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Bringing Youthful Energy into the Sport of Kings

Owner Profile: Joe Ciaglia

By Mary Forney

Joe Ciaglia has owned Thoroughbred race horses for a little more than a decade. An innovator and entrepreneur with some amazing stories to tell, he has brought energy, enthusiasm and a much needed youthful perspective to horseracing.

Ciaglia has introduced horseracing to a particularly hard-to-reach demographic: young, action-oriented sports fans. His work as president and CEO of California Landscape & Design and California Skateparks naturally brings him in contact with many of the country's top professional skateboarders, including Rob Dyrdek – who now owns five horses in partnership with Ciaglia.

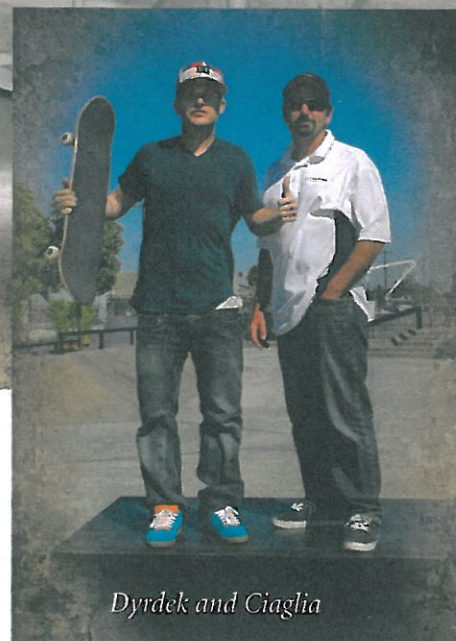
“I first started talking to Rob about horses at Breeders’ Cup

last year,” Ciaglia said. Last summer he brought Dyrdek into his existing partnership with Frank Alesia on a horse named Mega Heat. Ciaglia and Dyrdek, who are constantly bouncing ideas off of one another, came up with a plan for Dyrdek to not only purchase a racehorse, but also try his hand at riding it in a race. So Dyrdek learned to ride well enough to compete in a horse race at Hollywood Park (on a non-racing day) last June.

“I thought it could be pretty cool,” said Ciaglia. “The guy’s got talent, he’s athletic and I believed he could do it. So we asked to get it done. And at one point they weren’t going to use the starting gate, but I was convinced he’d be able to make it.” After some pretty intensive training at San Luis Rey Downs, with the



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Dyrdek and Ciaglia

help of several people in horse racing including trainer Matt Chew, Dyrdek was ready to try his hand at being a jockey. He even dedicated an entire episode of "Rob Dyrdek's Fantasy Factory" – his popular MTV series – to the adventure. (Watch the entire episode online at: http://www.mtv.com/shows/fantasy_factory/season_2/episode.jhtml?episodeID=157781.)

Born and raised in San Gabriel, Calif., Ciaglia has been fascinated by horseracing since his early teens; and although his family had never been to the track it didn't stop him from discovering the sport on his own.

"Actually when I was a kid I used to work at Ralph's Market in Arcadia near Santa Anita Racetrack," he recalled. "And I would go to the track all the time. Some of my fondest memories include watching Chris McCarron win races on John Henry. I always had a special spot where I would sit. I loved the horses early on, even though I knew I really couldn't afford them."

That changed in 1999, when Ciaglia partnered up with Frank Alesia at Del Mar to claim his first racehorse, Ask Crafty, for \$25,000. In his first race back for the partners,

Ask Crafty got claimed. But Ciaglia was hooked; and over the years he has enjoyed claiming, buying at sales, and even breeding horses with Alesia and a third partner, Mike Mellon, who races under the name Bran Jam Stable.

"The way it all started was my wife, Stephanie, was best friends with Pete Eurton's sister Julie; they actually went to college together," Ciaglia said. "Then I met Pete while I was doing landscape work at his house. Pete introduced me to Frank," he continued. "They kind of took me through it slowly. It actually took us six months to claim our first horse. They were super cautious. After that the horses came a little bit quicker."

"We pretty much always stick together," said Ciaglia. "We've been partners, getting along great all these years." Not only have the three partners stuck together over the years, they have stuck with the same trainer, Peter Eurton.

