

## If At First You Don't Succeed - The breeding of Obrigado

Hoofbeats this month is featuring the racing career of Obrigado, a ten year old trotter who is staging a comeback after retiring in 2018 due to an injury. After a year of inaction he returned to race last September and has since bounced back with two wins at The Meadowlands including his latest, a front end win from the 10th post position. His perseverance is a testament to his own will and determination but also to that of his breeder Michael Andrew of Gorham, Maine.

I first met Mike Andrew at the 2004 Harrisburg yearling sale. I had a booth in the vendors area selling my Pedigree Matching program CD's and on the first day, while the sale was underway, Mike sat down at my table and asked me to look up a horse he had just bought. I put it up on the screen then said Uh-Oh and Mike, looking a bit startled, said "What do you mean Uh-Oh, I just paid \$210,000 for this colt". It was a trotter by Self Possessed and from a mare by Super Bowl. His name was Servage Hanover. I explained that it was not a cross that liked because at that point Self Possessed had shown no success with Super Bowl line mares and his profile showed, if anything, a preference for Noble Victory line dams. The colt had ten attempts to qualify in his three years in training and just one unsuccessful start. My first impressions on the cross actually turned out to be premature since Cash Hall and Prime Interest both made over \$600,000 subsequently. The two best by Self Possessed, however, were from Noble Victory line dams.

Mike returned later with his friend Dr Doug Hutchins, a veterinarian and small breeder from Maine. We discussed the breeding situation in Maine and also looked at some of the stallions standing there. Among them was Boy Band, a stallion owned by Mike that he had bought in Lexington in 2001 for \$145,000 that had failed to race with no earnings in three starts. In 2004 he had bred Boy Band to two of his own mares, Malimony and A Virtue, plus four mares owned by the farm where he was standing, and a couple of other outside mares owned by friends. Boy Band was not exactly popular as you could imagine given his racing career but he was from a very good family being from Classic Cassette by Florida Pro. She had 16 foals including a couple that made over \$500K including Giant Hit, and a couple of other stallions in A P Lindy and Rockaroundtheclock. Boy Band was her 12th foal. We looked at his own two mares and on paper, at least, they showed promise since both had the necessary maternal connections to the dam of Boy Band, particularly through Arnie Almahurst, sire of Florida Pro.

Early in 2005 I got a call from Mike, then president of the Maine Breeders Association, to see if I could come down to their annual general meeting in Portland in March and give a presentation on pedigrees. There were several presentations on different topics and they were done in parallel with morning and afternoon sessions. There was a lot of interest in the topic of stallion selection and I used my knowledge of Boy Band to illustrate the concept of maternal connections as being a big factor in the success of a stallion or indeed predicting success for a new stallion such as Boy Band. Another topic that came up was the practice of breeders choosing a different sire each year rather than staying with one that was deemed to have a good "match". I explained that, based on my own

observations and what I had learned from knowledgeable breeders, that the vagaries of genetics do not guarantee success every time you breed the same way but that there is a one in four chance that you will get at least one very good one, plus two decent performers and one dud.

Dr Doug Hutchins is trying his own version of staying the course. He made his first appearance at Pedigree Camp on PEI in 2009 and we discussed the breeding of his mare Cocktail Hour and decided that he should try to get Muscle Hill. He did not get in the first time but the following year was accepted and she produced a colt called Martiniwithmuscle who was injured at three after making over \$140K and ended up in Sweden. Cocktail Hour missed in 2012 but hit the big leagues in 2013 with Bar Hopping, a winner of \$1,385,293, and now a stallion at Hanover Shoe Farms. He has continued with Muscle Hill getting two fillies that he has kept for his broodmare band and now has a fifth one by Muscle Hill, a colt called Cricket Hill, that will likely be in the 2020 Harrisburg sale. Will that colt be the start of another 1 in 4 run ? Don't bet against it.

Now it takes a lot of faith and perseverance to stick to such a plan but for Dr Doug and Mike Andrew it certainly worked out. A Virtue's 2005 foal turned out to be the one very good one in four such breedings with \$326K made. She was bred to Boy Band eight times in total, and had two other foals that earned over \$150K. Malimony was a bit slower to get her big winner. She too had eight foals by Boy Band and that 2005 foal, the first of six fillies, was decent for a Maine bred earning \$81K, and the fourth foal, also a filly, earned over \$230K and had a virtually unbeaten 2 and 3 year old stakes campaign that was a preview of what was to come. The fifth breeding produced a colt and that was a dud and the sixth was Obrigado now with earnings approaching \$1.9 million and a winner of 22 consecutive Maine stakes races at two and three. If at first you don't succeed !!

