

## AMERICA'S BEST RACING EXTOLS VIRTUES OF RACING PARTNERSHIPS ANIMAL KINGDOM, DULLAHAN REPRESENT SYNDICATES IN BREEDERS' CUP

From Mike Curry of *America's Best Racing* (a cooperative between the Jockey Club and National Thoroughbred Racing Association at [www.followhorseracing.com](http://www.followhorseracing.com)) comes the following:

### Partnerships: A Chance To Experience Thrill of Racing

Jumping into the sport of horse racing as an owner is a thrilling venture – they don't call the Kentucky Derby (G1) "the most exciting two minutes in sports" for nothing – but owning a race horse can be a daunting proposition.



*Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear presents the Derby owner's trophy to Barry Irwin.*

the groundwork?

Partnerships are a fantastic way to enjoy the thrill of racehorse ownership without the additional responsibilities of finding the horses, picking the trainers and mapping out races. Partnerships also allow people with shallower pockets to get involved in a great game.

"I tell our partners, 'Buy a horse, see the world.' It's proven to be exactly true," said Donegal Racing founder Jerry Crawford, whose Dullahan will compete in the Breeders' Cup Turf (G1) on Saturday at Santa Anita Park. Dullahan has won three Grade 1 races and placed in the Kentucky Derby in the last 13 months alone. "The Donegal partners have traveled all over the country to the best racetracks and the very best races in North America, and come March 30, we'll be going as a group to Dubai [with Dullahan] for the Dubai World Cup (UAE-G1).

Owning a racehorse is far more than just showing up at the track once a month to get a picture taken in the winner's circle. Selecting a bloodstock agent to assist with finding a Thoroughbred at auction or on the racetrack, picking a trainer to prepare the horse for racing and making decisions about the horse's future on the racetrack and after its racing career are just a few of the responsibilities that come with the commitment of ownership.

Ah, the devil is in the details as they say, so why not let someone with some equine expertise handle

“I think the beauty of partnerships is that they allow people who aren’t qualified to make decisions about a racing operation on their own to nevertheless experience the thrill of involvement in ownership. In addition to that, partnerships allow folks a chance for a low-dollar entry point, comparatively speaking. For those two reasons, partnerships have proven to be vehicles to bring new people into the game, which is really the most exciting thing about a partnership – introducing horse racing to people that otherwise would never get to be involved.”



*Barry Irwin recently had a large print made of this image of the Derby winner's circle, with several of Animal Kingdom's partners in the shot.*

Cot Campbell, founder of Dogwood Stables, is frequently credited as the founding father of partnerships in Thoroughbred racing. Crawford said he thinks a big component of Campbell's success was that he knew how to make people feel special.

“All of the partnerships owe Cot Campbell a great debt of gratitude. As far as I know, he was the creator of this idea,” Crawford said. “In addition to creating the partnership idea, Cot's not afraid to have a good time. And he's blessed to have, in Anne Campbell, a tremendous life partner who is equally good at entertaining. So they've really been the exemplar, and a lot of what we've tried to do has been based on stealing many of their good ideas.”

Barry Irwin, founder and chief executive officer of Team Valor International, put together his first partnership in 1987 with close friend Jeff Siegel and also is viewed as a pioneer of racing partnerships. Irwin remembers when he, Campbell, and Don Little of Centennial Farms were really the only partnerships on horse racing's block, and he has witnessed the evolution not only of the partnerships but also the investors.

“We have different kinds of expectations from different people, and it's kind of evolved over the years. When we started out, all we had were guys that wanted to make money. Period,” Irwin said. “If they had fun along the way, great, but we had a lot of hardcore guys who just wanted to make money. Those guys morphed after a while.

“It sounds funny, but anytime we talk to a new guy, we say them, ‘We're in this to have fun to have fun, and we hope to make money. We're not saying you can't make money, but basically we want you to look at the experience of enjoying what it's like to be involved.’”

Irwin says the normal response from new investors is that if a chance to make a buck arises, they plan to jump on it. But parting with a horse responsible for so much enjoyment is far more difficult than many potential investors imagine.

“They always say, ‘No, believe me, if I can make a profit, I'm taking it.’ And the number of times our guys have actually voted to take a profit, you can count the number on one hand,” Irwin said. “Most of these guys, they buy it to consume the product, and what we try to bring them is as much involvement at a high level as possible.”

## The Experience is Everything

Not only is the actual race a pulse-pounding thrill ride, but the big horse racing events are truly that — events. The classic races and Breeders' Cup World Championships, the meetings at Keeneland, Saratoga and Del Mar, these are not only marquee events and fantastic venues but destinations that beg for a new outfit and over-the-top hat and provide unforgettable memories with family and friends.



*A year after winning the Derby, Team Valor returned in 2012 with Went The Day Well, who overcame early trouble and finished fourth, beaten less than 3 lengths, at 30 to 1.*

“It’s been our thought for quite a while, as we’ve looked at other real luxury investments and luxury endeavors, that people really want to be catered to and have a really incredible, memorable experience,” said Terry Finley of West Point Thoroughbreds, which has Belle of the Hall entered in Saturday’s Breeders’ Cup Filly and Mare Sprint (G1). “That’s what we’re finding more and more. We’re competing against the Yacht industry and high-end clubs, and all sorts of other things that attract people with the wherewithal, so I think it’s essential to try to give people a really remarkable

experience.

