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Coming Up Aces

Fred and Jane Brei's Jacks or Better Farm plays a winning hand

BY MICHAEL COMPTON

FRED BREI'S SUCCESSFUL approach to Jacks or Better Farm's racing operation may seem like common sense, but for the runners carrying its purple and gold colors, the farm's genius lies in uncompromising dedication to best practices. Precocious homebreds such as Eclipse Award champion Awesome Feather and multiple grade I stakes winner Jackson Bend, ascending to the top ranks of their respective divisions in recent years, clearly illustrate the commitment is yielding uncommon results.

The dedication begins early with homebreds at the 89-acre Jacks or Better Farm near Reddick, Fla., a property acquired by Fred and his wife, Jane, in 1997 and home today to their broodmare band of 24. The initial lessons for foals start virtually at birth, continuing later at the Breis' 30-stall training barn housed within the expansive Nelson Jones Training Center.

The Breis (rhymes with why) invest the time and resources required to build solid foundations—both mentally and physically—in each of their young horses. The routine and repetitive work coaching the minds of impressionable youngsters are no secret, yet patience and attention to detail stand tall as the cornerstones of the farm's renowned regimen.

'Our program requires a great deal," Fred Brei said. "We don't weigh the cost of raising our horses up front. Our babies don't even come out of the stall the first time without

a halter. The babies have halters on and are led by a person the first time they ever see daylight. We have one man with mom and one with the baby. We lead them all twice a day while they are on the farm. With me, the care of the horse always comes first. We take the temperatures of every mare and every baby each day. We know the moment something is not right with one of our horses. We make certain that everything is closely monitored.

"By the time our horses go to the training barn, they have been led every



Awesome Feather winning the 2010 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies; inset, Fred Brei



2012 LEADING SIRES IN FLORIDA

So to BloodHorse.com for daily updated sire lists

				Stakes		_			Cumu	lative	
Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2013 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Wnrs/ Wns	GrSW/ Gr1SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2012 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	PUT IT BACK (98, Honour and Glory), Bridlewood Farm	\$6,000	193/103	6/16	2/6	(Yara, \$294,470)	\$4,554,883	*675	27	1.44	1.38
2	WILDCAT HEIR (00, Forest Wildcat), Journeyman Stud	\$8,000	177/107	7/7	0/7	(Derwin's Star, \$233,000)	\$4,478,745	*321	18	1.55	1.54
3	WITH DISTINCTION (01, Storm Cat), Hartley/De Renzo Tbreds, LLC	\$7,500	169/103	1/1	0/1	(Merit Man, \$192,000)	\$3,278,247	*268	5	1.10	1.23
4	CHAPEL ROYAL (01, Montbrook), Signature Stallions	\$10,000	228/110	3/3	1/3	(Dolly Peach, \$162,195)	\$2,976,189	*530	10	0.91	1.22
5	REPENT (99, Louis Quatorze), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$3,000	165/82	3/6	1/3	(It's Never to Late, \$139,238)	\$2,837,510	*413	22	1.17	1.25
6	GRAEME HALL (97, Dehere), Winding Oaks Farm	\$5,000	110/61	3/4	1/3	(Belle of the Hall, \$214,750)	\$2,494,010	*341	20	1.51	1.27
7	LEROIDESANIMAUX (BRZ) (00, Candy Stripes), Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$22,500	90/45	3/4	1/3	(Animal Kingdom, \$388,800)	\$2,381,068	*200	8	2.07	1.71
8	GREATNESS (99, Mr. Prospector), Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$2,500	69/40	4/10	0/4	(Good Lord, \$258,177)	\$1,964,284	*178	8	1.48	1.06
G		Died, 2011	77/43	2/5	0/2	(Musical Romance, \$464,035)	\$1,928,033	474	26	1.28	1.14
10	VALUE PLUS (01, Unbridled's Song), Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$2,500	115/62	0/0	0/0	(All Due Respect, \$104,410)	\$1,908,589	*272	1	1.01	1.23
11	CITY PLACE (00, Storm Cat), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds, LLC	\$5,000	81/55	5/7	1/5	(La Tia, \$274,041)	\$1,625,742	192	10	1.36	1.05
12		\$7,500	52/27	4/5	2/4	(Currency Swap, \$270,300)	\$1,575,238	*82	4	1.50	1.20
13		N/A	72/39	2/4	0/2	(See Tobe, \$197,870)	\$1,475,226	*403	24	1.53	1.29
14		\$2,500	76/38	1/1	0/1	(Sr. Quisqueyano, \$149,600)	\$1,353,541	117	2	0.92	1.10
15	A. P. WARRIOR (03, A.P. Indy), Stonewall Farm Ocala	\$4,500	80/42	1/1	0/1	(Exclusive Warrior, \$134,550)	\$1,275,825	108	3	0.91	1.45
16		\$2,500	77/43	0/0	0/0	(Little Drama, \$127,250)	\$1,220,801	*150	4	0.84	1.26
17		\$2,500	55/34	4/4	2/4	(Awesome Fire, \$225,772)	\$1,207,627	*109	4	0.87	1.10
18	(c · , g · , ,	\$3,500	84/37	1/1	0/1	(Imperial Czar, \$125,518)	\$1,182,731	129	2	0.89	1.01
19		\$7,500	76/30	1/2	0/1	(Shadowbdancing, \$135,833)	\$1,181,603	*769	47	1.60	1.57
20	(- , -),,	\$3,500	59/28	2/3	0/2	(Another Romance, \$178,660)	\$1,175,950	*79	3	1.01	1.34
21		Died, 2012	47/26	2/2	1/2	(Speak Easy Gal, \$114,640)	\$1,162,104	302	12	1.42	1.21
22		\$3,000	97/41	1/1	0/1	(Scherer Magic, \$148,400)	\$1,131,482	*652	24	1.06	1.34
23		\$2,500	31/19	2/3	1/2	(Playing a Joke, \$158,940)	\$1,087,761	47	2	1.38	1.13
24	3,	\$7,500	21/13	4/10	0/4	(Fort Loudon, \$384,638)	\$1,053,829	46	5	3.15	1.18
25	DOUBLE HONOR (95, Gone West), Get Away Farm	\$2,500	73/34	2/2	0/2	(Dryden, \$96,740)	\$912,091	*550	20	1.10	1.18

