

Sons Shine in Ocala

*Third generation of O'Farrells
carry the ball at Ocala Stud*

BY LENNY SHULMAN | PHOTOS BY LOUISE E. REINAGEL



From left, Joe O'Farrell III and David O'Farrell with dad Mike O'Farrell

HISTORY ISN'T ALWAYS FLASHY. Of course, there are highlights, but strung out over many years, the institutions that survive are the ones whose tent poles include solidity and soundness. It's the steak, not the sizzle.

There are no fancy copper cupolas atop the barns nor grand viewing stands around the training track at Ocala Stud. There is just the sturdiness born of 62 years of breeding, foaling, raising, and training racehorses. And the satisfaction now that a third generation has taken over the reins of a family business that has defined the Thoroughbred industry in Florida.

Thirty-somethings David and Joe O'Farrell call most of the shots at Ocala Stud these days although their father, Mike O'Farrell, continues to be an onsite presence available for consultation and advice. Mike O'Farrell learned the horse business from his father, also Joe, who was the George Washington of Florida's commercial horse sales.

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BEAST MODE

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2 RAGOZIN**

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2017 LEADING SIRES IN FLORIDA


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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2018 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2017 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	WILDCAT HEIR (00, Forest Wildcat)	Died, 2015	225/141	9/13	4/9	(Pay Any Price, \$267,258)	\$6,327,120	*685	34	1.40	1.36
2	FIRST DUDE (07, Stephen Got Even), Double Diamond Farm	\$10,000	161/79	2/4	0/2	(Skye Diamonds, \$378,920)	\$3,653,163	265	5	1.16	1.26
3	HIGH COTTON (03, Dixie Union)	Pnsd	163/79	3/4	1/3	(Talk Logistics, \$205,850)	\$3,562,859	*387	11	0.98	1.26
4	ADIOS CHARLIE (08, Indian Charlie), Ocala Stud	\$3,000	76/52	2/3	1/2	(Mo Cash, \$246,984)	\$2,801,633	115	3	1.51	1.32
5	GONE ASTRAY (06, Dixie Union), Northwest Stud	\$5,000	107/59	4/6	2/4	(Starship Bonita, \$389,100)	\$2,608,810	*174	6	1.06	1.15
6	SONGANDAPRAYER (98, Unbridled's Song), Journeyman Stallions	\$3,000	149/73	1/1	0/1	(Abbaa, \$159,325)	\$2,222,547	*969	35	1.12	1.43
7	WITH DISTINCTION (01, Storm Cat)	N/A	116/60	0/0	0/0	(Padilla, \$97,412)	\$2,001,831	*504	11	1.07	1.17
8	TWO STEP SALSA (05, Petionville), Get Away Farm	\$5,000	123/57	3/3	1/3	(Driven by History, \$126,200)	\$1,909,980	230	7	0.99	1.00
9	IN SUMMATION (03, Put It Back), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	100/64	0/0	0/0	(Calculator, \$148,020)	\$1,803,638	219	5	0.97	1.36
10	BIG DRAMA (06, Montbrook), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$5,000	84/44	1/1	0/1	(Smile Big, \$131,242)	\$1,543,070	139	3	0.96	1.30
11	OVERDRIVEN (09, Tale of the Cat)	Pnsd	65/33	1/1	0/1	(Overnegotiate, \$164,765)	\$1,527,767	107	1	0.92	1.17
12	AWESOME OF COURSE (00, Awesome Again), Ocala Stud	\$4,000	88/46	0/0	0/0	(Awesome Banner, \$245,855)	\$1,510,355	*201	10	1.51	1.36
13	EXCLUSIVE QUALITY (03, Elusive Quality), Journeyman Stallions	\$1,500	88/43	0/0	0/0	(Dreaming of Neno, \$120,372)	\$1,243,725	299	7	0.95	1.08
14	GREATNESS (99, Mr. Prospector), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$3,500	47/33	0/0	0/0	(Mr Manning, \$159,875)	\$1,150,289	*255	7	1.31	1.01
15	BIONDETTI (08, Bernardini), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$4,000	62/31	0/0	0/0	(My Darling Sofia, \$82,535)	\$945,322	98	0	0.65	1.46
