

## O W N E R P R O F I L E

# A "Positive Approach" Lands Owner Greg Long in the Winner's Circle

by: Craig Harzmann

Greg Long wanted a Derby horse growing up as a teenager in Lexington, Kentucky. Ever since the seventh grade, when he got his first riding horse, he has been hooked. He talked for years about the day when he would own his Derby horse, but he had no insight into the where and hows of becoming involved in racehorse ownership.

Fast forward fifteen years and you will find that Greg Long's dream has come true. He is still eyeing that elusive Derby horse, but his first crack into Thoroughbred ownership has resulted in King of the Heap, a talented young colt with the build of a linebacker and a late kick that leaves other horses tasting dust. For Long and the rest of his buddies who race King of the Heap under the name Big Blue Racing Stable, the dream came closer to reality when their star flew from last to first to defeat a quality field in the Grade I Malibu Stakes. This triumph proved to Greg that with patience, a business-like attitude, and most importantly, positive energy, dreams really can come true in horse racing.

A top-flight high school football player, Long continued his gridiron greatness as team captain at the University of Kentucky, where he still holds numerous records. His talent for flattening the opposition led him to tryouts with the Atlanta Falcons and the Indianapolis Colts. A separated shoulder in 1984 ended his football days.

"Honestly, I just don't think it was meant to be," explains Long. "I think when you get to that level, in any type of industry, it takes a little luck."

Returning to school, he studied

finance and earned a degree in 1985. Sunny California lured Greg away from the Bluegrass, and he began a career in the mortgage industry.

However, the racing dreams never left his mind. He ran into a former college teammate and current partner Dominic Sabatino, Jr., in the infield of Churchill Downs on Kentucky Derby Day in 1982.

"It was one of those magical moments in your life," Long recalls. "We looked at each other and said, 'Someday we should have a horse here at the Derby.'"

While they have yet to own a Derby horse, King of the Heap has shown them to the winner's circle in major stakes. Today, Big Blue, a tribute to the Kentucky Wildcats, consists of seven partners. Besides Long and Sabatino, the other members include Bill Combs, Richard Hiskey, Todd Mirsky, Uri Nemet, and Joel Tamraz.

When he is not feeding apples and peppermints to his star, Long, 37, spends his time in Manhattan Beach, minding 'a Sante' ("to health") Herbal Products, an herb supplement company he founded in 1990. Long cannot be missed driving around the backside of Hollywood Park with a license plate that reads "HRB MAN."

Long advises newcomers who are not sure how to enter the sport to contact someone in the business because "there's so much you can learn so quick. That's one of the problems with this business. For the person that doesn't know anything about getting involved, it's hard to know where to start." He mentions the TOC as a big factor in aiding prospective owners.

"I would recommend to everybody that ever gets into a partnership



Greg Long and trainer Wally Dollase pose with King of the Heap.

— number one, get a partnership agreement and make sure it covers all the bases," advises Long. "If you don't, then you're just asking for trouble. Make sure you treat it like a business. With the trainer, I would recommend you sign a contract. A trainer that respects business will respect you for wanting to treat it like a business."

All of the Big Blue partners are buddies, sharing a friendly, business-like relationship with trainer Wally Dollase as well.

However, Long feels there is a significant element that contributes to a horse making frequent stops in the winner's circle.

"Bring the attitude in to have fun, because horses sense energy. If you have a positive trainer and groom," suggests Long, "and if you're positive, I feel that the horse is happier and does run better. I see that with Wally and his horses. Every one of the horses is happy."

And how has King of the Heap stacked up with Long's dreams? "I'm still on 'cloud nine' just thinking about it. Right now, he's done more than I've ever dreamed of." 🐾

Racing fan Craig Harzmann is a "future" Thoroughbred owner. He will soon graduate from National University and hopes to pursue a career in turf writing.