

Paulick Report: Ruler On Ice and Rob Whiteley Rule the Turf

By Frank Mitchell

As the chestnut gelding Ruler on Ice splashed to victory in the Belmont Stakes, he showcased the accomplishments of Liberation Farm and Brandywine Farm, who bred, raised, and sold the son of Roman Ruler and Champagne Glow to owners George and Lori Hall.

Rob Whiteley breeds horses in the name of Liberation Farm, and Jim and Pam Robinson breed in the name of their Brandywine Farm. In addition to being the co-breeder of this year's Belmont Stakes winner, Whiteley also is co-breeder of the sire of Ruler on Ice and planned the mating that produced Silvery Swan, the dam of Roman Ruler and his G1-winning half-brother El Corredor.

Whiteley bought the dam of Silvery Swan, the Quack mare Sociable Duck for Carl Icahn's Foxfield at the beginning of Whiteley's tenure as director of operations for that successful commercial breeding program. Whiteley recalled: "Some of Carl's friends at the time gave me flack for buying a short-legged mare by Quack for Foxfield. But it goes to show the quality of her gene pool, and this business shouldn't always be about show horses but about racehorses."

Racehorses are what Whiteley has specialized in during his time with Foxfield and then under his own banner after Icahn wrapped up his profitable involvement in the business.

In addition to Sociable Duck, who produced two stakes winners, and her daughter Silvery Swan, who has produced three, including the Grade 1-winning half-brothers El Corredor and Roman Ruler, Whiteley selected a deep pool of quality in the Saratoga Six mare Champagne Glow. Along with the Belmont Stakes winner, Champagne Glow is also the dam of last year's G1 Acorn and Test winner Champagne d'Oro (by Medaglia d'Oro) and stakes-placed Lost on Champagne (Orientate).

Whiteley said, "I used to love watching Champagne Glow race [a stakes winner who also ran second in the G1 Frizette], and I've always been partial to Saratoga Six mares. I knew that Wayne Lukas said [her G1-winning half-brother] Grand Canyon had immense talent, as did any of us who saw the colt run. And when she became available at the sale, my heart surgeon Chris Elia of Oratis Thoroughbreds and I were looking to get a couple of mares together, and we were able to buy her for our final bid of \$70,000 in foal to Favorite Trick."

That foal and the mare's next two were no better than useful at the track, but the mare's last three of racing age are the three stakes horses mentioned above. Whiteley said, "Champagne Glow is finally able to express herself and her potential as a broodmare because it took me a while to find the right physical mating for her. So I blame myself that some of her earlier foals did not go as well as the last few. It's very satisfying that I haven't been getting in her way lately.

“Champagne Glow herself is a very well-made and athletic individual, but in a stallion she needs a little more size and scope than what I was initially giving her. Medaglia d'Oro and Roman Ruler meet my physical specifications for physicals and gave her foals that added dimension.”

The 23-year-old broodmare's current yearling is a filly by AP Warrior that Liberation and Brandywine sold last year at the Keeneland November sale for \$130,000, the highest price for a weanling or yearling by the sire last year.

An endorsement of the now yearling's qualities is that horseman Bill Casner bought the filly for his wife Susan. Whiteley said, “Bill told me he went to Keeneland to find the loveliest filly in the sale to buy for his wife, and he just sent me a photo of the filly being kissed and fed peppermints by Susan.”

The breeders haven't forgotten about Champagne Glow either. Whiteley explained that “Brandywine became the co-owner with me because I always strive to do right by my older mares, and I thought they might benefit from an ownership interest in return for retiring her at their farm after her reproductive years are over. Now I would guess they are even more thrilled to do so.”

Pam Robinson of Brandywine Farm said, “Champagne Glow is a grand mare who doesn't look her age, and her son was always an athletic colt. From a very young age, he was always ready to do something, very full of himself. Our staff didn't have any trouble with him, but he was good-sized, strong, and active. And all the way through his early growth and later preparation for the sales, he looked the part of a very well-balanced, athletic colt who would have a future as a racehorse.”

Because Whiteley and the Robinsons were so taken with Ruler on Ice as a foal, they decided to breed Champagne Glow back to Roman Ruler this year, hoping to get lucky again. Following her most recent cover to the stallion, the owners are counting days to see whether their mare is back in foal for 2012.

They obviously hope so, and Whiteley, in particular, likes this mating. He said, “Breeding Mr. P on top of Silvery Swan is the magic in this pedigree. The females are wonderful racehorses and producers, and the pedigree is balanced with superior colts. Champagne Glow's latter foals are testimony to her quality and genetic strength showing through near the end of her reproductive career. If Ruler on Ice isn't the last nail in the coffin of the long-standing and silly myth that older mares can't produce top racehorses, I give up.”

Among other things, the classic winner is the 15th G1 stakes winner that Whiteley has bred under Liberation Farm or planned for Foxfield over the past two decades, along with over 150 stakes horses. Now that is a ruler on the turf !