day," he added. "All of that hands-on work pays off by the time they enter training. It's typical of our program that we have a rider on their back from the get-go. They are jogging in the shedrow shortly after that. We stay intensive in their early training. Of course, it costs us more to accomplish this. You must have the labor and the stall capacity to make it all happen."

The Breis' intensive philosophy is returning dividends in a big way on the racetrack. In recent years, performances by Jacks or Better runners routinely make national headlines. In 2010 homebred Awesome Feather stylishly swept her division of the Florida Stallion Stakes series at Calder Race Course. She parlayed that impressive streak into an authoritative victory in the Grey Goose Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies (gr. I) at Churchill Downs at season's end under the tutelage of trainer Stanley Gold, the farm's Florida trainer.

"Coming down the stretch, John Velazquez (aboard runner-up R Heat Lightning) came off the rail and bumped her," Brei said, recalling Awesome Feather's memorable Breeders' Cup victory. "Well, I knew at that moment that we weren't going to get beat. I headed straight toward the winner's circle."

The victories just kept coming. Two days following her Breeders' Cup score, Awesome Feather brought \$2.3 million at the Fasig-Tipton sale in Kentucky with Frank Stronach casting the sales-topping bid. The following January at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach, Brei accepted Awesome Feather's Eclipse Award as outstanding juvenile filly of 2010. Awesome Feather added to the trophy case when she was honored as Florida's Horse of the Year by the Florida Thoroughbred Breeders' and Owners' Association.

'I probably have a different feeling about selling her than most people would think," related Brei, a big believer in the Floridabred racing program. "I was delighted we had won a big check in the race. If she hadn't won the Breeders' Cup, I would not have sold her. I really don't like racing outside of Florida. I prefer for my 2-yearolds to race right here at home. If we have one that's good enough to race in New York or California, I would rather sell the horse than go out of state myself to watch it run. As far as I'm concerned, when I get a good one, chances are it will get sold."

A daughter of the Breis' homebred stallion Awesome of Course out of their stakes-winning Gone West mare Precious Feather, Awesome Feather was retired following the first defeat and only unplaced effort of her career in the 2012 Breeders' Cup Distaff (gr. I) at Santa Anita last November. A "double homebred," as Fred calls her, Awesome Feather concluded her racing days having won 10 of 11 starts in a stellar career. The ninth-leading money earner of 2010, her championship season, Awesome Feather amassed career earnings of more than \$1.9 million. She made only five starts in Stronach's colors, most notably annexing the 2011 Gazelle Stakes (gr. I) at Aqueduct in November 2011 and the Florida Sunshine Millions Distaff Stakes at Gulfstream Park in January 2012 after overcoming a tendon

'She was a special racehorse from the standpoint that she didn't like having any horse in front of her," Brei said of Awesome Feather. "When she was with us, I never saw a horse that could get in front of her or catch her. We had to stop galloping her in company. She would never let up. She was fine if she was two or three lengths in front of her company, but as soon as they would draw any closer than that, she had to prove she was going to beat them. She ran her races the exact same way."

Despite not racing in the Jacks or Better colors following her juvenile season, Awesome Feather will always have a special place in Brei's heart.

