



CTBA Member
PROFILE

CALIFORNIA
BREEDING
FINDS JUST
THE RIGHT
NISHES

KEVIN AND KIMBERLY NISH

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Kevin and Kimberly Nish would have every reason to think the game of horse racing is easy, but they aren't fooled. Just because they found their way to the Breeders' Cup winner's circle a mere 15 months after getting into the game doesn't mean they aren't aware of the struggles involved with breeding top Thoroughbreds. They're also clear that their journey sounds like a fairytale.

"We started quick and went straight up to the top of the mountain, basically," Kim said. That's where they are working to stay.

The couple met working at Kimber Insurance in 1985 and were married two years later. Kevin recalls being a racing fan and bettor while in college during the 1970s, but realized relatively recently that "if I wanted to own a racehorse, I could."

They found the website for Victory Rose Thoroughbreds in Vacaville and met owner Ellen Jackson.

"We bought small percentages in a couple of horses Ellen had," Kevin said, "but we wanted to do more." That was August 2011.

They found bloodstock agents Alex Solis II and Jason Litt, who helped them buy some broodmares that November. In December, Litt had a client who wanted to sell his interest in six racehorses. One of them was stakes winner and multiple grade 2-placed Mizdirection, who a year later won the first of two Breeders' Cup Turf Sprints (G1T).

"It seemed like it was easy, which is a dangerous way to start," Kevin said.

Mizdirection earned \$1,719,621 and was sold for \$2.7 million at the 2013 Fasig-Tipton November sale.

"With the money from the sale of Mizdirection, we

rolled it back to buy a piece of Shared Belief," Kevin said.

At the time, Shared Belief was a juvenile who had won his first two starts.

"They advised us against buying him," Kevin recalled. "We would have had to pay too much. But it was one of the best decisions we ever made."

Shared Belief won 10 of 12 races, earned \$2,932,200, and is widely considered one of the top horses of the last decade. He won five grade 1 races and was thriving at the time of his shocking and unexpected death from colic in 2015.

Although they have dabbled in buying yearlings, most of what the Nishes race now are all homebreds foaled in California. In just their second year of buying broodmares, the couple obtained multiple stakes-placed Puskita for \$28,000. She was in foal to Philanthropist at the time. The resulting foal, California-bred Never Say Try, broke his maiden on his debut at Del Mar by 11¼ lengths.

Puskita's third foal is Apache Princess, a daughter of Unusual Heat. Apache Princess broke her maiden in her fourth start at Santa Anita last Dec. 30, then reeled off victories in an allowance race and the \$100,000 Sweet Life Stakes (G3). Most recently, Apache Princess finished third in the \$101,500 Campanile Stakes at Golden Gate Fields.

Puskita's juvenile, a Cal-bred Fast Anna filly named Hazare, is gearing up to head



Kimberly and Kevin Nish are finding themselves in quite a few winner's circles with their Cal-breeds

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to the track early this summer.

Maddie's Odyssey, by Kitten's Joy, was a \$14,500 purchase from the same sale as Puskita. Her second foal is Grecian Fire, another Unusual Heat. Jerry Hollendorfer conditions the chestnut gelding, who was already a stakes winner before he got his first graded win in the \$100,900 All American Stakes (G3) at Golden Gate May 27. He now has five wins in 23 starts.

Outside of Shared Belief's defeating \$14.7 million-earning Cal-bred California Chrome in a highly publicized edition of the 2015 San Antonio Stakes (G2), Kim considers the All American one of her greatest moments as an owner.

"I did not expect him to win like that, not even close," she said. "When we were first at the Breeders' Cup, someone told us not to let them become pets. This is a business. Well, I tossed that out the window. I give them kisses, I give them snuggles, we pet them. Grecian Fire is a big softie, but he rounded that corner and he was off."

The day before the All American, Maddie's Odyssey's sophomore filly Sneaking Out became grade 2-placed by running second in the \$200,000 Summertime Oaks. Earlier this year that daughter of the Nishes' stallion Indian Evening won the \$200,351 Evening Jewel Stakes by 2½ lengths despite an awkward start.

Maddie's Odyssey has been sent to Kentucky and was bred to Tapit for 2020. She has a juvenile filly by Fast Anna named Been Studying Her and a yearling full sister to Sneaking Out named Starlight Stroll.

Kevin's most memorable moment as a Cal-bred owner came with another daughter of Indian Evening, Kimberlea K. The homebred filly broke her maiden at Golden Gate in 2017 by 5¼ lengths, but was ahead by eight lengths



Cal-homebred Apache Princess wins grade 3 Sweet Life Stakes in February at Santa Anita

at the quarter pole.

"I remember that one pretty clearly," Kevin said. "We were watching on a cell phone on a cruise ship."

Outside of their California breed-

“We just try to get into a place where luck can find us.”

— Kevin Nish

ing program, Kevin and Kim's KMN Racing campaigned synthetic specialist Minks Aprise, a multiple graded stakes-placed stakes winner at Golden Gate, Woodbine, and Presque Isle Downs. The Kentucky-bred earned \$300,215 and brought an additional \$290,000 at the Keeneland January auction of 2018.

Minks Aprise was part of a group of five yearlings Solis and Litt purchased for the Nishes that also included stakes winner Lindisfarne and graded stakes-placed stakes winner Lutine Belle. A

year later came the cleverly named Stays in Vegas (City Zip–Double Jackpot, by Broken Vow), who ultimately finished in the top three spots in 10 of 13 starts, debuted with a stakes win, and started solely in stakes while earning \$419,279.

Unfortunately, Indian Evening died, and the couple now has an interest in Legacy Ranch stallion Straight Fire, by Dominus. Straight Fire broke his maiden at Del Mar in 2016 by 10½ lengths. He went on to be twice grade 1-placed before retirement.

"He's the one we're really hoping for," Kim said.

With three different stakes winners already in 2019 and a host of juveniles preparing for the summer meet at Del Mar, the Nishes look to continue their hot streak.

"The bloodstock guys say, 'Sometimes we like you to be in horses because you seem to be lucky,'" Kevin said. "We just try to get into a place where luck can find us." **CTB**