



DERBY



PREAKNESS



BELMONT

# Batting 1.000

BY TERRY CONWAY

In the early 1970s Roy Jackson tinkered with minor league baseball franchises. As a club president he polished his teams' rough edges and turned them into gleaming gems. Then Jackson cashed his ticket, selling the clubs to local investors.

## *Roy and Gretchen Jackson get to the Derby with undefeated Barbaro, Showing Up*

His business savvy earned Jackson posts as president of three prominent minor leagues, and he parlayed those contacts into a thriving sports agency firm. Retired Seattle Mariner hitting machine Edgar Martinez was a prized homegrown client.

"You could tell early on that Edgar had star qualities," said Jackson. "He just needed the chance to show it at the major league level. In some ways it's very similar to the racehorses we breed. They need the opportunity to show their ability. But like any great athlete, the horse has to have the heart, the will to win."

Roy and his wife, Gretchen, witnessed that iron will when their Barbaro outdueled Sharp Humor in a stirring stretch battle in this year's Florida Derby (gr. I). Their unbeaten star's latest conquest stamped the homebred colt as one of the favorites for the Kentucky Derby (gr. I) presented by Yum! Brands.

"It was the first time a horse eyeballed him, and he got it done," said Roy Jackson. "Barbaro showed a lot of determination."

The versatile Dynaformer colt follows in the hoofprints of a pair of recent celebrated Chester County, Pa., alumni. Smarty Jones was bred there (about 40 miles southwest of Philadelphia) and Afleet Alex's managing partner, Chuck Zacney, resides in the same region. Barbaro's Florida Derby victory—the Jacksons' first grade I stakes win—was the culmination of nearly three decades in the racing game. This will be the Jacksons' first trip to the Derby.

Barbaro may find added competition from the Jacksons' Lael Stables in the starting gate at Churchill Downs. The Jacksons also race the highly touted Showing Up, who broke Gulfstream Park's one-mile track record in March. Unbeaten in three starts, the flashy son of Strategic Mission was purchased for \$60,000 by his trainer, Barclay Tagg, at the Fasig-Tipton Midlantic sale of 2-year-olds in training last May. The owners anteed up \$6,000 for the chestnut colt to be a late nominee for the Triple Crown. Showing Up won the Coolmore Lexington Stakes (gr. II) at Keeneland April 22 (see page 2524).

If that's not enough Derby day excitement, consider this: another Lael-bred colt, George Washington, is the current 3-1 favorite in the English Two Thousand Guineas (Eng-I) May 6. Last year's champion 2-year-old male in Ireland, the colt also stands as an early choice for the Epsom Derby (Eng-I) in June. Demi O'Byrne paid \$2.05 million for the son of the late Danehill, the top price of the 2004 Tattersalls October yearling sale.

"It killed us when we sold him," Gretchen Jackson acknowledged. "It was a very hard decision with Danehill coming to an end. The only way we were going to part with him was if someone was really willing to pay a huge number, and they did."

The Jacksons count roughly 20 horses in training with Michael Matz and Tagg, both based at the Fair Hill Training Center in northeast Maryland. Their broodmare band totals 27, with two locally at Rick Abbott's Charlton Farm, three in England, and the remaining 22 in Kentucky at Denali Stud and Mill Ridge Farm.

Up until this year, the couple never had a sniff at a Triple Crown starter.

"We've never come close to breeding a Derby contender," said Gretchen, a lifelong equestrian. "But you just keep trying. It makes it so special that we had Barbaro's dam (La Ville Rouge) run for us. It's amazing. I can't believe it happened."



Roy and Gretchen Jackson at their 190-acre Lael Farm

JEFF SWYDER PHOTOS



Lael Farm is in southern Chester County, Pa.; at right, Triple Crown silks...Triple Crown aspirations



son Toros, the Oakland A's AAA club. Again, after a few years Jackson sold the franchise to a group of local investors. He ran the Pacific Coast League and the International League from 1975-82, then utilized his contacts to launch the sports agency firm Convest. From 1983-2001, Convest represented 60 players, including 25 major leaguers.

"It was a unique business back then—none of us were lawyers like the agents today," noted Roy. "We took some criticism for it but it really worked out well for us."

