

## Meet two of the expatriate athletes participating in the 2016 Rio Olympic Games!



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# The Mediterranean Shark: Oussama Mellouli competes in his third Olympics for Tunisia

*Oussama is an Olympic gold medal winning swimmer who has previously competed in the Beijing and London games. He will be representing Tunisia again in the Rio Olympics.*

## **Can you tell us a little bit about how you got to where you are today—a medal winning Olympic swimmer?**

I started swimming young. As with any parents living on the coast in Tunisia, mine wanted my two older brothers and I to learn how to swim. We were all competitive, and started formally competing at a very early age. We just kind of got hooked. By the age of 15, I was basically beating all the older guys and becoming the fastest swimmer in my country.

My technical coach suggested that I go overseas to train to compete against people who would push me in my training. We picked France, which is where I went to high school. During those two years in France, I kept on progressing and had some great results with the team over there.

A couple of teammates wanted to go to the States. I wanted to study to be an engineer and keep training. It was going to be impossible to do both training and school in France or Tunisia—only the USA had the system to do both. So I've been living here since 2002.

Every move has been fundamental to my success. Moving to France was a great move because it brought great results. I think I was a skilled swimmer. Would I say that if I stayed home I would have won three Olympic medals? Probably not.

## **How do you keep ties to Tunisia?**

Family keeps me very tied to home. With the internet and Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, we're just one click or phone call away from friends and families. That keeps us very much connected and very close.

My mom is very close to me and has been following my career. She has helped me maintain my link to home. She will be in Rio and has been to all the big meets with me. Almost all my family will be in Rio.

My country has always been the biggest driving force for my performance. I've always had a burning desire to make my country proud, and my family obviously.

I hope to be the example for that generation of aspiring athletes who are dreaming at a very young age. I want parents to say to their children, "Look at Ous from La Marsa—he did it. You can do it."

This is what I hope my legacy will be. I hope that people will be inspired. I would be the proudest athlete one day if I could see another athlete from Tunisia make it to the Olympics, going to the final or even getting a medal. If they could win another gold, that would make the proudest.

## **Do you have any links to the Tunisian/Middle East-North Africa expatriate communities?**

I've been keeping close ties with a few organizations, including the Tunisian American community. All the different groups, with FB and the role that plays in our lives, it's so easy to stay in touch and keep track of what Tunisians Americans are up to. It's been very hard to be as in touch as I want to. But I still have friends like Saleh Mejri (basketball player) who are from the Arab world. We try to raise the Tunisian flag high and proud for those of us



competing out here.

There's also the great work of the US Embassy in Tunisia—they reached out to me to do a skype session with young students who want to come and go to school in the USA. I've shared my experience about studying abroad here in America.

I think it's a fun way to give back. Home is what we've got. It's our roots. We can't just forget about our roots. That's what gives us strength abroad.

It's very important to have a goal. It's so dangerous to embark on a journey without a goal. This is something I tell the kids, is to write that goal everywhere.

### **Would you be interested in supporting athletics, particularly swimming, in Tunisia?**

Sports have always been a passion of mine. I would love to stay involved in sports in a national level in Tunisia or an international level with different governing bodies. I would put myself in a position that will be instrumental to the country—I have so many ideas of working with the younger generation.

My aspiration is to go back home and help out in whatever way possible.

### **What role do you see for Tunisians living abroad playing in strengthening development initiatives in Tunisia?**

A bit of both—those who are willing to, I almost want to say, to make a sacrifice to go back home. Many of them are settled abroad—abroad becomes home in a way. We need those people—Tunisia has been through a lot after the revolution in 2011. We're facing safety and security issues—we need people with specific skill sets in all kinds of fields who will make the conscious decision to go back.

Going abroad, in this day and age, is almost a necessity in order to get the skills and technical experience you need. To get that experience and soak it all in. One day you'll go back and develop what's back home. It's not easy. As with any other process, it's just not an easy thing.

