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For \$14,000, Jersey breeders bought a "Dream Come True"

by Bill Finley

New Jersey-based breeder Greg Kilka knew the odds were not in his favor when he arrived at the 2020 Keeneland January Sale. A small-time owner and breeder with a modest budget, what chance did he have of coming home with a horse that could be life-changing? He was playing the lottery.

"I didn't have unlimited resources," he said.

What he did have was \$14,000, what it cost to buy an unraced mare named Adorabella (Ghostzapper) in foal to Fast Anna (Medaglia d'Oro). It was the only horse he bought at the sale.

Fast forward some three years later and Adorabella's first two foals are both stakes winners and her third, a yearling colt by Classic Empire, sold for \$135,000 at the Fasig-Tipton Midlantic Fall Yearling Sale. All three are New Jersey-breds.

She is currently in foal to Medaglia d'Oro.

"People may think we're overnight successes," Kilka said. "But my wife and I have been putting money into the sport for some 15 years. But never have we had anything like this."

Kilka arrived at the sale with bloodstock agent Chris Gracie. They looked at dozens of horses, hoping to find that diamond in the rough that everyone else misses. Hip 945 caught their attention. There wasn't a lot to go on. She was bred by Tracy Farmer but never made it to the races. Her dam, Alydorable

(Arch) was 1-for-6 during her brief career and finished third in the Revidere S.

"Physically, she was beautiful," Kilka said. "There was nothing we could see that was wrong with her when we purchased her. Chris went through a lot of mares on my behalf. He liked this one physically and thought she could be a productive broodmare. Looking at her family, he thought there was some upside."

Kilka said he had no idea why Adorabella had never raced. It turns out she had the type of niggling problems that keep a lot of horses from making it to the races.

According to Joe Miller, who helped manage the racing and breeding operations of Tracy Farmer, Adorabella was sent to Mark Casse to prepare for her debut but came down with some ankle issues.

"We felt like we'd be better off breeding her because she was going to struggle to make it to the races," Miller said. "Now I feel embarrassed that we sold her. Fortunately, Tracy still has the rest of the family. He's pressing on with the family, so, hopefully, they'll keep breeding stakes winners out of Adorabella."

Kilka teamed up with Christine Connelly of Bright View Farm and they are the co-breeders of the Fast Anna foal, which they decided to sell at auction. Named Girl Trouble, the filly sold for a mere \$15,000 at the 2021 Fasig-Tipton Midlantic Fall Yearling Sale. The buyers were Swilcan Stable LLC and LC Racing and they turned her over to top Mid-Atlantic



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trainer Butch Reid. She's gone 5-for-13 and has won two stakes, both at Parx, the Future Stars Filly Division at 2 and the Parx Futurity at 3.

Kilka and Connelly were off to a fast start with Adorabella, but it would only get better.

Kilka had been part of a partnership that raced Bucchero (Kantharos) and was eager to give the stallion a try. He didn't know at the time that Bucchero would become a rising star among stallions. From his first two crops to race, he's had 61 percent winners to starters, second only to Army Mule and ahead of horses like Justify and Good Magic. He's had nine total stakes horses from modest books of mares.

"I probably wouldn't have been shrewd enough to breed her to Bucchero, who is off to a phenomenal start as a stallion," Miller said. "More power to them. They've done a great job managing her."

The mating of Bucchero and Adorabella produced Book'em Danno (Bucchero), named for Steve McGarrett's go-to closing line in the old *Hawaii Five-O* series. This time Kilka and Connelly decided to sell the foal privately and he was purchased by Atlantic Six Racing LLC., which is comprised of a group of friends who are residents of the Jersey Shore.

Trained by Derek Ryan, Book'em Danno broke his maiden Aug. 12 at Monmouth, besting a field of Jersey-breds by 9½ lengths. Believing his horse was ready for a tougher challenge, Ryan entered him back against open company in the Smoke Glacken Stakes Sept. 9 at Monmouth, which he won by 2 lengths.

That had the connections thinking Breeders' Cup and they wheeled Book'em Danno back in the Oct. 8 Futurity at Belmont At The Big A for what was to be his turf debut. The race was a "Win and You're In" for the Grade 1 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf

Sprint, but things took a wrong turn when the race was rained off the grass.

That didn't prove to be a problem on the racetrack as Book'em Danno dominated, winning by 6½ lengths. But because the race came off the turf it was no longer a "Win and You're In" race, so "Danno" did not head to Santa Anita. It was also downgraded from a Grade 3 to a listed race.

"Maybe that was a blessing in disguise," Ryan said. "The Breeders' Cup race is at 5 furlongs and that might be too short for him."