16	BACKTALK (07, Smarty Jones), Goldmark Farm	\$2,250	29/19	1/2	1/1	(Soutache, \$405,000)	\$943,270	47	1	1.22	0.75
17	FLASHSTORM (04, Storm Cat), Northwest Stud	\$2,500	42/26	0/0	0/0	(Cinderella El Crome, \$116,900)	\$749,335	82	3	0.95	0.96
18	POSEIDON'S WARRIOR (08, Speightstown), Pleasant Acres Stallions	\$6,500	29/6	1/2	0/1	(Firenze Fire, \$449,100)	\$598,466	*110	1	0.98	1.09
19	TREASURE BEACH (GB) (08, Galileo), Pleasant Acres Stallions	\$10,000	32/14	0/0	0/0	(Ambassador Jim, \$82,500)	\$588,439	*160	0	0.79	1.46
20	CROWN OF THORNS (05, Repent)	N/A	28/16	0/0	0/0	(Major Key, \$68,650)	\$561,110	46	1	0.82	1.14
21	J P'S GUSTO (08, Successful Appeal), Bridlewood Farm	\$2,000	33/19	1/1	0/1	(Remember Willy, \$56,242)	\$559,884	57	1	0.92	1.12
22	FIELD COMMISSION (05, Service Stripe), Solera Farm	\$2,500	30/15	0/0	0/0	(Ten Hut, \$102,910)	\$549,859	68	0	0.73	0.96
23	MONTBROOK (90, Buckaroo)	Died	34/21	0/0	0/0	(Schivarelli, \$112,598)	\$530,782	*895	47	1.45	1.48
24	HEAR NO EVIL (00, Carson City), Ocala Stud	\$2,500	29/12	0/0	0/0	(Toni Ann's Miracle, \$80,040)	\$486,043	114	7	1.58	1.47
25	BRETHREN (08, Distorted Humor), Arindel Farm	Private	18/6	0/0	0/0	(Tip Sheet, \$118,500)	\$483,056	35	0	1.24	1.78
26	SOLDAT (08, War Front), Woodford Thoroughbreds	\$5,000	43/13	0/0	0/0	(Pete Marwick, \$51,215)	\$453,269	82	0	0.52	1.32
27	TELLING (04, A.P. Indy), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$5,000	30/16	0/0	0/0	(Arcelor, \$46,551)	\$421,647	41	0	0.58	1.24
28	SILVER TREE (00, Hennessy)	N/A	20/13	0/0	0/0	(Tree Fire, \$51,834)	\$410,792	44	1	0.81	1.17
29	HELLO BROADWAY (06, Broken Vow), Ups and Downs Farm	\$3,000	11/7	0/0	0/0	(My Sweet Dove, \$108,020)	\$377,709	22	1	1.03	0.83
30	IQBAAL (06, Medaglia d'Oro), Ward Ranch	Private	12/8	0/0	0/0	(Big City Dreamin, \$63,141)	\$359,405	20	0	1.03	1.18
31	PROSPECTIVE (09, Malibu Moon), Ocala Stud	\$3,000	28/9	0/0	0/0	(Piven, \$55,311)	\$338,914	59	0	0.61	1.17
32	UNITED STATES (06, A.P. Indy)	N/A	37/18	1/1	0/1	(American Luxury, \$32,775)	\$333,968	56	2	0.61	1.13
33	BURNING ROMA (98, Rubiano), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$2,500	17/10	0/0	0/0	(I Zoom, \$49,829)	\$244,113	*181	5	0.98	1.13
34	WAGON LIMIT (94, Conquistador Cielo)	N/A	13/5	0/0	0/0	(Delta Bluesman, \$58,625)	\$225,158	196	7	1.31	1.09
35	VINEYARD HAVEN (06, Lido Palace)	N/A	14/8	0/0	0/0	(Sweet Tooth Haven, \$57,100)	\$209,782	35	0	0.60	0.84
36	ROCK HAMPTON (04, Storm Cat)	N/A	19/7	0/0	0/0	(Stone Heart, \$56,380)	\$192,658	53	0	0.61	1.05
37	DARK KESTREL (03, Stormy Atlantic), University of Florida Vet Medical Center	\$1,500	5/2	0/0	0/0	(Buckeye Bullet, \$107,820)	\$171,151	23	1	1.66	1.47
38	CAUSEWAY'S KIN (06, Giant's Causeway)	N/A	6/3	0/0	0/0	(Causeway Cutie, \$79,449)	\$170,121	10	0	1.03	0.76
39	FORTY GRAMS (04, Distorted Humor)	N/A	14/5	0/0	0/0	(Forty Kilos, \$49,810)	\$162,093	27	0	0.81	1.13
40	RATTLESNAKE BRIDGE (08, Tapit), Hartley/De Renzo Thoroughbreds	\$7,500	23/5	0/0	0/0	(Little Bridge, \$34,370)	\$155,726	43	0	0.31	1.16
41	DONERAILE COURT (96, Seattle Slew), Stonewall's Prestige Stallions	\$2,000	25/8	0/0	0/0	(Scherer Magic, \$34,815)	\$153,143	*698	18	0.99	1.27
42	SEÑOR SWINGER (00, El Prado), La Mancha Farm	\$5,000	18/4	0/0	0/0	(Hoof Hoof Away, \$44,297)	\$141,337	91	0	0.43	1.00
43	CORFU (11, Malibu Moon), Bridlewood Farm	\$3,500	12/3	0/0	0/0	(Flashing Diamond, \$39,950)	\$111,169	26	0	0.42	0.97
44	YOU LUCKIE MANN (06, Exchange Rate)	N/A	10/5	0/0	0/0	(Diamond Mint, \$39,850)	\$109,592	14	0	0.37	0.79
45	LIFESTYLE (00, Indian Charlie)	N/A	7/6	0/0	0/0	(Zing Zing, \$22,110)	\$106,789	21	1	1.12	0.99