### **What's new at IOM?**

- May 11-12 IOM participated in the Abu Dhabi Dialogue Senior Official Meeting in Dubai, presenting on initial findings of the UAE-funded research project assessing the private recruitment systems within the Asian-Gulf labour mobility corridor. The Abu Dhabi Dialogue is a forum that brings together the major countries of origin and destination for labour migration within the South/South East Asia-GCC regions;
- On June 2nd IOM Lebanon held meetings with the Ministry of Labour to discuss potential collaboration on initiatives to support employment among Lebanese host and Syrian displaced communities. IOM and the Ministry will be looking to partner on a pilot project that aims to use online outsourcing tools as a means of generating employment for higher skilled segments of the target communities. The pilot would also seek collaboration with diaspora groups to identify opportunities;
- On June 3rd and 4th IOM Egypt facilitated consultative meetings in Geneva between the Government of Egypt and Egyptian Communities Abroad, with the aim of fostering dialogue on issues pertaining to the engagement of Egyptian expatriate communities into Egypt's development initiatives;
- On June 8th IOM's MENA Regional Office participated in a videoconference organized by the Centre for Mediterranean Integration and the World Bank looking at opportunities to engage Syrian diaspora in initiatives to support employment and resilience among displaced and host communities. Follow up meetings are scheduled in July and August as participating organizations look to collaborate further on this issue.

# Madame Boxer: Sarah Ourahmoune becomes the first female to box for France in the Olympics

*This World Champion boxer gets ready to make history in Rio.*



**Could you tell us how you came to where you find yourself today, a champion about to become the first female boxer to represent France in the Olympics.**

I started boxing at the age of 14 but without really planning it. My mom was eager for me to engage in physical activities outside of school because she believes in the educational value of sports. I went to inquire at the boxing hall in my city thinking that they had courses for a number of different sports...But there was only boxing. I was tempted into taking a trial class and I really liked it; the ambiance, the game, the strategy...So I continued.

**How have your opportunities to train in France given you the skills and networks you needed to reach the Olympics?**

When I started, women were still not allowed to compete in boxing in France. We could train but we weren't able to compete in competitions. Since then, female boxing has really developed in France. The French Boxing Federation has created a women's team and has put systems in

place that allow us to reach the highest levels in the sport.

**You are French, you grew up in France and you train there now. Have you maintained ties to Algeria as well? If so, how?**

I live in France but a large part of my family still lives in Algeria. I go regularly on vacation to Algeria to see my family.

**What type of role model would you like to be for young, aspiring athletes in the Middle East and North Africa ?**

I hope to be an example of courage and determination for aspiring athletes. Reaching an elite level in sports requires a lot of personal investment and courage and a strong support network. You need to have role models; sports stars that you can identify with and who can help you find your calling. I would be very happy if my journey in boxing could help encourage young athletes to follow their own paths to success.

I would be thrilled to support athletic programmes for migrants and children of migrants. It's always a pleasure for me to share my passion for boxing and to teach the values we find in sports.

**What role do you think Algerians living abroad or persons of Algerian origin abroad can play in supporting development initiatives in Algeria?**

The Algerian diaspora maintains many ties with Algeria which benefits the development of the country through trade, cultural exchanges, and social cooperation.



# Sport Master: Bringing Egyptian athletes off the bench and into the match



Founded by Hassan el Kammah (left) earlier this year, Sport Master looks to connect talented Egyptian athletes with scholarships to US university athletic programs. The mission of Sport Master is to develop sports programs and marketing in Egypt to help youth optimize their talents and achieve a career in professional athletics.



After working abroad in USA and Europe for over seven years, Hassan decided to start Sport Master to bridge the huge gap in professional sports industry in his home country of Egypt that stems from the lack of sport professionals who can take the initiative to help young talent be successful.

“There is so much untapped talent here in Egypt. There is a limit right now to how far people can go, because they don’t always have access to good training facilities or high quality coaching,” Hassan explains. “I’ve learned how to use the skills and networks I have built to start something in Egypt and give back to the community where I was raised in and played soccer since I was 7 years old.”

