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UIPM PARA SPORTS: YASSER HEFNY (EGY) IN AWE OF PARA ATHLETES AS HE EMBARKS ON COACHING ROLE



Yasser Hefny has seen a lot in 16 years competing in Modern Pentathlon.

But just when he had seen it all, he became acquainted with the most inspirational athletes in the UIPM Sports movement and felt like a rookie just starting out.

Hefny (EGY) recently volunteered to take over as shooting coach to Egypt's UIPM Para Sports team. In this interview he takes up the story, describing all the emotions he has felt since undertaking this important role.

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Q: How did you get involved with coaching athletes in UIPM Para Sports?

A: Honestly I didn't plan it, I was attending the board meeting of the Egyptian Modern Pentathlon Federation as the head of the Athletes Committee ... and one of the topics was about the shooting coach who can't work with the para team any more because their training is during his days off.

I don't blame him, he is old and he deserves some rest!

So without thinking I was like, "I have nothing on these days of the week and I can do it voluntarily and see if I will be able to continue", and honestly it felt great to draw a smile on those faces. I got addicted and I decided I will commit some time to work with the Para team.

Q: How do you feel about having this opportunity?

A: In the beginning I had this feeling that I'm the guy who saved the situation – I was proud and walking tall... but after the first workout everything changed, I felt something like I needed these people more than they need me!

I was learning from them a lot of things – their amazing ability to adapt, their positive attitude, their strong willpower... honestly they are the real champs because of their willpower to keep going after all that they have been through!

Every athlete's journey in Para Sport is worth all the titles any great athlete has ever won.

Q: What signs of progress have you seen in the UIPM Para Sports movement?

A: I have been following the UIPM movement and plans regarding Para Pentathlon and I think they are doing a great job. Advising and supporting the National Federations to have a Para programme and organizing competitions for them... and most importantly the hard work the UIPM is doing to include Para Pentathlon in the Paralympics.

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Q: What are the main challenges when coaching a para athlete?

A: There are several challenges I was facing in the beginning but I'm getting better, for example:

- Building the trust between me and the athletes wasn't so easy because the shooting coach who was working with them before me was very experienced in shooting and also in dealing with athletes.
- Choosing my words carefully when giving instructions.
- I have to be very patient and friendly; also I should find a way to make the training look more like a game but also give the right instructions and correct the technique. It's very hard to maintain this balance but I think I'm doing good, the para athletes are improving and having fun.

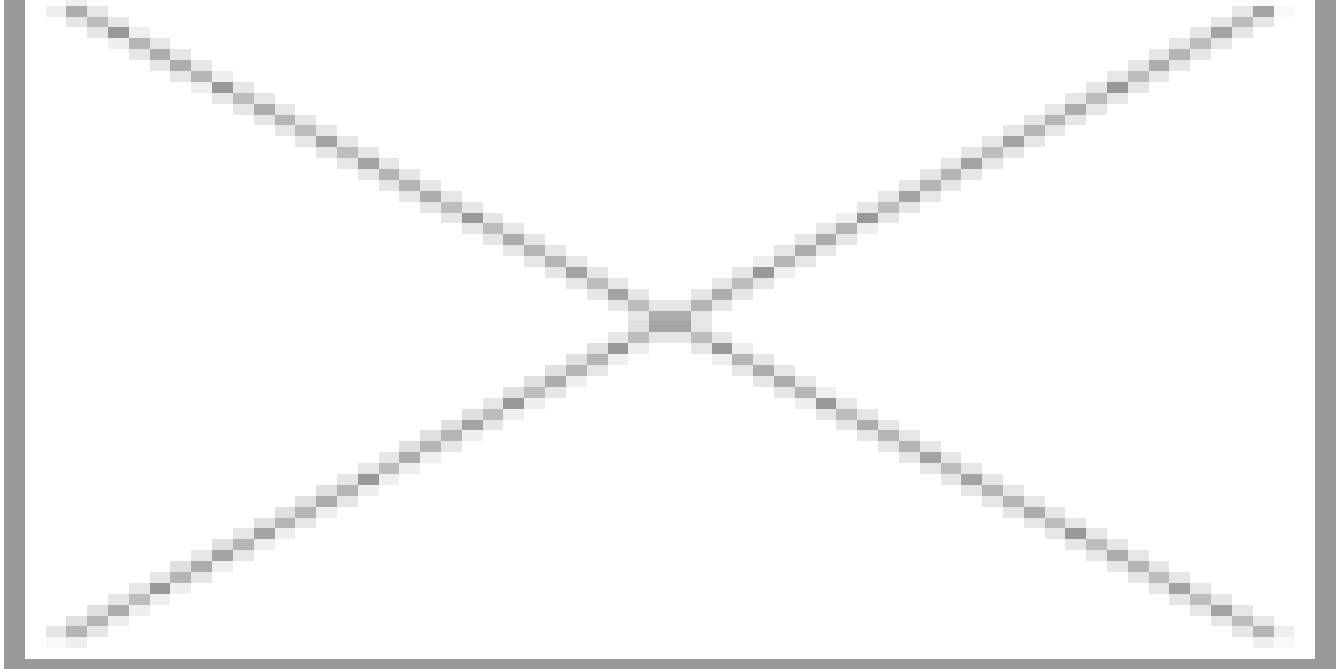
Q: And what are the most rewarding aspects?

A: I would say inner peace and, as I mentioned before, I learn from them how to be patient and

positive. For example, I'm suffering from a bad chronic back injury and a lot of times I would be like "why me? Why did you do that to me? I don't deserve it!"

But then I look at those super athletes and how they can compete and train with all the problems they are facing mentally and physically. And I will be like "shame on me to be that weak and negative", and my thoughts directly changed to be a man! Be positive like those superheroes.

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Q: Why is it so important for a National Federation like the EMPF to have a para programme?

A: In my opinion every federation must have a para programme because those athletes deserve to have a normal life, they didn't choose to be disabled or handicapped. The least we can do for them is give them a chance to enjoy the sport and maybe compete... also it's the least we can do for their parents who put in a crazy effort to help those athletes keep going.

Q: You were also involved in the recent #LaserAllStars – what can you tell us about your experience?

A: I think it's a great idea to bring people from all over the world to compete together virtually during this hard time. It was fun for athletes and spectators; these are the kind of ideas that will help in promoting the sport.

Q: When did you decide to start coaching UIPM Sports and what are your goals as a coach?

A: As I mentioned in the first question it was a coincidence, a great one. My goal as para laser-shooting team coach is to make them smile and always be excited for the next workout. If I can achieve this formula it will be way easier to implement the shooting programme and I believe they will definitely improve as long as they are having fun.

Actually I didn't retire yet as an athlete, I'm recovering from my injury and I'm still fighting to catch up with our strong young Egyptian athletes in the road to Tokyo.

To be honest, it's hard to beat those strong team-mates, but still not impossible. I have been through harder situations before and things went well. I guess after the 2021 season I will totally shift my career from athlete to full-time coach.

To find out more about opportunities in UIPM Para Sports contact para@pentathlon.org