Joe O'Farrell moved to Central Florida in 1955, one year before Florida-bred Needles won the Kentucky Derby. O'Farrell purchased 1,400 acres of limestone-rich soil under live oak trees, and the ex-car dealer, with the help of a band of cheap mares, began raising Thoroughbreds.

A one-man show, he rented the Hialeah paddock for a day in January 1957 to sell 26 2-year-olds "bred like billy goats." Surviving a rainstorm, he sold the horses, and the Florida commercial

horse industry was born.

O'Farrell, who embraced risk and threw caution to the wind in his business dealings, suffered a heart attack in 1971 as his farm was being foreclosed on. His son Mike left college a semester short of graduating to try and help save the farm, which he did.

Taking a more conservative approach, he steered the operation back to solvency while keeping some of his father's traditions. Ocala Stud still sells its stock com-

pletely and exclusively at 2-year-old sales in Florida.

"I'm blown away by the history of this place," said David O'Farrell, who handles the management of the farm while his brother Joe manages the books and the financial end. "I'm so impressed by what my grandfather started and built here, but I'm even more impressed by what my dad has done and his work here. He inherited a very difficult situation with the farm in financial ruin and things up in the air. But

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in the states featured in this section (stallions that are dead or exported prior to 2013 are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through December 31, 2017. As supplied to *BloodHorse* by The Jockey Club Information Systems Inc., lists include adjusted money from Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Adjusted earnings are put on par with average North American earnings from the previous year. For example, the average North American purse in 2016 is \$22,141 or 45% of the 2016 average purse in Japan. To put earnings on par, all Japanese progeny earnings are multiplied by 45% before being credited to a sire's progeny earnings. Hong Kong earnings are adjusted by 17%; Singapore by 65%. Current year stakes winners include all Northern Hemisphere black-type stakes results from all available countries. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners include all countries. (A ¶ indicates a sire represented by his first crop to race).

