

Familiar Faces: Finding An Expert Adviser

BY NATALIE VOSS

For a player in the modern world of Thoroughbred sales, navigating consignments, evaluations, purchases, preparation and portfolio management can be an overwhelming blur. Even for veterans, today's market requires a new but experienced approach to combat the economic downturn.

Many in the Kentucky Thoroughbred industry recognize Tom VanMeter's name from his lifetime association with the sales business.

This year, VanMeter decided to put his 25 years of experience to practice in a new way, launching his own VanMeter Sales with well-known partners Olin Gentry, Thomas Gaines and closely associated with Arthur St. George.

"We thought, 'Nobody's going to do this like we would do it' ", said VanMeter. "When we started we didn't have a pitchfork...(but) people started calling, and the next thing you know we're in business."

He says that VanMeter Sales will be a full-service agency, providing consignment, sales prep, board-

ing, appraisals, matings advice, and portfolio management. The company has 66 horses going into the Keeneland September sale, and VanMeter anticipates a similar number for the Keeneland November sale.

While he acknowledges that this is an unconventional time to be starting a new business, particularly in Thoroughbred sales, VanMeter is in a prime position to take such a risk: he has had success at the highest levels of racing as an owner, consignor, appraiser and breeder.

In addition to his high-level experience in sales, VanMeter also holds a veterinary medicine degree from the University of Georgia, which he says has proved extremely valuable during his career and gives him a unique perspective and understanding of horses he evaluates. The early part of his career was spent doing reproductive work with Dr. Ruel Cowles, which added another dimension to his range of expertise.

A lifelong racing enthusiast, VanMeter bought Stockplace soon after graduation and has used it as a home base for his own stable, allowing him to gain experience in broodmares, racehorses and pinhooks.

All those years of experience have taught him that the recession cannot last forever.



"At some point...this thing is going to turn around, and it's going to be good again," he said.

When it does, he wants to be ready to do things his way.

He plans for VanMeter Sales to be a different type of agency from many in business today.

"We're not trying to be everything to everybody...we're not going to be Walmart," he declared.

He expects it to be a mid-sized operation based on clientele he and his partners have worked with before. VanMeter Sales will look to consign only quality prospects

with appeal both on paper and in person.

Once he saw the opportunity to start a new venture with longtime business associates, he decided to take a gamble that he believes will ultimately pay off. He is quick to stress that his partners, like him, are lifelong horsemen who together bring a wealth of experience, perspective and ambition to the table for their clients.

"I want them to know that we're serious, that we know what we're doing...and that we're hungry," he said.



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