## LAEL'S BEGINNINGS

When Russell Jones, a friend since high school, mentioned that the farm adjoining his property was for sale, the Jacksons snapped it

up in 1978. They named the 190-acre property Lael Farm, the Gaelic word for loyalty.

Six of the Jacksons' favorite runners spend their retirement days in the surrounding paddocks that spread out below the couple's home. Visitors also find a champion retired show horse, three dogs, seven ponies, four miniature donkeys, two cows, and 15 sheep. The Jacksons have four children and 10 grandchildren who ride the ponies when they visit.

The couple first got started in the business in 1978 when Jones, then co-owner of Walnut Green Bloodstock, convinced them to go in as partners on a mare at a Fasig-Tipton sale in Maryland. For two decades, Lael Farm was set up for foaling, boarding, and breaking horses. The Jacksons' success was relatively modest until eight years ago when they focused on racing and building a broodmare band.

In 2003, they campaigned the 2-year-old filly Superstar Leo, an English and French champion who made a habit of beating males as a juvenile. She finished her racing career with five wins and four seconds from 13 starts and earnings of \$287,484. Among their top runners were North American grade II winners Belle Cherie and C'Est L'Amour and grade III victors Love n' Kiss S., Storm Dream, Sweetest Thing, and Rashes Warning.

One elite colt that got away was Grandera. The Jacksons raced the son of Grand Lodge in Europe as a 2- and 3-year-old with partner Viv Shelton. After he finished third in the 2001 Prix du Jockey Club (French Derby, Fr-I) and won the Dubai Arc Trial, the racing partners sold him privately to Dubai's Godolphin Racing. He went on to win the 2002 Prince of Wales's Stakes (Eng-I), Irish Champion Stakes (Ire-I), and Singapore Airlines International Cup (Sin-I). The colt is a half-brother to George Washington.

## HORSE COUNTRY

In southern Chester County, the horse is truly king. Traveling the winding country lanes, visitors gaze out at rolling turf, small patches of woodlands, and historic horse farms. This is gorgeous countryside, not unlike parts of England and Ireland, and a wonderful locale for foxhunting.

The Jacksons' farm is located near Unionville, an area sprinkled with top-flight Thoroughbred owners and breeders as well as celebrated connections from the world of steeplechasing, three-day eventing, and show horses. Nearby neighbors comprise a "Who's Who" of the sport-horse world: Valentine, Ledyard, Wicks, Jones, Han-num, Jenney, Cocks, Neilson, and Straw-bridge. Across the road resides Ashwell Stables, home to Hall of Fame trainer Jonathan Sheppard and birthplace of Storm Cat and legendary steeplechase runner Flatterer.

Roy Jackson was raised about 10 miles away in Edgemont. His father, Roy Sr., was a renowned Master of the Hounds for Rose Tree and later Radnor in the 1930s and '40s. He introduced a new, specialized foxhound, known as the PennMaryDel, which has become a popular Chester County foxhunting breed.

Several years after the death of his father, Roy's mother married Hardie Scott, a Philadelphia attorney. The couple entered the racing game with the purchase of a few mares from a dispersal of Elizabeth Arden's Main Chance Farm. Later, the Scotts became clients of Robert Courtney's Crestfield Farm in Kentucky, where their mares foaled each season.

"They were into racing, not the breeding side," Roy explained. "The horses ran at Delaware Park, Atlantic City, and tracks in Maryland. It was a lot of fun and sparked my interest."

Gretchen has foxhunted and competed at hunter trials for much of her life.

"Instead of going to church on Sundays, my father would take me to the Philadelphia Zoo where I would ride a pony," recalled Gretchen with a laugh.

Growing up in the Chestnut Hill area of Philadelphia, she attended riding schools and was taught by "Cubby" Haines, who competed in dressage at the Helsinki Olympics. Gretchen met Roy at a school dance in Merion, Pa., while in the 11th grade. They both graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and married in June 1959. A stockbroker for six years, Roy has a passion for baseball that finally won out when a friend introduced him to Bob Carpenter, the owner of the Philadelphia Phillies.

"Mr. Carpenter started a business training program to bring younger people into the game," recalled Jackson.

"I worked with the Phillies' minor league clubs for nearly two years before the opportunity arose to purchase the Class AA York Pirates and become the club president."