*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.



A set of 2-year-olds head out to the training track at Ocala Stud

he put his head down and built the farm back up to national prominence.

“I’m just glad to be part of the tradition and hopefully leave my mark on it in some way, but my father and grandfather have been an inspiration. What my dad did was almost impossible, and I’m really proud of him. He’s never rested on his laurels; it’s always been a battle. We’ve had good years and we’ve had bad years, and he’s always continued to work and I’m proud to be a part of it.”

Ocala Stud left the gate quickly, raising 1961 Kentucky Derby winner Carry Back. It bred and sold 1965 co-Horse of the Year Roman Brother and stood Rough’n Tumble, who contributed mightily to the survival of the farm after he sired the great Dr. Fager.

More recently Ocala Stud has bred multiple grade 1 winner and champion Musical Romance; grade 1 winner Asia Express; grade 1 winner Rigoletta; and multiple grade 1 winner Turbulent Descent.

It continues to make successes out of stallions whose race records are slighter than their brethren in Kentucky. And it has survived the vacillations of the state’s breeding and racing industries, including the demise of Hialeah and Calder Race Course (for all intents and purposes).

Six-foot-five and still lean as a fence post, Mike O’Farrell looks far younger than his years, which number in the high 60s. He’s a practical and realistic man, which makes his optimism

particularly comforting.

“There are bright spots and rough spots,” he said of the current state of affairs in the Sunshine State. “You might hear more about the bad things because there are disgruntled people who want to complain about Hershey chocolate bars not having enough nuts in them, but the breeders’ award program and the state-bred programs we have now are actually very good.

“The gradual destruction of Calder took its toll, forcing owners and trainers out of town, and that hurt everybody breeding horses here in Ocala. But we’re slowly building back. Things are on the improve after five or six years of decline.



Joe O’Farrell Sr., left, with Art Bruns at a 2-year-old sale at Hialeah in 1968

“Frank Stronach and Gulfstream Park are helping put up money for our Stallion Stakes series; the Sunshine Millions has helped; he’s been proactive in boosting the industry. We’ve had problems with some of the organizations in the state, and there has been a lot of negative press. Ultimately what makes good sense is good horses. That takes care of all the problems.”

At November’s Breeders’ Cup World Championships at Del Mar, two Florida-breds helped heap good publicity on Florida as World Approval and Caledonia Road scored victories. Ocala Stud counts among its clients industry stalwarts such as Sagamore Farm, Ian Wilkes, Carl Nafzger, and Chester and Mary Broman, the last-named also victorious at Breeders’ Cup this past year with New York-bred Bar of Gold in the Filly & Mare Sprint (G1).

Having sold off some of its original acreage, Ocala Stud today consists of three distinct land parcels that stretch out over more than 500 acres. The most historic piece houses the office and stallion barn and runs 181 acres. Less than two miles away is another 125 acres where the broodmares roam, and 10 miles north of town is the yearling division that covers 225 acres.

Ocala Stud owns some 35 broodmares and will foal out roughly double that number this season. Not surprisingly for a farm with its long history, Ocala Stud is bolstered by staff and management that have long been on the job there, some for four and five decades.

Joe and David O’Farrell will need to put in some time to reach that sort of longevity, but their enthusiasm indicates they will indeed get there. Joe left for college in South Carolina in the mid 1990s, and the separation from horses and the business left a hole. He returned to the farm in 2004.