“You’ve got to take care of the little things. We’re not perfect, but we really try to make sure people have their seats and lunch tables, all the things that are going to make this a very good experience. When you have a high-roller at a casino, they don’t make very many mistakes; their concierges are on top of things.”

Finley, a West Point graduate who served in the Army for eight years, said he thinks racing has evolved. Racetracks, in addition to partnerships, now understand the importance of an unforgettable experience.

“I think overall the tracks have done a really good job and they’ve worked very hard to get better and better at trying to make owners feel special,” said Finley, who also has witnessed partnerships adjust to capitalize on the power of social media.

“One of the things that I don’t think is talked about a lot, just think how many people forward the link of the video of their horse winning. I see it all the time on Facebook and on Twitter, how much people are really into it. It’s one thing to talk about how social media is a vehicle to help our business, it’s another thing — and it’s really, really exciting to see it working — to see the people who own the horse and put the winner’s circle picture up on Facebook, and to see the number of comments and likes that it gets. That’s really the power of social media.”

Another key component to the racing experience is the camaraderie. Makes sense that new acquaintances sharing unforgettable moments often develop lasting friendships away from the track.

Irwin has seen it with a group of Team Valor partners that traveled initially to South Africa as part of events he planned. They now organize their own Southern Hemisphere expeditions to enjoy racing together.

For Crawford, Donegal started out as a way to bring together close friends from Des Moines, Iowa, to enjoy racing, but the partnership business has become much more than that.



*New Yorkers Dr. Alan Miller and Steve Karlin are loyal participants in Team Valor's South African partnerships, and they joined Anant and Vanashree Singh and Gaynor Rupert in celebrating Ebony Flyer's Grade 1 win in the Majorca Stakes in January.*

anyone who has ever watched the Kentucky Derby has thought about what it would be like to make that walk over from the barn to the racetrack at Churchill Downs with your own 3-year-old and then watch him enter the starting gate for the first jewel of racing's Triple Crown. Irwin lived that dream with his partners several times in recent years, including a trip to Churchill in 2011 with Animal Kingdom that included an unforgettable winner's circle celebration.

"When you get to a Derby, you want to do something," Irwin said. "We won the first one, which was incredible, the second one [Preakness Stakes (G1)] we had a bit of a disappointment, but the horse ran second. The third one the horse almost fell down. So they went from a high, to a medium, to a low. Talk about a roller-coaster. It was pretty intense, I'll tell you that."

The Animal Kingdom Triple Crown ride undoubtedly was something his partners will remember forever, and Irwin played a major role in making the Triple Crown races special.

"It's different for me than it is for [the partners]," Irwin said. "For them, they get the benefits of the fruit of our labor. For us, we're putting on the show for them and arranging everything and all of that stuff. When you have a horse at that level, and people are dreaming the biggest dream we have in America, it's like they are wearing their hearts on their sleeves. It gets very sensitive and tense at that time, but we had several parties and took them to the barn. We did a lot of stuff and everybody kind of bonded, and that helped."

"I think the best thing in life is when you get to share quality experiences with people you love," Crawford said. "That's how Donegal started out — quality experiences with our best friends — and it's grown beyond that. We've been careful to grow it in a way that really has kept the relationship quality very high. Everybody enjoys that."

### **Dare to Dream**

Horse racing caters to those with "Derby Dreams." Just about

Irwin said one of the great joys he took from Animal Kingdom run through the Triple Crown was watching the wives of two of the partners slowly come around to appreciate the thrill of racing. He said neither of the women made the trip for many previous races, and he got the feeling that they thought perhaps their husbands might be “indulging themselves or being infantile.”

Let’s just say that one Triple Crown later, that, was no longer the case.

“Both of those women are now more on board than their husbands,” Irwin said with a laugh. “That was the best part of the whole deal. ... To see the evolution of those two women come around was quite a thrill for me personally.”

One common theme between the Team Valor, Donegal and West Point partnerships

is that all three understand the importance of making their investors feel special. They are no strangers to high-level success on the track, either, but bringing people together to make memories at the racetrack is what partnerships are all about.

There was a time when partnerships were not viewed as positively within the sport as they are now, but it’s pretty easy to see the many benefits to the industry. Think track photographers mind printing an additional 15-20 winner’s circle photos after a victory for a partnership? Of course not. Certainly post-race partnership celebrations are great for restaurants and bars at the track and in nearby communities, and who leaves the track after a big win without invading the gift shop for a souvenir. And once partners get a taste for the sport, especially the thrill of victory, you’ve got a fan for life.

So when the field for the Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) is loading into the starting gate at about 8:30 p.m. EDT on Saturday night, dare to dream a little. The thrill of racing might be closer than you think.



*Animal Kingdom received a huge ovation at Santa Anita Park on November 3 after finishing a strong second in the Breeders’ Cup Mile in his first start in 8 ½ months. Photo courtesy of Wendy Wooley.*