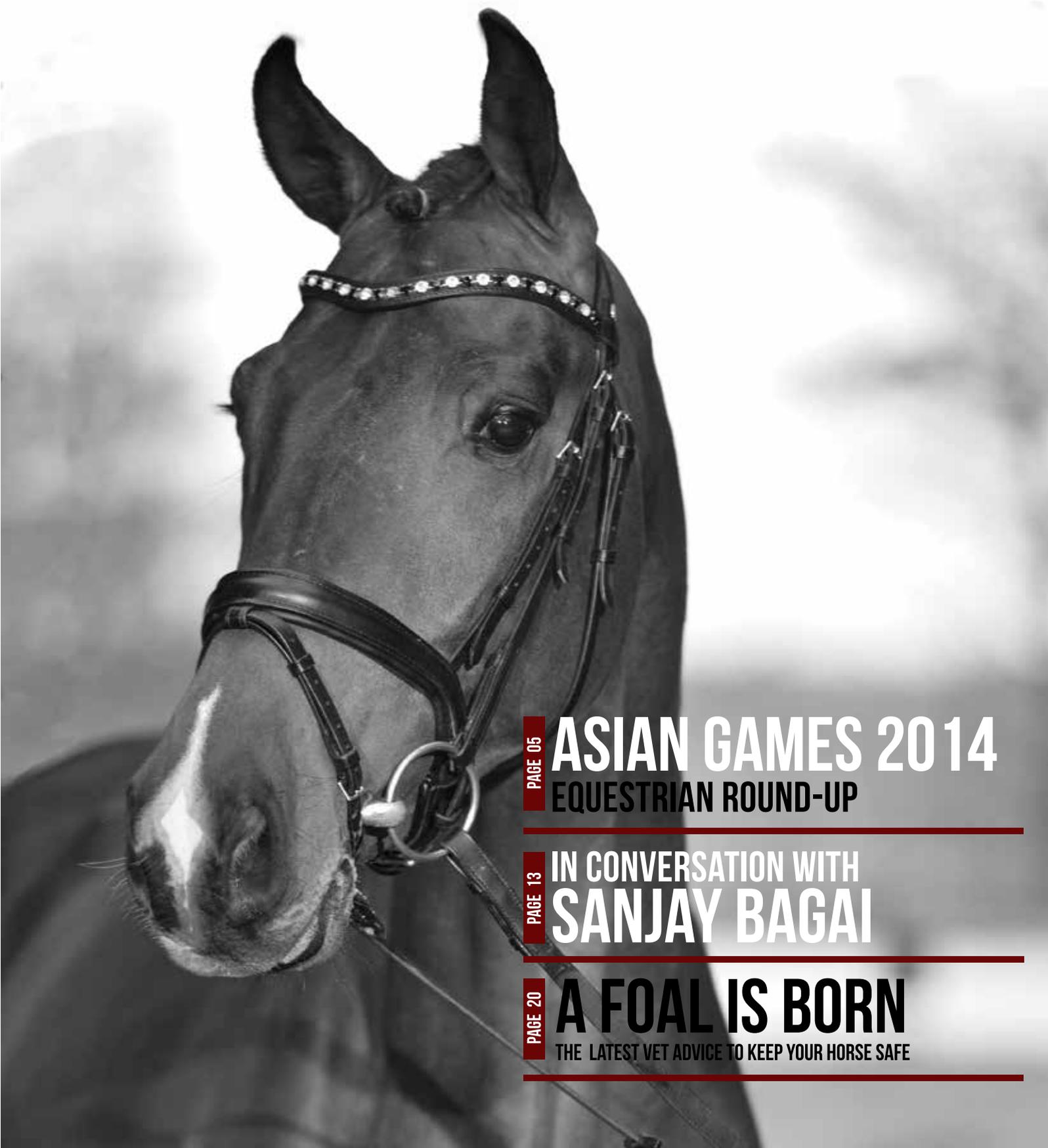
# EQUESTRIAN TIMES



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AN INDIAN EQUESTRIAN NEWS LETTER

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AQUARIUZ

Interview

# SANJAY BAGAI

*I have been lucky to train with some of the world's best. My career started with Herbert Meyer, the ex-chef of the German team. From there I trained with Karsten Huck one of the most influential trainers in my life. We then had Bernie Traurig for a few years and then lastly the great Eddie Macken for 3 years.*

*Sanjay, you were the first Indian rider who ever competed at the World Equestrian Games. Tell us something about yourself and your career in showjumping.*

I am 48 years old, I am married with 3 children, Thea 21, Jack 18 and Tommy 17. My wife also rides at the Grand prix level and we train in Petaluma California, which is roughly 45 mins North of San Francisco. I took up riding not so long ago; I am an investment banker and technologist and took up riding very late in life. I had no idea that riding would become the most passionate pursuit in my life when I started to ride and now it is an activity we pursue 24 x 7. I am now competing at an International level. Which means that I mainly attend 4 and 5 star shows. I still self-fund my own riding and competing, and so I still work at my career at the same time.

