



SID FERNANDO

Lessons of founding fathers

When John Gaines hatched the Breeders' Cup in the early 1980s and guys like John Nerud supported and marketed the concept, the novel idea of a day of highly publicized "championship" racing included two turf races meant to attract European horses: the Breeders' Cup Mile (G1), which is not an American race at all; and the Breeders' Cup Turf (G1), which at 1½ miles on turf stretched the bounds of American stamina but played straight to the European Derby distance.

Both distinguished horsemen knew that U.S. breeding stock needed to be periodically replenished from Europe—it always had—so why not two races that would specifically attract some of the best potential sire prospects from across the pond?

Interestingly, looking back, the best sire who won the Mile was not a European but instead was Nerud's homebred Cozzene, who was third in the inaugural Mile in 1984 and won the race in '85 (although a case could be made for the Nijinsky II horse Royal Academy, the winner in '90). Cozzene, a U.S. champion, was sent to stud at Gaines' Gainesway in Lexington, where he sired more than 80 stakes winners, including 1994 Breeders' Cup Turf winner Tikkanen and '96 Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) winner Alphabet Soup.

Gainesway at the time was home to a number of fabulous foreign-raced stallions, including Riverman, Sharpen Up (GB), Blushing Groom (Fr), Lyphard, and *Vaguely Noble, and Kentucky was at the height of its dominance as the world's leading producer of top-class talent. Roughly around this time, 1970 English Triple Crown winner Nijinsky II was at Claiborne Farm alongside '68 Epsom Derby winner Sir Ivor, '66 Argentine Quadruple Crown winner *Forli, and '64 Prix du Jockey-Club (French Derby) winner *Le Fabuleux; Nureyev, the disqualified '80 Two Thousand Guineas (Eng-G1) winner, and dual Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe (Fr-G1) winner Alleged were at Walmac-Warnerton International; ex-French sire Caro (Ire) was at Spendthrift Farm; and '72 Epsom Derby winner Roberto was back home at Darby Dan, which at one point also stood the legendary European duo of *Sea-Bird and *Ribot.

Although Cozzene was not a foreign-bred horse, Nerud, who trained speed phenom Dr. Fager (Rough'n Tumble—Aspidistra), got Cozzene by breeding to an imported stallion in Caro. He also controlled the breeding decisions for Tartan Farms and the Genter stable and left his thumbprint on the stamina branch of the Mr. Prospector line through Unbridled. Nerud sent Tartan's In Reality mare Charedi (whose second dam was Aspidistra) to imported *Le Fabuleux to get Gana Facil, who then was bred to his homebred Mr. Prospector stallion Fappiano to obtain 1990 Kentucky Derby (G1) winner Unbridled. The latter was bred by Tartan but raced by Frances Genter, who bought him when Tartan dispersed.

Unbridled's best sire son, of course, is the popular Unbridled's Song, whose dam, Trolley Song, is by Caro—also sire of Winning Colors as well as Cozzene.

Since these glory days, the U.S. racing and breeding industries have diverged with the rest of the world's, with us breeding more speed horses that do not stay while Europe continues to value horses with a range of aptitudes. Perhaps this Breeders' Cup week is an appropriate time to recall why we were once so great and a time to revisit the lessons of Gaines and Nerud.

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Fresh Faces: Mike Repole

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The co-founder of the company that created VitaminWater, Mike Repole started in racing in 2004 but waited to dive into the deep end with his wallet. He dabbled first with an emphasis upon claiming and accomplished a significant goal last year when he led the New York Racing Association in victories.

"I didn't come in thinking that this game was easy and I was going to throw \$5-million or \$10-million in it the first year," Repole, 41, said in late September. "I've been going to the track since I was a 13-year-old kid. To me, whether it was a \$5,000 claimer or \$500,000 stakes race, to me, it was all the same. I've always had passion for racing, but I didn't want to get into it buying expensive yearlings because I knew the game as a gambler, not as an owner. I wanted to learn about the game as an owner."

Champagne Stakes (G1) winner Uncle Mo and Three Chimneys Hopeful Stakes (G1) winner Stay Thirsty are the torchbearers for a different approach. Repole has downsized from 120 horses to 85 and forged an important relationship with trainer Todd Pletcher over the last year.

"Over the last two years, I started to come up with a game plan formula that I was going to buy about ten or 12 at yearling sales and six or eight at two-year-old sales and spend about \$3-million a year. It definitely was a strategic game plan to start small and get bigger into the game. I wish more owners would go that route because I see too many owners come in and spend \$10-million and in a year it's gone, and other than the \$10-million being gone, so are they. I don't think it's good for the game."

Repole got together with Pletcher right after the Saratoga Race Course meet ended last September.

"He's a high-energy guy and we've had a lot of fun with him as a client," Pletcher said on Sunday. "We've been fortunate we've had some success. This basically is the conclusion of one year of training for him and to have two colts for him coming into the Juvenile and one of them [Uncle Mo] potentially being the favorite, it's pretty exciting. I think he understands that it's not that easy to do, and he's thankful at the same time."—Jeff Lowe



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