



West Virginia

THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

September 2021

Jonesing for Success

Michael Jones Jr. has battled for everything he has attained in life, even though the community of Charles Town acknowledges his family heritage as racing royalty. His is a personal plight of youthful circumstances, repercussions and the inheritance of recovery versus all odds. Fortified by the positive affirmations of his upbringing, Mike believes no social constructs will deter goals his heart is set on.

Any given day, pass by Barn 21 and you'll find the man everyone simply refers to as "Big Mike". At 6 feet 6 inches tall, fitness unquestioned, the 43-year-old horseman casts an imposing shadow, as he effortlessly relocates from the faint luminescence of a stall into the radiant morning light.

Laden with tattoos that tell a subjective tale, Mike's voice is tranquil, his shoulders broad, as if fittingly placed there to carry a burden beyond our comprehension. If one begins to peel back the substantial layers of his family lineage, a good starting point is his grandmother, Sylvia Rideoutt Bishop.

In 1954, a time of fierce sexism and discrimination, she became the first licensed female African-American Thoroughbred horse trainer in America. A pioneer in her trade, like most individuals her fame didn't come until well after her death in 2005.

In 2008, she was inducted into the Charles Town Races Hall of Fame and, a few years later at the advocacy of her daughter Laverne, a stakes race was named in her honor.



This is the kind of blood Mike Jones has coursing through his veins. Opportunities remain moderate, but for Mike defeat is not an option. In 2021, he is on track to having a career best year. The numbers may not jump off the charts, but make no mistake, if given the proper tools he gets the job done.

For the present, claiming horses command the majority of Mike's

stable, with his prize possession being Sherwood Lady, a West Virginia-bred filly by Fiber Sonde he haltered for \$12,500 in March 2019 who went on to win the 2020 White Alley Overnight Stakes.

A 12-time winner with earnings over \$230,000, the consistent mare also sports a third-place finish in the celebrated Cavada Stakes on last year's Breeders Classics card.

Mike recalls when he was just 6 or 7 years old spending hours around the barn area.

"Miss Sylvia, William Berry, Millard Dotson, countless other family members and close acquaintances watched over me as I was constantly underfoot. My mother always tells the story when my first grade teacher sent a note home about my poor performance in math class. Apparently, I was having trouble with my numbers. Mom told the teacher, that's funny because he can correctly read every single saddle towel in the post parade of a 10-horse field," chuckled Mike.

Mike bears the same name as his father, but gives all the credit for life's formative lessons to his mother and present resistance to failure, wife Brandy.

"I knew from the age of 12 that horses would be more than just a phase," he said. "Though my mom had no interest in the business, she knew I had been bit by the racing bug and there was no cure."

Stepfather Millard Dotson was prominent in Mike's early racetrack instruction. According to Mike, he was an exceptional horseman who worked under the shedrows of Maryland legends Bernie Bond and John Tammara and was a decisive factor when Mike relocated there in the late 90s.

The next several years found Mike gainful employment in the dominant barns of Dale Capuano and A. Ferris Allen and, like a sponge, he absorbed all the knowledge he could before transitioning back to Charles Town. In 2012, Mike went to work for local conditioner Lewis Craig Jr. and two years later struck out on his own.

Recalls Mike, "I bought a horse from Michael Pino and we have been close friends ever since. He is more than just a friend, he is a mentor, benefactor and class act. Just last week I got two horses from him to train here."

Like the weather, the number of horses in Mike's care can fluctuate dramatically. He presently has 20 head peering contently out of their stalls and dreams to someday replace quantity with quality. His major component for success is consistency, which comes from aggressively placing horses.

"I treat every horse as an individual and just wait for improving opportunities," he says.

Every afternoon, following training hours, Mike is on the road to the farm (Wild Cherry Farm) Brandy and he rent to supervise their future—four West Virginia yearlings they bred and own. It seems suitable irony, after all the trendy tutors that have crossed Mike's path, that right in his rearview mirror was kinfolk surveilling him all along.

This time it would be legendary O'Sullivan Farms and the memory of their longtime trainer Gene Smith.

"Aunt Shirley (Sylvia's sister) was once married to Gene, who trained for the Funkhousers for decades.

Maybe it's just a coincidence that I bred my mares to their stallions, but I'd like to think relatives are still looking down on me," whispered an emotional Jones.

Brandy and he are counting on Limehouse, Golden Years and Aldrin to enhance the chances for success and to ultimately diversify their top-heavy claiming barn. The couple are further excited by the recent workouts of Brandyurafinegirl, a 3-year-old daughter of Bandbox out of Delightful Erin owned by the twosome.

Mike Jones has discovered, through maturity, that you can't leisurely manufacture an enviable bloodline like his or selectively reproduce the intensity to succeed. Whether the past is an encumbrance or encouragement, this is Mike Jones' time to write his own legacy.

Closing, he humbly stated: "Life has been good, but certainly not easy. I am truly blessed to have the support of so many people."

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 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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