“It’s hard to describe, but when you grow up around it, you miss it when you’re away,” he said. “It’s an amazing sport, and so different from other professions. It’s a privilege, particularly to carry on this farm that has been in the family this long. It’s a lifestyle more than a job.”

A former college baseball player, David O’Farrell had worked summers on the farm in his youth, enjoying the outdoors and the horsemanship. After graduating,



Ocala Stud sticks to the model of offering all of its horses at 2-year-old auctions

he also scratched the itch of wanting to return to work the farm.

"I started at the bottom, on the back of the pick-up truck with the broodmare crew," he said. "I worked my way up through the broodmare ranks, worked the 2-year-olds in-training sales, and pitched in at the stud barn to learn everything there is to do. You can't manage something if you don't know how to do it yourself, and I've worked all aspects. We work really well together as a family. I'm spoiled. I can go to my father and bounce ideas or suggestions off him, and he can help shape the decisions I make; he didn't have that luxury when he was growing up in the job."

Nearly one-third of the mares bred in



The O'Farrell boys with 16-year-old grade 1-producing broodmare Candlelightdinner

Florida last year were bred to Ocala Stud stallions, and the farm will present a dozen options for mare owners in 2018, including three stallions standing their first season. Leading the newcomers is Greenpointcrusader, who won the grade 1 Champagne Stakes at 2 and carries plenty of paper with him, being a son of Bernardini out of Ava Knowsthecode, who has also produced Greenpointcrusader's full brother Algorithms, an undefeated graded stakes winner; grade 1 winner Justin Phillip; and graded stakes winners Successful Mission and Keyed Entry.

"It's unusual that we get the opportunity to stand a horse with those credentials," said David. "He's by a leading stallion and out of that kind of mare and is a grade 1 2-year-old winner in New York to boot. So he's a promising young horse who, at \$5,000, offers tremendous value to breeders in Florida."

Noble Bird, by Birdstone out of a Tiznow mare, also debuts at Ocala Stud this year for \$5,000. Winner of the 2015 Stephen Foster Handicap (G1), he banked more than \$1.3 million.

"He is so visually impressive, a grand-looking horse and a grade 1 winner himself who had speed and could carry it a long way," said David. "He's by a classic-winning sire who was also a good 2-year-old, and I think the sky's the limit for him. He was extremely talented, and if he can throw his physical type, he could be a very important sire for Florida."

2017 FLORIDA SIRES BY WINNERS

Sire	Rnrs	Wnrs
Wildcat Heir	225	141
High Cotton	163	79
First Dude	161	79
Songandaprayer	149	73
In Summation	100	64
With Distinction	116	60
Gone Astray	107	59
Two Step Salsa	123	57
Adios Charlie	76	52
Awesome of Course	88	46
Big Drama	84	44
Exclusive Quality	88	43
Overdriven	65	33
Greatness	47	33
Biondetti	62	31
Flashstorm	42	26
Montbrook	34	21
J P's Gusto	33	19
Backtalk	29	19
United States	37	18
Telling	30	16
Crown of Thorns	28	16
Field Commission	30	15
Treasure Beach (GB)	32	14
Soldat	43	13
Silver Tree	20	13
Hear No Evil	29	12
Burning Roma	17	10
Prospective	28	9
Doneraile Court	25	8
Vineyard Haven	14	8
Iqbaal	12	8
Rock Hampton	19	7
Hello Broadway	11	7

The other new arrival in the stallion barn will be Rainbow Heir, who will make his last start at the end of January before heading to Ocala Stud. Similarly to the human connections at the farm, Rainbow Heir will be continuing a family tradition: his sire, Wildcat Heir, was a success story, becoming an important stallion while standing at Ocala Stud. Rainbow Heir is a hard-knocking sprinter who is a graded stakes winner who has won eight stakes on dirt and turf. He will stand for \$3,500.

That trio joins a stallion roster led by Uncaptured, the 2012 Horse of the Year in Canada and Canadian 2-year-old champion, millionaire, and Canadian classic winner by Lion Heart who stands for \$6,000.