The next horse they claimed was Cee Dreams, who Ciaglia still considers the best horse he's ever owned. A \$20,000 claim, Cee Dreams went on to win six races for the partnership including the 2001 Cal Cup Matron. Unfortunately, Cee Dreams subsequently suffered a devas-

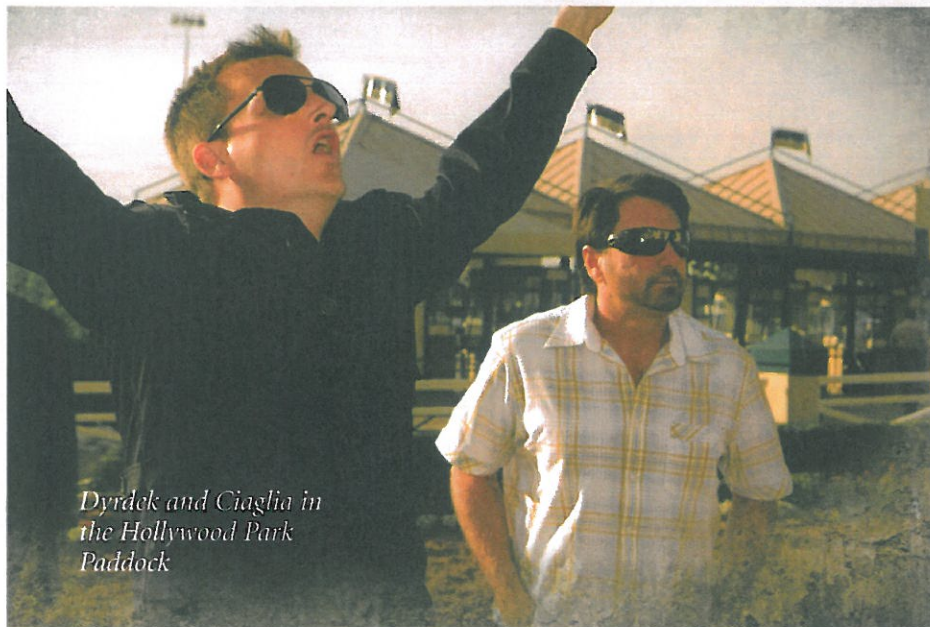
tating injury during training. She fractured both sesamoids and, although at first expected to make a full recovery, eventually had to be euthanized.

"It was kind of like the Barbaro story," Ciaglia recalled. "They ended up having to amputate her leg, and she got a prosthetic; but she foundered and we had her put down." It was a very hard lesson, especially for a new owner.

"Your first winner, you get a little selfish," he said. "Sometimes trying to save the horse is kind of selfish, really. We finally said, 'We've got to stop this.' The hardest thing is not falling in love with the horses," Ciaglia added. "But to last this long in the business, you've got to care about the horses, obviously.

"What I enjoy the most is being kind of an underdog, having an inexpensive horse that kind of works his way up, like Cee Dreams." Ciaglia also enjoys the breeding business.

"We have a horse, Bran Jammis, that was homebred. So that's really exciting because we have the mother and now we have the baby. And that makes such a big difference because you know the personality of the mom and then you get to see the offspring.



Dyrdek and Ciaglia in the Hollywood Park Paddock

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and internationally, in addition to unique projects for high-profile events such as the X-Games. A true pioneer in the sport of skateboarding, Ciaglia is also one of its top promoters and marketers.

"In the beginning there really weren't many skate parks being built," he explained. And the ones that were had a lot of restrictions. "We changed the way things are done for bowls, we've taken fences away, and we made them basically safe places to go out and skate. They're places where everybody can hang out, kids can skate, and parents can watch what's going on.

"It's basically part of everybody's lifestyle now, and we've consistently pushed the importance of having skateboarding, how many kids skateboard, and why it shouldn't be treated any differently than any other activity like baseball or soccer in a public park. We brought a lot of awareness to skateboarding, and a lot of people are building private facilities now."

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36-1/2 feet long, it has been certified by the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's largest skateboard. The board has traveled around California, to Las Vegas, and was even part of last year's Martin Luther King Day Parade in Los Angeles. Although it is meant to be ridden by ten to 12 people, Ciaglia took it on alone last July – and the resulting video has had more than three million views to date on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KU1qSSZDPws&feature=player_embedded).

"I think having athletes and stars involved with horseracing really will help the sport a lot," concluded Ciaglia. "It's good to get that energy back into the sport."



Peter Eurton, Stephanie Ciaglia, Joel Rosario, Joe Ciaglia, and Curt Wohl

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That's super rewarding. And of course having Cal-breds is pretty nice. We were one of the first to win the \$20,000 California-bred maiden bonus award, and we've won three now!"

Ciaglia's enthusiasm for horseracing is contagious, and his line of work places him in a unique position to introduce racing to fans of other high-action sports.

"We do custom residential homes, swimming pools, hardscape and landscape," he explained. "Then ten years ago I got interested in building skate parks. I built my first skate park in La Verne, Calif. and kind of kept expanding from that." To date he has worked on more than 200 projects and produced world class skateboarding facilities and concrete skate parks all over the U.S.