

Quality Operation and Quality Horses Culminates in 12 Months of History Making

Sara Skalley

Q & A with Craig Bandoroff

Craig Bandoroff has become a well-recognized name at Thoroughbred sales, where he has built a well respected farm and sales agency in Denali Stud over the last two decades. These days, it's almost unusual to see Denali absent from the list of sales-topping consignors at public auction, which is no surprise for a company responsible for the sale of Breeders' Cup champions Uncle Mo and 2011 Kentucky Derby winner Animal Kingdom.

Although Bandoroff has been at the top of his game for some time, the last year has proven to be one of his best.

What was the 2010 Breeders' Cup experience like for you?

We've sold a lot of nice horses that have won nice races and adding two winners from our program, Pluck foaled/raised and Uncle Mo from our sales program added two more jewels to the crown, so to speak. You want to sell horses that can perform at the highest level on an international stage — we want to raise Grade I caliber runners. We've always wanted to play this business at the top and we've been fortunate enough to have clients that have allowed us to compete at the top. We'd never won a Breeder's Cup race before, so that was really special but then to have two of them in one day, and to do it the way they did it, very impressively, I was about as excited as you could ever be.

Pluck and Animal Kingdom were home-breds for Team Valor, both were foaled and raised by Denali. What were they and Uncle Mo like as young horses?



Joy Gilbert

Uncle Mo was a big leggy horse as a baby. Pluck never went to the sale but being foaled and at raised at the farm made that special and meaningful. Animal Kingdom was a very good looker for which we had high expectations. All three horses had quality and that's what all good horses seem to have.

You announced a strategic alliance with Team Valor earlier this year, which was obviously great timing since Animal Kingdom just won the Derby for them. How did that come about?

Barry was looking to consolidate his operation and we'd done business together for a long time. I proposed the idea and he readily accepted. He's a quality person and over the years I've dealt with him, he's always done what he said he was going to do, and I think he accepted it because he has mutual respect for me and he is a big fan of my management team led by Gary Bush. People who deal with quality and are busy people want to know their business is being handled the way they'd expect and I think that's why this worked for him. For us it gave us an opportunity to align with a quality operator who has quality horses.

You were also associated with Animal Kingdom on an ownership level as a partner. What was that experience like?

It was so unusual because we do race some fillies but rarely stay in on the colts. Thanks to Barry Irwin I did. It was a once in a lifetime experience. There are so many great races but the Kentucky Derby is the Holy Grail. To be a part of it on Kentucky's biggest day and to have my wife Holly and our children there was a day that you really don't ever expect to have.

You were a leading consignor earlier this year at the Keeneland September sale, grossing over \$6.3 million. How do you see the current market, moving forward?

I think this October sale is showing that we're off the bottom. We have a long way to go before we reach profitability for the majority of horses but there's strong demand for good horses. You put the right product in front of the buying public, and prices are better than they've been in several years.

Denali has had particular success in New York, where they will soon be getting \$61 million in added awards. How does your success there benefit your clients?

We have several clients that are arguably the best breeders in New York, including Gallaghers Stud, Berkshire Stud, Edition Farm and Stepwise Farm. They're all very accomplished, and I think the added incentives to New York will make their programs that much stronger. I'm pleased that their horses will be more valuable because obviously New

York-breds will be in higher demand. We lend a strong expertise and familiarity with New York to anyone considering getting involved there. We have a strong relationship with the trainers there and we have been doing business there for a very long time.

Speaking on a more national stage, what sets you apart from other consignors operating at this level?

We've acquired 700 acres of the best land in central Kentucky, quality Central Kentucky land that breeders have long sought after, and I'm very proud of the facilities we've built. We have three farms now, one broodmare facility where we foal mares; one yearling facility and a smaller farm for maidens or quarantines.

We also have a staff of some of the best professionals in the business—Gary Bush, my manager and Donnie Snellings, my yearling manager are well-established as two of the finest horsemen in central Kentucky.

Since the farm was established our slogan has been, "Where attention to detail is standard." We all stay focused on that. When you deal with Denali, you're very much dealing with an owner that is hands on; I have a strong management team and staff but I am very involved in all aspects of our operation. I think it is a little bit more of, the guy you hire is the guy you get.

In addition to selling, boarding, and sales prepping for our sales clients we offer portfolio management of breeding programs and we have been very fortunate over the years to be associated with some of the best clients out there. I sold Royal Academy as a yearling for R.D. Hubbard, then we met the Lewis family and Serena's Song joined the broodmares at Denali, they along with Dede Snowden, Barry Weisbord, Richard Santulli, and Bobby Flay, they have all played a big role in our success. We have several new clients who have allowed us to handle their portfolio management and purchase some very nice mares recently. This is an important addition to Denali.

DENALI STUD

1700 Georgetown Rd. Paris, KY 40361
Phone: 859-987-6212 / Fax: 859-987-6210
www.denalistud.com / Craig@denalistud.com

You've got some well-known mares coming off the track to the Keeneland November sale. Who are you most excited to sell?
Gypsy's Warning (SAF) comes from a really strong South African family. She won the 2010 Matriarch running a 2 1/2 Rag number, the fastest in ten years, and she's a classic winner in her home country. She is nominated to the 2011 Matriarch, so we think she'll be very well-received.

Daveron (GER) is out of a full sister to the dam of Animal Kingdom and comes from a very good German family. She won the Grade 2 Ballston Spa at Saratoga and came second by a nose to Together (IRE) in the First Lady S.-G1 at Keeneland.

We'll also be rooting hard for another of our very good clients, Bobby Flay, he has two fillies Her Smile and More Than Real in the Breeders' Cup. They have a lot of racing still to come from them.



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