A couple of years later, he sold the franchise, and was named president of the Eastern League. In 1972, Roy launched the Tuc-



CAROLINE NORRIS

The Lael Stable-bred George Washington



## Roy and Gretchen Jackson

"We had one heck of an offer from the sheikhs," said Gretchen. "The horse was racing in England, so it was not as easy to see his races and be part of his training. It turned out great for us. The price wasn't too high for his dam, so we acquired Borghera."

Usually kept at Round Hill Stud in Ireland, the Alysheba mare currently resides at Peter Stanley's Stud in Newmarket and is to be bred this season to Tiger Hill. Overseas, the Jacksons have experienced their greatest racing success with a pair of English trainers, James Fanshawe, who conditioned Grandera, and William Haggas, who trained Superstar Leo.

One mare that holds a special place in their hearts is La Ville Rouge. On the recommendation of longtime adviser Kathee Ringert, the couple drove up to Aqueduct in the fall of 1998 to watch the 2-year-old daughter of Carson City run in the one-mile Tempted Stakes (gr. III). Beaten by just a half-length, she was bought by the Jacksons privately. The acquisition was part of an ongoing effort to purchase talented race mares.

La Ville Rouge won six races in 25 career starts and showed good form on turf as a 4-year-old, placing in three graded events—two on grass—at distances up to 11 furlongs. Those longer distances were surprising since Carson City was a sprinter and a sire of runners who excel in sprints.

"She is more of an average-size mare," observed Roy. "She is not a heavy-bodied mare. La Ville Rouge doesn't look much like the sprinter type."

The Jacksons retired her from the track and sent her to Mill Ridge Farm near Lexington, where she produced her first foal, a colt by Saint Ballado. Named Holy Ground, he won the 2005 Stanton Stakes at Delaware Park at age three. La Ville Rouge, now 10, is also the dam of a 2-year-old Quiet American colt, Man in Havana.

"I think they are just at the launching pad, the beginning of a lot of nice horses," said Russell Jones. "To see my longtime friends experience this success, it excites me to no end."

The Jacksons have surrounded themselves with a team of experts, but oversee the execution of breeding plans and have the final say. Referred by George Strawbridge, Lexington agent Headley Bell starting advising the couple on bloodstock matters five years ago.

"They truly love the horse," said Bell. "It's not about them. Their satisfaction is when the horse performs, which really means a lot to me."



ANNE M. EBENHARDT PHOTOS

The Jacksons, with Ashford Stud's Dermot Ryan, at the winner's presentation at Keeneland following Showing Up's Coolmore Lexington victory April 22

When Bell first analyzed the Jacksons' broodmare stock, he pegged La Ville Rouge at the top. In sending her to Dynaformer, Bell's thinking was to add some size.

"His offspring are good-sized horses who run and win and stay sound," said Bell. "I like a stallion who can make it from nothing

Jacksons discovered in Roy's mother's attic after her death. It's a picture of five foxhounds with the particular dog's name under each one. They chose the hound on the right-hand side, Barbaro. The painting now hangs in the family room at their Unionville home.

La Ville Rouge produced a full brother to Barbaro in March and is being bred back to Dynaformer. "It seemed too obvious not to," said Bell.

Away from the horse business, the Jacksons own a ranch outside of Big Timber, Mont. Since 1968, the couple has spent part of the winter in Eleuthera, a quiet hideaway in the Bahamas where their extended family enjoys the pleasures of sailing, windsurfing, diving, and fishing.

Still, they can't stay away too long. They book island-hopper flights to Fort Lauderdale to watch their horses run at Calder and Gulfstream Park or drive to Ocala to check in on their young horses at John and Jill Stephens' farm. When the Stephenses

were breaking Barbaro, their message to the Jacksons was: "You're going to have a lot of fun with this horse."

"He has always had a certain presence to him," said Gretchen. "You always hope that what you're looking at as a baby or yearling out in the field will grow up to be something special." 🐾



Homebred Barbaro gallops at Keeneland; unbeaten colt one of the choices for the Kentucky Derby

(\$5,000 initial stud fee). Barbaro has real quality about him. There is a refinement that is quite different from Dynaformer. He's a very handy horse, a true athlete. You saw that as a foal. Barbaro knows it, and everyone around him knows it."

The versatile colt takes his name from a foxhound in a five-panel 1880s painting the