"We plan to stretch him out now," Ryan said, with the next start the Nov. 5 Nashua Stakes, run on the dirt at 1 mile at Aqueduct.

"It's a one-turn mile and I don't think that will give him any trouble. He'll handle the distance. He's a very laid-back horse. He switches himself off and then when you call on him he's there. I'd like to try him on the grass at some point. He's bred for it. I think if that race stayed on the grass the result would have been the same."

Ryan said the Nashua would be the gelding's last start of the year. He will then ship to Tampa Bay Downs and gear up for his 3-year-old campaign.

For Kilka and Connelly, the best should be yet to come. The \$135,000 they picked up when selling the Classic Empire—Adorabella foal was their first real payday. (The yearling was bought by the same connections that own Girl Trouble). Especially if Book'em Danno continues to flourish, the foal by Medaglia d'Oro should sell well. Kilka said that going forward, Adorabella will be bred only to top-tier stallions, ones like Medaglia d'Oro. (Update: Adorabella sold to LC Racing for \$550,000 at Fasig-Tipton Kentucky's Fall Mixed sale).

So, what did Kilka really get for his \$14,000?

"A dream come true," he said. "An absolute dream."

Book'em Danno wins Grade 3 Futurity Stakes

Atlantic Six Racing's Book'em Danno posted his third consecutive victory in an off-the-turf running of the Grade 3 Futurity Stakes, which was contested at 6 furlongs on the main track after it was originally slated for the same distance on the outer turf, at Belmont at the Big A Oct. 8.

Trained by Derek Ryan, the son of Bucchero entered from a successful stakes debut in the Smoke Glacken Sept. 9 at Monmouth Park and remained undefeated through three lifetime outings that began with a debut score in August at the Jersey Shore oval.

Ryan said he was not deterred by the race moving to the dirt, a surface the dark bay gelding has won each of his races on.

"It doesn't really hurt that it came off," said Ryan. "I'm not disappointed that it came off, we'll try the turf down the road."

Book'em Danno emerged from the outermost post 5 under Jose Ortiz while Ruddy Buddy stumbled badly to his inside and trailed the field as Works for Me broke sharpest of all and led through an opening quarter-mile in :22.09 over the fast main track.

Book'em Danno tracked in fourth down the backstretch under patient handling from Ortiz as Jimmythetooth kept



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close watch in second and was nudged along by Manny Franco approaching the turn. Book'em Danno advanced with purpose from his stalking position and was swung three-wide by Ortiz to make his bid for the front as Works for Me clocked the half-mile in :45.27.

Works for Me turned back the brief challenge from Jimmythetooth exiting the turn, but was left to deal with a looming Book'em Danno as Ortiz gave left-handed encouragement and Where's Chris kicked into gear from 15 lengths off the pace. Book'em Danno proved too much for his rivals and swept past Works for Me with ease approaching the sixteenth marker to draw off to the 6½-length triumph in a final time of 1:09.47.

Ryan compared Book'em Danno's potential versatility to that of his multiple graded stakes winner Musket Man, who won his first two starts at 6 furlongs ahead of a stretch-out when taking the 7-furlong Pasco and a pair of graded dirt route scores before finishing third in the 2009 Grade 1 Kentucky Derby.

"He's very versatile. You can sit or do whatever you want with him," said Ryan. "He'll go as far as I want him to go. I had a horse a few years ago – Musket Man – and everyone told me [about stretching out], 'he's 6 furlongs, he can't do that.' You train them to do whatever you want."

Ortiz, who rode Book'em Danno for the first time in the afternoon, said the pace scenario worked out well.

"He broke well and I had a good trip. Two horses went to the front and I was just stalking them from off the pace," said Ortiz. "When I asked him to go, he responded very well."

"I rode him like much the best and he was much the best," Ortiz continued. "I worked him in the morning and he showed in the morning that he's a good horse. I was very confident. I



got a great post today and he just responded very well for me when I asked him. He's a nice horse."

Ryan added Book'em Danno could come under consideration for the one-mile \$150,000 Nashua Nov. 5 at the Big A (he set the pace before giving way late to finish second).

"We'll see what we're going to do with him. We might try the Nashua, but I don't like to over-run a young 2-year-old," said Ryan. "Next year is a long year. I might be tempted to go a little further, who knows."

Bred in New Jersey by Gregory J. Kilka and Bright View Farm, Book'em Danno is a half-brother to multiple dirt stakes winner Girl Trouble and banked \$82,500 in victory.

Grade 1 winner Max Player to stand in New Jersey

Max Player, winner of the 2021 Jockey Club Gold Cup-G1, has arrived at Annestes Farms in Middletown, where he will stand the 2024 breeding season. The 6-year-old son of Honor Code has over 700 investors who own shares of the dark bay colt.