"We couldn't be happier with his first few seasons," said David O'Farrell. "He's

a gorgeous horse, and his babies look terrific; his first crop are 2-year-olds in 2018. He's had such a positive response from breeders that in his third year he bred more mares than he did in his first two seasons—140 mares in his third year for the same fee. Breeders have a ton of confidence in him. His progeny will have to perform on the track, but they look the part, and he's got a big opportunity to be successful."

Saratoga grade 1 winner The Big Beast (\$6,000), a son of Yes It's True, has a first crop that are yearlings of 2018.

"He's a man's man," noted O'Farrell, "a big, awesome horse who was a talented, top-level sprinter who looks like he's made of solid oak. Just an awesome physical. Yes It's True was very successful in Florida before relocating to Kentucky."

Jess's Dream began his stud career last year at Ocala Stud, breeding 120 mares. Although he raced just once, it was an impressive outing, a victory at Saratoga going nine furlongs. His pedigree screams success, being a son of Curlin out of Horse of the Year Rachel Alexandra.

"He was very popular last year," said O'Farrell. "Curlin is having a tremendous run, and so we have a lot of hopes for him. He offers tremendous value (\$5,000) given his pedigree, and he's a tremendous-looking horse as well."

Unlike in Kentucky, it is difficult to gauge bookings in regional markets ahead of the breeding season, as breeders do not usually buy their seasons in advance. In 2017 Ocala Stud stallions bred 600 mares, but it's always nervous time waiting for the phones to ring. Like many other regional markets, Florida has seen its foal crop shrink over the past few years.

"You never know where the chips are going to fall until April; that's when you get an idea of how well you're doing," stated David O'Farrell. "People will wait to see how Uncaptured's babies are training; they'll wait and see what Jess's Dream's foals look like; they'll see how The Big Beast's short yearlings sell in January. People take a wait-and-see approach, so it's always hard to say what a book is going to be in advance. But my goal is always 100 mares to a stallion, and I'm sticking to that."



Uncaptured, Canada's 2012 Horse of the Year and 2013 classic winner by Lion Heart, stands at Ocala Stud

Ocala Stud also sticks to its policy of selling its entire crop as 2-year-olds, perhaps the last of the breeding operations to do so.

"It's been good to us," David O'Farrell said of the philosophy started by his grandfather. "And in today's world the 2-year-old sales have really gained in market share. We don't want to overthink things. We don't want to sell a yearling here or there that might turn out to be a really good 2-year-old. We put them all through the same program. We know what we do well. It doesn't always work out, but we have the program we set out to do, and that's how we're going to do it. We don't deviate from the 62-year-old plan very often. If it ain't broken..."



Ocala Stud stallion The Big Beast

Not much needs fixing at Ocala Stud, thanks to the succession of generations of the O'Farrell family. Mike is holding on tight and still shows up for work every day at the farm.

"They haven't succeeded in pushing me out the door," he joked. "People ask me why I don't retire. Hell, what would I retire for? I'm doing what I love to do, and I like being in the loop and being in the game. We still do it all: breed mares, stand stallions, have broodmares, foal, raise weanlings, train horses. It's been my life."

David O'Farrell echoes his father's enthusiasm.

"Every day is a challenge," he noted. "I have a lot of duties: I sell stallion seasons, so I speak to the breeders; I book mares; I'm involved in the overall farm management, the day-to-day operations; client communications. There's always something going on and the phone is always ringing."

"You're always excited to see the next crop, whether it's the yearlings turning 2 or the mares getting ready to drop their foals. It's always exciting."

Added his brother Joe, "We've been scratching and clawing for 62 years, and it's still fun for us. Everyone wants to breed the top horse in the world, and everybody gets a chance at doing it every year. We still believe that Florida is the best place to breed and raise a horse, and doing it as a family makes it all the more rewarding." **BH**