A look at the overall profile of success for Boy Band, who is still breeding with three foals in 2018 including another from A Virtue, shows that the presence of the Arnie Almahurst line in the dams was indeed an important factor in his success with 15 of his top 17 including the top four all exhibiting that maternal connection. But what was in the pedigree of Obrigado that made him so much better than the rest.

His maternal family is #18 on the list for all time sub-2:00 performers and is relatively short lived compared to many of the top families The family matriarch is Molly J, born around 1885, by a grandson of Hambletonian and from a dam listed simply as By Boston Horse. She has one daughter, Mary Bales, by Montjoy, a full brother to Waller, the sire of Molly J. Montjoy's dam has a daughter of Pilot Jr called Kate maternally so it is the first connection to the X-factor mare Miss Russell, also a daughter of Pilot Jr.

Mary Bales has two daughters, a pacer by Zombro called Zombrewer and a trotter by Nutwood Wilkes called Wilkes Brewer, but it was her first born Zombrewer that was to make the history books with a filly called Elizabeth by Peter The Great. Her pedigree combined the maternal influence of two daughters of Pilot Jr in Kathleen and the aforementioned Kate and when bred to Guy Abbey produced the fastest trotter in the

world at the time, the legendary Greyhound. He was born in 1932 and was the outstanding trotting horse of his day and arguably the most outstanding in the history of the sport. He was nicknamed "The Great Grey Ghost" and "Silver-skinned Flyer." In 1935, he won the Hambletonian in world record time for two heats combined and in 1938 he lowered the world record time for trotting the mile to 1:55¼, a record that stood until for over thirty years..

Elizabeth had 16 foals and it was her daughter, Yankee Maid by Volomite, that leads us to yet another world champion in this pedigree. With successive breedings to sires like Porterhouse, Noble Victory and Speedy Crown the line arrives at that important connection with Arnie Almahurst bred to Quiet Elegance by Speedy Crown. She had an amazing 20 foals with six being born in the United States before being exported to Sweden. Three of the American breds were by Ardnon, a son of Arnie Almahurst, who has the great X-factor mare Margaret Parrish maternally. These include Kindavahush who, when bred to Lindy Lane, produced Hellava Hush, the first ever 1.51 trotter and a world champion. A full sister produced Better By Design, a \$342K winner also by Lindy Lane. The third full sister is the second dam of Obrigado, Meadow Hush, producing Malimony by Malabar Man whose pedigree now has an X-factor double to Speedy Crown to add to its maternal inheritance.

Considering the success of the recent maternal line with Lindy Lane perhaps we should not be surprised by the success of Malimony with Boy Band, himself a son of Lindy Lane. A proven pedigree match with a maternal line featuring world champions is a roadmap to success that anyone can follow.

When researching the pedigrees of horses it is often surprising to find a personal connection to the pedigree. Apart from my acquaintance with Mike Andrew there are several other such coincidences. Boy Band's trainer was Ivan Davies, who was born in Kington, Worcestershire just across the border with Wales where my maternal grandfather was born some twenty miles away. I don't have any Davies in my maternal line though as far as I know but I do have a closer connection to Obrigado's driver in Maine. Heath Campbell's family came from Charlottetown, PEI and his uncle John "Buddy" Campbell was a trainer/driver/horse shoer of note for many years at the Charlottetown Driving Park. When my son, Charles, was a teenager learning how to train and shoe horses it was Buddy Campbell that took him under his wing. Charles is now an equine practitioner in Ontario.

There is yet another connection, this time to the family of Obrigado. In 2002 my horse partner Bill MacNeil of Saulsbrook Farms and I bought a mare in Harrisburg in foal to Dream Vacation and she produced a colt we named Critic Vacation. We were back at the sale the following year looking for a weanling to raise and train with Critic and settled on a smallish Angus Hall colt called Fight To Win. I was attracted to the colt because of his pedigree that was a double/double of Speedy Crown, Stars Pride and Arnie Almahurst lines. The dam was R Sweet Hush, a three quarter sister to the dam of world champion Hellava Hush and, as it turns out, to the second dam of Obrigado. Both Critic Vacation and Fight To Win had decent racing careers earning \$111K and \$121K respectively. Critic's big race was finishing a lapped on second to the PEI 3 year old

stakes record holder Maple Leaf Noble in a then track record 2:01.1h. Fight To Win, not eligible to any stakes had to face Open Trot company at three in Charlottetown finishing second in 2.01.2h. They were sold later in their three year old years to Ontario but turned a nice little profit for Bill and I.

Waiting for your 1 in 4 chance to show up gives you a possibility of a 25% success rate - a lot better than the 4-5% success that is experienced by breeders in general as they rotate their mares through the available sires hoping to get lucky.