*How and when did your career in showjumping start?*

Actually started by fluke. I was recovering from a long legal battle and a friend of mine took me trail riding as a way to relax and have some fun. From an innocent trail ride, it has now become this passionate and intense pursuit of excellence. However, having said that my father was always into horses, he loved horses and owned many race horses. My two brothers rode at the Tollygunge club Gymkhana and on holiday in Kashmir we used to ride as kids. I also went religiously to the Delhi Riding Club. I have always loved horses, but never in my wildest dreams did I think this would be result of that deep passion.

*Where did you train the last 10 years? What are your experiences in the different countries? Is there a difference between Europe, America and Asia?*

In the last 10 years, I have been lucky to train with some of the world's best. My career started with Herbert Meyer, the ex-chef of the German team. From there I trained with Karsten Huck one of the most

a huge and very significant difference between Europe USA and Asia. Even within Europe there are huge differences between the Germans, French, Italians and Irish, although as riding evolves most top trainers and riders are reaching very similar conclusions in their styles and methodologies. The main riding styles are deep seat, light seat and two point, with the frame of the horse being controlled with different levels of flexion.

### *What was most significant during your time in Europe and USA?*

In Europe, the arenas are tiny and so riding in front of the leg is paramount, there is very little time and space to accommodate a horse behind the leg, at the same time, Europeans ask very difficult questions from the horses, from small distances and tight corners, therefore only the very best horses survive in European circuits. In the USA which is traditionally a thoroughbred country and also much larger arenas, they present longer distances to prepare for the oncoming jumps. So rider and horse can actually create scope and or prepare. The tradition and the discipline in Europe is very strong, it is a popular sport with lots of spectators and involvement from all levels of society. There are many stables spread out through the community, so distance to the barn is not an issue and thus it becomes a community affair. In the US the country is not so densely populated with stables breeders and competitions thus the riding becomes a week end event. In the US the jumping disciplines are divided into 4 with hunters, equitation, eventing and jumpers, and each discipline has its very own specific requirements and style.

### *How many horses do you have now? How does their daily work look like?*

Last year I cut down from 13 active competing horses to 6, which includes my wife's horses. I have 2 top level horses and she has 4, that number keeps changing between us as we actively sell and buy horses all the time. The horses are first fed at 6:00am, then they go on a walk for 45 minutes after which they are thoroughly groomed and put in the green grass pastures for 1.5 hours. They are then taken back to the stable iced and put back in the stables. Even though I am at the barn early, my first horse is typically at 9:00am. I work every horse for 1 hour which includes a 10 minute warm up and 5 minute cool down. The work typically follows the German Pyramid for young horses, which I constantly reinforce with advanced level Dressage, but at the core of all of this is looseness strength and reaction. They then return to the stable for lunch, after which they walk again for 30 minutes and turn out for another 45 minutes. Then the stable starts to shut down and they get groomed bandaged iced, I do medications feed charts next day plans and they get their evening feed at 5:00pm. The last barn check is typically at 10:00pm but we have cameras on them 24 x 7. We have 3 grooms so about 2-3 horses per groom.

### *You are the 1st Indian rider who competed at the WEG. How are your impressions about the WEG in France?*

The WEG in France was an amazing experience; it was always my dream to compete at WEG and the Olympics. My own personal experience with the organization was that it was absolutely amazing, everything was super top class. I didn't do as well as I had wanted, that year was a very hard year for me, I had my worst injury in the

sport with 15 broken bones and severe brain damage and also my horse had a very close call with death and so his training as suspended too close to WEG. As a result when we got there we were under prepared, however getting there and being ready in itself was a learning experience that has prepared me for the next games. Competing at this level is even more difficult and challenging than competing at the 5 star level so I have now learned an even higher level of performance than what I am used to.

### *What are your goals for the future?*

Like it is for all riders, my future goals all depend on what horse I have. If I have the right horses, then I would like to compete and do well at the next Olympics and continue to do well in the 5 star sport. I would also like to teach and bring on a team that competes on behalf of India.

### *What do you advise young riders who want to start their career in showjumping?*

Patience, hard work and always learn. These are very important attributes for a show jumper, often after jumping 1,20m there is a lot of bravado but let me assure you the 1,20m ring does very little to present the challenges at the 1,60m ring. A normal talented show jumper will take a decade before he is ready to execute at the 1,60m level and in those 10 years you have to ride more than 5 horses per day and attend as many shows as possible, you probably will use over 15 horses before you are able to comprehend the complex concepts of show jumping. This is a huge time, life and financial commitment and it would be wise to put those three in order so you can focus on your growth.