Playing college soccer in the USA introduced Hassan to the world of professional sports, and connected him with the founder of International Doorway. A Master’s degree in sport management from the University of San Francisco and then an apprenticeships with FIFA master in Europe rounded out the experience and connections in the world of sports across continents necessary to make Sports Master a success.

Once established, Hassan was able to partner with the International Doorway program (based in the USA) to connect Egyptian student athletes with opportunities in college for scholarships. Run in 50 countries worldwide, this partnership with Sports Master is the first time International Doorway is working in the Middle East.



One of the first success stories of the Sports Master/ International Doorways partnership is Jason Gamil (left), a soccer player who has gotten an 80% scholarship to Missouri Valley University. Formerly playing for Etihad Shorta Football Club, Jason will have a double opportunity of a quality education and playing sports at a level, and to an audience, he would not have had access to in Egypt.

Services provided by International Doorway go beyond just making the initial connection between aspiring athlete and university. Hassan knows well what it is like to be a foreign student in the United States, so he makes sure that scholarship recipients know what to expect academically, socially and culturally. “We tell them what to expect from coaches, what kind of training they can expect if they want to improve and how they’ll have to get used to the school-

training-life balance at a level they wouldn’t have experienced before,” he said.

Though the organization is focusing now on placing athletes at the university level, there are already plans to expand into other sports. Egypt has a long history of fielding successful athletes in martial arts and handball. Hassan hopes to expand the playing field, and find talent who will be able to compete in basketball, tennis, swimming and beyond.

“We’re hoping that by connecting Egyptians with opportunities abroad, we will be able to give them a chance to improve themselves and then bring those talents and skills back to Egypt. Once people here see successful athletes coming from Egypt, they’ll be more willing to invest in programs for their kids,” he says.

## From young dropout to National League hopeful

Yassine, like so many young men in Morocco's underserved suburban expanses, was restless, rebellious and irreverent in school. At 16, the school expelled him. For the following two years, he took on odd jobs with miserable pay, and had no path to life as an established adult. At 18, he and his group of friends dabbled in drugs and made plans to illegally enter Spain. Yassine was idle and without direction.

This is when a community-based group working with IOM's FORSATY program reached him. Yassine was immediately engaged in an activity fostering community engagement and personal growth through sports and cultural activities. In the program, Yassine developed confidence and played his favorite sport: football.

In May, the community-based group linked Youssef with trials organized by the national-league Tetouan AJAX Futsal Club. The Club selected Yassine and eleven others out of 170 players to become Junior Futsal Club members – putting him a single step away from playing the national leagues with one of the hottest teams in Morocco. But the best thing about playing for the AJAX, according to Yassine, is making his family proud of him.

There are numerous youths like Yassine, making good when given a chance. Each year IOM's FORSATY program provides more than 8,400 marginalized youth at risk of dropping out, exposed to drugs, violent crime and extremism, with just that: a better chance.

The Favorable Opportunities to Reinforce Self-Advancement for Today's Youth (FORSATY) program is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and is implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Tangier and Tetouan, Northern Morocco. FORSATY works so that marginalized youth become integrated, productive citizens.



### Announcements

- September 19th: During a UN Summit on Migrants & Refugees, IOM and the United Nations are scheduled to sign an agreement for IOM to join the UN system as a related agency. The agreement requires the prior approval of the UN General Assembly. IOM Member States approved the agreement during a Special Council meeting held on June 30th.
- October: USAID will be organizing a diaspora conference in Washington DC entitled Diasporas in Development: Moving from Opportunity to Action. IOM, the World Bank, and other relevant agencies will be organizing breakout sessions during the event to engage diaspora representatives and other relevant stakeholders on particular topics of interest.

### Submit to the next issue

Submissions accepted for the following sections:

- Successful project
- Highlighting a Diaspora Group
- Expatriate Success Story
- Announcements

The next newsletter will be released at the end of April.

For information and submissions, e-mail [iommenanews@iom.int](mailto:iommenanews@iom.int).