



West Virginia

THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

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Mike Schiano Di Cola is Molto Grato

Italy has a long history of emigration, as their citizenry have sought financial opportunities around the globe.

For Michael Schiano Di Cola it was an undeniable element in departing home and heritage; but no matter how far he travels family remains the cardinal principal and driving force behind his impressive work ethic, intense faith and thriving entrepreneurship.

I was able to catch-up with Mike and his longtime business associate Amanda Moro to discuss horses and future plans for his commercial Thoroughbred enterprise.

Born and raised outside of Naples, Mike's life changed forever when he visited his older brother Raimondo in New York City.

That experience combined with the closeness of the two siblings led him to make the transition stateside.

"I headed to the land of opportunity to learn the restaurant business from the ground up," said Mike.

Years later, a wife, four children and ceaseless hours of labor, Mike was in a position to again copy his brother, this time venturing into the dynamic world of horse racing.

Raimondo Schiano Di Cola initially discovered racing as an owner, ultimately converting occupations to a full-time Thoroughbred trainer.

Mike never envisioned himself in that capacity, but visualized several options for partnerships in either racing or breeding.

"I saw opportunities to enlist my close friends, Antonio Scotto Di Carlo and Mike Fascelli (Scuderia Montese



Mike Schiano Di Cola has had success as a breeder and owner, a favorite being stakes winner Gabriel's Smile (above).



Stable), as a way of deflecting risk, sharing fun and providing a diversion from work," he remembers. "However, I needed to make a case for my ability and that highlight came via the claim box. My very first horse was named Kyoko and his success (in the mid-1990s) lit a fire in me that persists today.

"One of the partnership's most memorable moments was the claim of Shesagrump too (in 2008) for \$32,000, a then record price at Charles Town, who proceeded (in her next start) to finish second in the \$500,000 Cavada Stakes; but I wasn't satisfied."

Mike was on a personal quest to target an aspect of this industry that would leave a lasting impression on his soul. He wanted a process where he could select a stallion and mare

and evaluate that foal for sales or racing potential.

That subjective approach was partially realized in 2006, when he bought a weanling son of Five Star Day out of Like a Woman from the Keeneland sale for \$7,000.

Three years later his investment, Gabriel's Smile, scored at first asking by a resounding 10¾ lengths.

"It was like a fairy tale to have a horse win that I named for my son and conditioned by my brother," he said. "Gabriel's Smile would go on to earn just shy of \$200,000, adding wins in the Coin Collector and It's Only Money Stakes. This horse will always be extra special. Amanda, a devoted advocate of Thoroughbred Aftercare Programs, has him as a permanent resident at her Jefferson County farm."

Gabriel's Smile set the stage for Mike to embrace racing in a manner that pacified his economic and intellectual side.

A further successful collaborative effort by Team Scuderia Montese was West Virginia-bred Paco Smart, who went on to earn \$309,446.

The son of Aragorn (Ire) was purchased for \$16,000 as a yearling at Keeneland and won the West Virginia Vincent Moscarelli Memorial, Tri-State Futurity and West Virginia Lottery Breeders Classic.

"My involvement, whether individually or in partnerships, is aided by my relationship with two extraordinary women. In the last 10 years, I have leaned heavily on Amanda Moro to care and nurture our growing band of broodmares and foals, while Carrie Brogden (Machmer Hall) is my bloodline guru and boots on the ground in Kentucky. We use a combination of pedigree and conformation as our breeding program motto, while sire power commands our attention for commercial purposes."

That assemblage of gifts has placed Mike and his group on the proverbial map, but it was the pairing of Flatter (sire) and Comedy (dam) that elevated the operation to a new level of notoriety.

Mike's voice raised an octave when the conversation shifted to his star pupil.

Amanda sat in, surrounded by the ambient noise of neighing foals, as the two regaled me with their once-in-a-lifetime narrative.

In her best British accent, Amanda started, "I think you have to understand how volatile the breeding industry is and the financial risk one undertakes. Mike and his partners realize, through experience, the schemes and dreams of playing in the big leagues."

In this game of chess it appears mares are used as interchangeable parts and foals as pieces of a racing puzzle.

It's like the stock market, except here the value of a mare is only as good as her last foal and the popularity of a stallion his progeny's last effort.

In November 2012, Mike purchased Comedy, a daughter of champion Theatrical (Ire) out of Don't Be Silly, at the Keeneland Breeding stock sale for \$24,000.

She was in foal to Flatter, a son of A.P.Indy and sire of local racing legend Lucy's Big Boy (\$1 million earner).

The outcome of that union was a filly named Stoweshoe and in 2014 she went to the Saratoga select yearling sale.

Said Mike: "Trainer Jeff Runco and one of his best clients, David Raim, were interested in this filly from the get go. Already having a strong business relationship with both men, when the hammer dropped at \$95,000, they were the new owners. Stoweshoe only started four times, managed to win a stake, but proved a sound investment. Aided by the popularity of her dam, Stoweshoe sold at the 2016 Keeneland mixed sale for \$330,000. A few months

earlier Comedy sold in foal to Tapit for \$1.5 million."

"There is a very small window of opportunity in this business," said Amanda. "You have to be prepared to buy or sell on a moments notice."

Mike notes, "Presently we have 12 broodmares split equally between Kentucky and West Virginia. I've tried to upgrade my female line and generally seek value in breeding to freshman sires. West Virginia is home and I will continue to foal here, because it's a good program. However, breeders in the know, especially commercial ones, recognize legislative relief is a necessity to survive."

Mike and Amanda insisted I check out a colt by Tonalist who was peering inquisitively over the stall guard with his mother Holiday Shopping (Harlan's Holiday), as if listening to our conversation.

I was awestruck at the majesty of this mare, her immaculate coat and sporty six-day-old foal at her side.

Mike blessed himself stating, "Hopefully this is the next big thing."

My only response was, "Bring your checkbook. This one is coming to a select sale near you!"

Benefits of Owning a WV-Bred and/or -Sired racehorse

Some of the best incentives in the nation:

- A minimum of three accredited races are written every day at Charles Town exclusively for registered WV-bred and/or -sired horses.
- West Virginia has the only program in the country that permits horses to win state-bred races that do not count against the horse's lifetime open conditions.
- The WV Thoroughbred Development Fund distributes almost \$5 million to breeders, owners, and stallion owners of accredited WV-bred and/or -sired horses based on the horse's annual earnings at Charles Town and Mountaineer Park racetracks.
- The West Virginia Breeders Classics pays out almost \$1 million in purses for WV-bred and/or -sired horses. It is held annually on the second Saturday in October.
- \$800,000 in purses are allocated for up to 16 WV accredited stakes races during the year.
- Supplemental Purse Awards of up to 10% of the winner's share of the purse to the owner, breeder, and/or sire owner of the accredited WV-bred and/or -sired winner.
- West Virginia offers year-round racing with approximately 300 race days per year.

West Virginia Thoroughbred Breeders Association

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