

Feature Presentation cont.

O'Neill said he is well aware of the Pennsylvania Derby's implications for 3-year-old championship honors. Although Nyquist has defeated Exaggerator in four of their six total meetings, the latter has claimed two of the season's top prizes in the Preakness and Haskell.

"Exaggerator is a really, really top horse," O'Neill added. "So I would think that right now those two are battling for the top 3-year-old. I think [GI Travers S. winner] Arrogate (Unbridled's Song) was just a little bit too late on the scene, unless he were to win the Classic or something. We're definitely thinking, hey, we need to run a big race on Saturday to reclaim the [title of] leading 3-year-old. And I think we will."

If all goes according to plan, Nyquist will compete in the GI Breeders' Cup Classic Nov. 5 before eyeing a potential 2017 campaign.

As for the possibility that Nyquist and Songbird could square off in the same race in the future? Hollendorfer said that a start in the Breeders' Cup Classic was unlikely, but did not rule out the idea that Songbird's 4-year-old season could include a start in Gulfstream Park's newly created GI Pegasus World Cup in late January. Not coincidentally, Paul Reddam was one of the first owners to purchase a reserved spot in the starting gate for the world's richest race.

"The Pegasus is quite another consideration," Hollendorfer responded when asked about the possibility of Songbird facing male rivals. "That's a long way away. Something like that would be in the back of our minds, maybe, but we're not pointing to that particular race. We didn't buy a slot, although perhaps some slots would be available [eventually]... We want to get past the Cotillion first, and then think about other things later."

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From the Stakes Winning Family of
- Meteor Miracle -
First time seen in the sales ring in over 10 years.
Tizway, out of Planeta
Hip #3833
Sarinana Racing, Agent Jose C. Sarinana - Barn #29

One owner who has been floating under the radar and into the deep end with aplomb over the last few years is David Ross, whose DARRS Inc. is having another solid year in 2016. Incorporated just over two years ago, the brainchild of the Northern Virginia-based real estate agent has 20 wins from 65 starts this year (30.7%) and has hit the board 60% of the time. With horses trained by Tony Dutrow, Mike Stidham and Brendan Walsh, the one-man outfit has picked up two graded stakes in the last 11 months, the GI Nearctic S. at Woodbine with **Bye Bye Bernie** (Bernstein)—historically one of the top turf sprints on the continent—and the GI Greenwood Cup at Parx with **Scuba** (Tapit) on the other side of the spectrum as a 12-furlong dirt marathon. Both horses were conditioned to victory by Walsh.

"I've actually been involved going back to 1989," the Pittsburgh native reflected. "It has been something that's been



Scuba wins the Greenwood Cup
Equi-Photo

of interest going back to college. I then made my way into the real estate profession, but I took an interest to racing and what I liked about it is I could apply some technical expertise. Right now I am floating with a little over two dozen

horses between Tony Dutrow, Brendan Walsh and Mike Stidham and I have a barn at Fair Hill [Trainer Center in Maryland]."

"My second job is this business and I spend a lot of my spare time really looking at things and communicating with trainers," Ross continued. "There are some great tools out there that produce reports and I use those a lot. The Ragozin sheets and Thoro-Graph reports both are very useful. You can also get great info from EquineLine and Brisnet, who have developed some excellent statistical analyses. I also surround myself with people who are great at their jobs like James Breeden in Kentucky, who is a key part of what I do and picks out a lot of my horses. I then like to apply the technical data I've been doing for a few years when positioning horses and giving them a shot at winning. My trainers are all excellent at what they do and they put the horse first—and that's definitely key. I communicate with them a lot."

DARRS INC. ON THE RISE

by Michael Adolphson

The proverbial 'they' often label racing as more of an expensive hobby for the affluent than a profitable business venture. Understandable is this perception, as so often the costs are high and the rewards—though sometimes astronomically rich—are scarce by definition. To win is to reap the 60% spoils and only one of the contestants can do so, barring the rare dead-heat, yet the costs flow aplenty. It is difficult to imagine too many other business ventures—or sports for that matter—where winning one of every four attempts is considered exceptional. In this, racehorse ownership seems to mirror swimming against the current in the dichotomous sea between hobby and profit, with those who glide their way to the latter sticking out from the crowd as if they have fins.

DARRS Inc. On the Rise cont.

Arguably even more impressive than his strike and top-three percentages, Ross's equine athletes are averaging nearly \$11,000 in earnings per start and just eclipsed the \$700,000 mark in earnings this far in 2016 last week.

"In today's racing business, you have to be very keen on where you place your horses," Ross explained. "It's not an inexpensive business and a horse can cost you about \$3,000 a month to manage it well and some are more than that. We really want to try to be as efficient as we can, especially when they can be injured and anything can happen. That's why we always try to really do the right things with the right horses."

"I think it's more about where the horses fit and Mike has done a great job at Fair Grounds, in Kentucky and at Arlington with that, while Brendan operates in Florida and does well at



Tony Dutrow | Equi-Photo

Keeneland for us. Tony is on the East Coast and all three are just very flexible trainers and that's one of the things I really like about all three. They're only going to do what's right and they understand owners."

Even with his success, Ross has no plans on increasing numbers. His operation appears

acutely focused on the quality-over-quantity mantra, allowing him the time and understanding of his recruits to make decisions on an intimate level. Still, he is sharply aware that the racing business is indeed a business and requires appropriate pragmatism.

"I've had as many as 50 horses and it gets tough to manage them and I like to be able to manage what happens with every horse," he explained. "Twenty to 30 is optimal for that. We also have a couple horses we bred, bought as 2-year-olds and some from dispersal sales, so we're spreading out a little, but our numbers will stay in that range."

"What's interesting is that when I first got into racing, I was attached to a few horses--and that's great--but you have to understand that it's a business and you must do what's best for the business, as well as the horse," he continued. "Scuba has done a great job and been a big success for us. Bye Bye Bernie, on the other hand, has a tendon injury and I made the decision to give him an early retirement so that he can have a productive life. We don't want them to just become a claimer because they can't perform like they used to. We try to do what's best."

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DARRS Inc. On the Rise cont.

Some exciting young blood will be carrying the Washington & Jefferson College and University of Pennsylvania alum's black and red silks over the next few months, including **R Naja** (Exchange Rate), who has already earned black type when third this month in the Arlington-Washington Lassie S. at Arlington Park, yet is still a maiden from two starts. The good-looking dark bay has long been highly regarded by the Stidham barn and finished behind a stablemate when third that day, suffering through a wide trip. Another to watch is hard-closing female turf sprinter **Rapid Rhythm** (Successful Appeal), who defied her 10-1 odds when running a bang-up second last out in the \$350,000 Kentucky Downs Ladies Sprint S. the same day.

"R Naja definitely a favorite of ours," said the resident of Great Falls, Virginia. "Mike and I think she is very talented and we believe she'll do well moving forward. We may run her at Keeneland."

"We have a lot of horses we are excited about and I think we'll do well," he concluded. "We really take the time to do what's best and look at everything from jockeys to race shapes to picking our spots and I am fortunate to have a great team working with me."

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