

Laredo Morning Times



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Laredoan Steve Asmussen Wins Belmont Stakes

Steve Asmussen has watched a replay of the Belmont Stakes more than 50 times since his horse, Creator, used a furious surge on the final straightaway to win almost two weeks ago.

It was third Triple Crown race and fourth American Classic race the United graduate has won in his 30-year training career.

“It’s not only rewarding but extremely exciting in the way in which he did it,” Steve said. “He was coming off a disappointing race in the Kentucky Derby, so for the Belmont to unfold the way it did was extra exciting.”

He had two horses in the Kentucky Derby this year but came up short as Gun Runner finished third and Creator came in 13th. Neither horse was trained in Laredo, but Steve said more than half of the horses he runs were started out with his parents, Keith and Marilyn, in the Gateway City.

His parents are both trainers and have been in Laredo for 40 years and have two places where they train and breed horses. The Asmussen Horse Center is in the heart of the city, while the El Primero Training Center is located north of town on Old Mines Road. Altogether 150 to 225 horses are trained and bred by the Asmussens.

It’s not uncommon for the duo to get a call from one of their sons and hear they’re riding with a foreign king in Rolls Royce or jet setting to the South of France. But they still considered the race earlier this month at Belmont as one of their best memories.

“We’re blessed to be doing something we’d probably do for nothing,” Marilyn said. “It’s a profession where you have to have a passion and dedication for what you’re doing.”

Steve, his wife Julie and their three sons now live in Arlington, but he still considers the Gateway City home. He went to Milton and Nye Elementary and Mary Help of Christians School before graduating from United in 1985.

“My family moved to Laredo when I was two years old and we spent summers away at the races,” Steve said. “They opened the training center when I was in sixth or seventh grade. Laredo is definitely home to me. It feels the same to me when I make it back.”

Unsurprisingly, the entire Asmussen family has been hugely successful history with horses. Their oldest son Cash was an award-winning jockey in Europe and was the first foreign rider to win a French riding title. In 1991, he won Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, the most prestigious race in France. He currently works at the El Primero Training Center.

In the Asmussen's home is a room they call the "Ego Room." It's mantles are covered in trophies and statues and the walls are filled with photos and banners, including the saddle cloth and horseshoes from Curlin's Preakness run.

One of the statues is a bronze figure of Suave Dancer, a horse Kieth bought for a bargain price of \$55,000 before Cash rode him to wins at the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe and French Open races. The horse earned more than \$3 million in his career.

At age 50, Steve has already had a great career and will be inducted into the National Museum of Racing's Hall of Fame on August 12. Since he started training in 1986, he ranks second all time in career wins at 7,330 and is fourth in all-time earnings at \$243,525,494 and has ranked in the top 10 of yearly wins and earnings for 16 straight years.

In addition to this year's Belmont, he's finished in the top three at the Kentucky Derby three times and won the Preakness Stakes twice, first with Curlin in 2007 and again two years later with Rachel Alexandra. Curlin also won the \$5 million purse at the Breeders' Cup in 2007 and was named horse of the year.

"It's very humbling," Steve said. "I'm putting a lot of the Southwest in there and I carry a lot of the area with me. I'm proud of where we've come from and what we've gotten done and what we've accomplished. It shows you've left your mark."

The next time he will have a horse in action will be the last week of July when he and his parents head to Florida for the open races at Saratoga Racetrack. His horse Gun Runner is set to race in the Grade 1 Haskell in New York on July 31.

The biggest thing Steve remembers from growing up in Laredo is how important family is to the culture. He and his parents talk every day and said the success that he's had is partly because of the opportunities he had in Laredo.

"Growing up in Laredo and running in the fair meets on the weekend, you were all in and when you won it was a big deal," Steve said. "I've been extremely blessed to have success, but what's successful to me is to have those moments you can share with your family."