"She is special," Brei said. "It was bittersweet that she didn't win her last race before being retired. I would have much rather seen her go out on top, that's for sure."

In 2009 the Breis made some Florida racing history of their own. After 10 years of watching their runners compete in the Florida Stallion Stakes series without visiting the winner's circle following an FSS race, the couple finally broke through

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in North America (stallions exported prior to the 2008 breeding season are excluded), and have runners in North America. All available statistics listed below for the Northern Hemisphere through December 31, 2012. As supplied to *The Blood-Horse* by The Jockey Club Information Systems, Inc., earnings exclude monies from Japan and Hong Kong. Current year stakes winners include all N.H.-foaled stakes winners worldwide and any S.H.-foaled horses that won a N.H. stakes. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners includes all countries. (A ¶ indicates a

*AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX and COMPARABLE INDEX: Lifetime AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX indicates how much purse money the progeny of one sire has earned in relation to the average earnings of all runners in the same years; average earnings of all runners in any year is represented by an index of 1.00; COMPARABLE INDEX indicates the average earnings of progeny produced from mares bred to one sire, when these same mares were bred to other sires. Only 32% of all sires have a lifetime AVERAGE-EARNINGS INDEX higher than their mares' COMPARABLE INDEX.

Honour and Glory / Miss Shoplifter, by Exuberant

F L O R I D A ' S

Progeny Earnings: \$4.5M

Stakes Winners: 11

Graded Winners: 5

2YO Progeny Earnings: \$1.2M

2YO Winners: 23

Sire of 2012 Juvenile Sensations:

BRAVE DAVE

Winner of 4 of 6 juvenile starts, with three consecutive \$100,000 stakes victories including: Sapling S-G3 at Monmouth Park \$125,000 Jack Price Juvenile S. at Calder

PUTYOURDREAMSAWAY

ALLION STAKES FILLY

Winner of the \$125,000 Susan's Girl S. (FSS) by 7 1/2 lengths and second in the Desert Vixen S. (FSS).

In 2012, more 2YO winners than:

Medaglia d'Oro • Malibu Moon • Elusive Quality Kitten's Joy • Speightstown • Unbridled's Song More Than Ready • Giant's Causeway • Hard Spun Street Sense and Tiznow.

CINDY MIKELL PHOTO ©

* STATISTICS THROUGH 12/31/12



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when Jackson Bend swept all three legs of the series' open division that year. Following Jackson Bend's FSS sweep in 2009 and Awesome Feather's repeat of the feat in the filly division a year later, homebred Fort Loudon, in 2011, made it three years that Jacks or Better color-bearers saddled by Gold swept a division of the South Florida

"By the time Jackson Bend, Awesome Feather, and Fort Loudon came along, we had been at this long enough that we were on the second and third generations of our own mares and stallions," Brei said. "Our success really began to pick up when we got to the point of breeding our own to our own. We knew the studs and the mares, and we were well aware of the flaws and strengths of each horse. It is a definite advantage."

True to his doctrine, Brei sold a majority interest in Jackson Bend to Robert LaPenta in October 2009 to give the oncedefeated horse a chance against the best of his generation outside of the Sunshine State. A son of the Breis' homebred stallion Hear No Evil out of the Tabasco Cat mare Sexy Stockings, Jackson Bend was pointed to the following year's classic races. He finished second in the Holy Bull Stakes (gr. II), the Fasig-Tipton Fountain of Youth Stakes (gr. II), and Wood Memorial Stakes (gr. I), and was third in the Preakness Stakes (gr. I) while in the care of trainer Nick Zito.

Jackson Bend went on to glory, winning the Forego Stakes (gr. I) at Saratoga in 2011; the Carter Handicap (gr. I) and the Hal's Hope Stakes (gr. III) at Gulfstream Park in 2012. Following a fluke training accident at Saratoga in August 2012, in which a bolting horse ran into him on the training track, Jackson Bend was retired to Brent and Crystal Fernung's Journeyman Stud last October. He took career earnings of more than \$1.6 million to stud, and he will stand his first season for \$5,000.

"Jackson Bend is a horse with personality," Brei said. "He outran a lot of the best horses of his generation. He did it because he was a machine on the track. If you look at his record, he ran against the top horses each and every race. He didn't dodge any of them. He finished in the top three in the majority of his races. You just don't get any better than that. He's very special. And he's probably the best-balanced horse I've ever had," Brei added. "If you draw an absolute balanced horse, he wouldn't miss that ideal by more than a half an inch anywhere."

Brei's initial foray into the Thoroughbred business didn't last long. He bought a farm and his first Thoroughbreds in the early 1970s while working as a builder/developer in his native Northern Illinois.