"After an impressive career on the racetrack, we are excited about his prospects as a sire," said majority owner George Hall of Rumson. Hall, a lifetime patron of Monmouth Park Racetrack, hopes Max Player can enhance the options for New Jersey Breeders. The owner of 2011 Belmont Stakes-G1 winner Ruler On Ice also has a successful track record of breeding horses on his farm in Versailles, Ky., including Pants On Fire,

Snapper Sinclair and Max Player among others, and hopes to achieve similar success in New Jersey for the benefit of Max's investors while at the same time advancing the progress of New Jersey breeding for years to come.

Max Player is the only horse of his generation to compete in all three Triple Crown races, finishing third in the Belmont, and fifth in the Derby and Preakness. He also placed third in the Travers Stakes. Wins in the Grade 2 Suburban and the aforementioned Jockey Club Gold Cup earned Max Player an all-expenses paid trip to the Breeders Cup Classic-G1 in 2021.

Please contact John Hall for more information at KnGStables2020@gmail.com.



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Mia's Crusade wins third stakes in Pinot Grigio

Joseph and Gayle Ioia and Chuck Spina's Mia's Crusade took advantage of an early stalking trip and then took control at the sixteenth pole to score a half-length victory in the \$65,000 Pinot Grigio Handicap during the Monmouth-at-Meadowlands meet Oct. 6 – the 4-year-old filly's third win in Jersey-bred stakes company this year.

Trained by Spina and ridden by Jomar Torres, Mia's Crusade tracked early speedster Amazing Graces Joy through an opening quarter of :22.64 before Torres urged her to draw even with the leader in a :46.15 half. Mia's Crusade surged past a stubborn Amazing Graces Joy in deep stretch and then had enough in reserve to hold off the late charge of longshot Sadie Baby, who rallied for second. Amazing Graces Joy finished three-quarters of a length back in third.

The winning time for the 5 furlongs over a turf course listed as good was :58.21.

Mia's Crusade, a daughter of Greenpointcrusader, improved to 6-2-2 from 16 career starts, including 3-for-5 this year. She previously won the Eleven North and Spruce Fir Handicaps, both during the Monmouth Park meet. The victory was the first

in three grass tries for Mia's Crusade, who paid \$6.80 to win.

Bred by Dianne Boyken, Mia's Crusade is the only starter for Boyken-bred Mini Moneigh (by Mo Mon), a full sister to stakes winners Moneigh Lisa and Loving Dove.



Precious Avary goes the distance in \$125,000 Maryland Million Ladies

Smith Farm & Stable's homebred Precious Avary, racing for just the third time on grass and first beyond a mile on any surface, got out to an easy lead and had enough left to hold off a late charge from Naval Empire to kick off the Maryland Million Day stakes action with a front-running three-quarter-length triumph in the \$125,000 Ladies at Laurel Oct. 14.

Ridden by Silvestre Gonzalez for Parx-based trainer Tim Shaw, Precious Avary (\$8.60) completed 1½ miles in 1:49.53 over a firm Exceller turf course. It was the second turf stakes win for the 3-year-old daughter of 2015 Preakness-G1 third-place finisher Divining Rod, following a gate-to-wire triumph in the 1-mile Jersey Girl Handicap July 8 at Monmouth Park.

Gonzalez immediately put Precious Avary on the lead from her rail post and she was unpressured through a quarter-mile in :24.78 tracked by Golden Heart and Naval Empire on the inside, while defending Ladies champion Coconut Cake ranged up into third on the outside after the half went in :50.58.

Precious Avary continued to lead into the stretch as Naval Empire inched closer along the rail but was unable to get past the determined winner, who encountered trouble finishing

seventh in last year's Maryland Million Lassie on the dirt. She has now won all three of her grass starts, dating back to a maiden triumph last fall at The Meadowlands.

"I knew if she ran similar on the lead at Monmouth she would be tough today," Gonzalez said. "She broke sharp with her ears perked and was happy. I was thinking she'd sit second as there might be speed from the outside, but she went on. Around the turn I asked her for run and she went about her business."

It was the first Maryland Million win for both Gonzalez and Shaw.

Precious Avary is a third-generation homebred for Stanton J. Smith Jr.'s Smith Farm & Stable. He purchased her third dam Run Tan Tan for \$11,000 at the 1989 Keeneland November and saw her produce six winners for the stable, including the Lord Avie filly Avary Run, who in turn is the dam of nine winners from nine foals. Avary Run's daughter Alytania (by Mutakddim) earned \$117,110 – her best runner is Precious Avary, who has a record of 5-2-1 from 14 starts, and total earnings of \$274,448 (\$227,793 earned this year).



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