

# Saudi Polo Federation

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Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

## Jean Francois Decaux



الاتحاد السعودي للبولو  
SAUDI POLO FEDERATION

**Q. Just for the recording, can I get your name, please?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Jean Francois Decaux.

**Q. Jean Francois, how has your experience in AIUla been?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: It's my first time here. It's beyond my expectations. The entire program was second to none, and the place is simply amazing, whether it's the mirror building where we went with Adolfo Cambiaso the first day to take some pictures at sunrise, or whether it was the concert inside that mirror building yesterday from Alicia Keys. The art exhibition, Desert X, in the middle of the mountains with artists from all over the world, and what's interesting is that when she did the last song, Alicia Keys yesterday, you could see all the Saudi men and women rushing to the stage. This would have been impossible a few years ago. So you can see that the country is opening up, which is good news for the new generation.

AIUla is part of the Vision 2030 from MBS, the King, and they are implementing it to get more tourism. It's a first for me, but a great experience, and obviously with La Dolfina, you can't do better than that.

**Q. How did you enjoy the sport? How did you enjoy the competition?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: It was nice, but the ground is not as good as in England or in France because it's a bit -- you sink a little bit in the ground with the horse, which is why we played with a bigger ball which doesn't go straight. As soon as there's a bit of wind, the ball comes back. So it's unfortunately not as fast as it could be.

But I heard that the ground is even much better than two years ago, so they keep on improving the ground. The day before I wanted to play with the arena ball, but it was impossible, and you saw that after two chukkers, even the bigger ball got stuck in the holes, and you couldn't play.

**Q. No doubt you'll play with Adolfo, you'll play with David Stirling. You've played with these guys before?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yes.

**Q. And I guess it must be enjoyable to be back out there with them?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yeah, in 2020 I won the Gold Cup for the British Open Championship with Adolfo Cambiaso and his son Poroto at 14 years of age, who break the record from his father who had won the British Open Championship many times but at 16, and he won it at 14.

I changed the name of my team from La Bamba De Areco, which is my estancia, to the Next Generation in order to honor this challenge of winning with a 14-year-old boy. So that was a great experience, and to see them again today in AIUla was great. As a matter of fact, they invited me to come here.

**Q. I guess you must enjoy that. You must enjoy playing with -- I know you're a very competitive man, so it must be great to play with these guys who are the best of the best in the sport.**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yeah.

**Q. Is there something in that for you around Adolfo and his son and I know your son plays polo, as well?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: No, I don't have any sons, I have only daughters. I have two grandsons. Maybe a couple of years from now they will play polo.

**Q. Do you see something in that, a legacy, a family history?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: No, no, what I see is obviously I'm second generation in the family business, and the way Cambiaso is coaching his son, it reminds me very much of how my father introduced me to the family business at a very early age, so that's the connection.

**Q. When you're playing polo, when you're playing any sport, what's your approach? Do you think about the match? Do you think about tactics or style or do you just go out there to enjoy it?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: No, it's all about tactics, about which horses we are going to play. No, the strategy -- the playing strategy nowadays is very important in polo.

**Q. Is that the same in everything you do?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yes. Obviously it's a very competitive world, no matter what you do. In order to win, you have to be better than the best.

**Q. You drive a lot of racing cars, as well. Do you enjoy -- polo is a very high adrenaline quite dangerous sport. Motor racing is also high adrenaline. Is that a character trait of you?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yes, I like adrenaline.

**Q. Why is that? Do you see that as a release or do you see it as something which just builds you as a person?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: A bit of both. A bit of both. To be honest with you, when I started to play polo at the age of 33 when I arrived in London, I had never ridden a horse in my life, and this is the only sport with motor racing where I can forget the business. As soon as I get on the horse, basically that's it, I'm 100 percent focused. I can wash my brain completely from the business, which otherwise being a family business, which we expanded with my brother in so many countries, you think about it all the time.