"I bought that first farm mainly as an

2012 Florida Sires by Stakes Winners

Sire	. Stks Wnrs	Stks Wins
Wildcat Heir	7	7
Put It Back	6	10
City Place	5	7
Awesome of Course	4	10
Greatness	4	10
High Cotton	4	5
Strong Contender	4	4
Repent	3	6
Slaughter Beach	3	5
Graeme Hall	3	4
Leroidesanimaux (BRZ) .	3	4
Chapel Roval	3	3

investment," he said. "Once I had the farm I realized I wanted to see some horses on it. If I was going to have horses, I wanted to have horses that could make money. I bought some inexpensive mares in foal to cheap stallions, and like everyone else who does that, I failed. My best horses at that time broke their maidens. I also claimed a few horses and actually did pretty well with those. Most of my claiming horses paid their way.

"I stuck with it for nearly five years," he added. "My business was doing very well, and I got so busy I couldn't even make it to the races anymore. I sold the farm, and when my last horse was claimed from me, that was it.'

Brei focused on his business for the next two decades, ultimately selling his company in 1995. Upon retiring, the Breis moved to Savannah, Ga., for a short time before taking up residence in Florida.

"Jane and I were talking in the car driving home from a family visit in Illinois," Brei said, "and Jane reminded me of something my father once said about me owning some horses when I retired. I didn't want to live in the cold I was brought up in, so Kentucky was out of the question for me. I knew the only other place in the U.S. to breed Thoroughbreds was Ocala. We drove to Ocala, booked a room in the Marriott on State Road 200,

and looked at some properties in the area. Three days later we made an offer on the property that became Jacks or Better Farm."

Brei admitted that as recently as a couple of years ago he was giving serious thought to expanding the operation and possibly purchasing another farm. Those plans changed. He sold some broodmares at the Ocala Breeders' Sales Co. in October of last year and is slated to run more mares through the ring at OBS this month during its January sale.

"It came to my attention that I am 70 years old," he said. "Now I don't like to admit that, but I figured it might be time to sell some of the mares and no longer entertain any thoughts of expanding the operation."

Despite nixing the plans for expansion, Brei, currently serving a second term as a board member of the Florida Thoroughbred Breeders' and Owners' Association and a former president of the organization, is looking forward to the future offspring of Jackson Bend, Awesome of Course, and Hear No Evil, all of whom stand in Florida at Journeyman Stud.

"I'm proud to stand my stallions with Brent and Crystal," said Brei. "They are good people and very knowledgeable about the business. And I am proud to have Stanley (Gold) as my Florida trainer. This industry is all about relationships, and you want to surround yourself with top people."

Competitive by nature, Brei is looking forward to the next crop of youngsters to put through their paces, searching, all the time searching for the next stable star good enough to represent the Jacks or Better operation outside of Florida, even if it means in someone else's colors.

"There is nothing more special to me than breeding a double homebred who goes on to do big things," Brei said. "This is a competitive game, and that's what it's all about."

Spoken like a man who should know.



GONEA RAY

Millionaire Multiple G2SW

by DIXIE UNION

Won / Placed in 10 Stakes (6 Graded)

- · At 2, won second start in Saratoga Maiden Special and finished on the board in the Champagne S-G1
- At 3, won the Pennsylvania Derby-G2 by 9 1/2 lengths and the Ohio Derby-G2 by 2 1/2 lengths.
- · At 4, won the Salvator Mile-G3 by 5 lengths and finished second by less than a length to BC Classic winner BLAME in the Curlin S. Record: 5-5-4 in 21 starts, with earnings of \$1,125,162.

Superior Family

ILLICIT, by Mr. Prospector. Unraced. Dam of 8 loals, 4 to race, 2 winners-GONE ASTRAY (c. by Doie Union). Beyer 104. SUBJECT STALLION

Contentious (f. by Giant's Causeway). Beyer 91, TF 107. Winner at 3 and 4 in ENG and NA, placed in 1 start at 3 in GER, \$94,660 (USA), 2nd Kolner Herbst-Stuten-Meile [G3], Pomfret S., 3rd Space Property Rosemary S.

0.000), 3rd

Manipulator (c. by Unbridled). Beyer 84. 4 wins at 3 and 4 in ARG and NA Collusion (f. by Broad Brush). Beyer 62. Placed at 2, \$6,930. Illicit (f. by Mr. Prospector). See above.

to STRATOSPHERIC PURE PROFIT, by Key to the Mint, 4 wins in 5 starts at 4, \$55,0PM (\$43,821 (USA), 2nd hwt. filly at 2 on English Free Hand QUICK AS LIGHTNING (\$188,070 (USA), One The andelabra S.-G3, etc.). as-G1, etc.), INFINITE

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GONE ASTRAY

Dixie Union - Illicit, by Mr. Prospector 2013 fee: \$4,500 stands and nurses – first foals arrive in 2013 —



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