But whether it's in the racing car in Monaco in the F1 or here on the pitch, you don't think about that. That's refreshing. At least you have a break or one day or two days. That's what I like about it.

**Q. Healthy, I guess.**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yeah, cycling, a lot of cycling. I think when you grow older, it's nice to be fit. Obviously you have to be careful about what you eat because as soon as you take on weight, it's much more difficult to lose it.

**Q. Do you find that especially in the business you're in and the profile you have, you have to be sharp; you need to be healthy; you need to have these opportunities to break away?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yes, I think so. I think it helps to break away in anything for one, two or three days, and think about something else. There are some -- you learn from -- I'm not suggesting that what I learn about polo

I can translate into my business, but it's about perfection. It's about perfection.

Leonardo DaVinci said, "Details make perfection, and perfection is not a detail." When you play with Cambiaso he's into detail whether it's the attack, the horse, everything, the training, the massage, everything, the food, the diet. It's near perfection.

**Q. It's like the 1 percents, it's all the tiny little 1 percents.**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yeah.

**Q. Obviously in Saudi Arabia, it's something I believe JC Decaux previously had the world record for the world's biggest outdoor in Jeddah Airport 2014 it might be?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: We are the world's largest out-of-home media company, and we have a small presence in the Saudi airports since many years. So we have the concession in Riyadh, in Jeddah. As a matter of fact, in AIUla there is a panel from us as soon as you get out of the airport. I called the manager, I said -- he knew I was coming, so I'm sure the panel would have been fixed no matter what.

**Q. Is this a growth market? Is the region a growth region for JC Decaux?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: No, we are well established here. We are No. 1 in Dubai. We are getting into more countries here. Potentially it's a big market, potentially. But you have a lot of local companies which are very well connected to the top, and that becomes difficult.

**Q. I guess would you say the Middle East is a priority or one of many?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: No, no, it's one of many. One of many. Asia is a priority. Asia, and we are betting on Africa right now because the population from Africa will double over the next 30 years, and we are setting eyeballs being in the outdoor advertising business. It's all about the eyeballs. So the population of Nigeria which is currently about 200 million will double to 400 million. The numbers are just staggering.

**Q. In terms of the outdoor marketing or the outdoor business generally, I assume it's highly competitive. Is it one which is very much driven by technology?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yes, because we are digitizing now a lot of panels. In the UK, for instance, we

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

are 70 plus percent digital now, and we set up three years ago a trading platform to trade the media programatically online in order to deliver the message at the right time for the right person at the right location. So there is a revolution in our business right now, and you can buy what we call RTB real time, on a real-time basis. It's unbelievable. When Verstappen won the championship, in less than 15 seconds we displayed both in the Netherlands as well as in Abu Dhabi a congratulations message on all our digital panels.

**Q. Is that the future? Do you have to stay at the cutting edge of technology in order to thrive?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yes. Yes, we do.

**Q. Is that an investment?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yeah, it's an investment, and we also are very creative in our company. We invented a self-bicycle program, what you have in the boys' bikes in London. The first bike scheme was launched by our company in 2003 in Vienna. Everybody laughed about it. It was a long time before Uber, and it was a success in Vienna, then became a success in Paris. Velib was a success in Paris. The mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, before losing the election went to Paris to look at the scheme, and Bloomberg, as well, and you have bikes today in New York, all over the world. We started that revolution.

Again, it was an investment in something new. So we are known for basically thinking out of the box.

**Q. I assume that comes from your father, I guess; he was an innovative thinker --**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yeah, for sure, very innovative.

**Q. Is that something that you wouldn't restrict the business; if there's an opportunity to get eyeballs no matter what it is, I guess it's a win?**

JEAN FRANCOIS DECAUX: Yeah, that's what we did with the jet bridge advertising program with HSBC about 20 years ago. We started to brand the jet bridges. I remember when we won the New York airport concession, we put HSBC, and the New York Times said, Welcome to HSBC town, city, because the first thing you could see after landing was HSBC on the jet bridge of JFK.

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