



BACKTALK

THE HORSE

Thanks to a precocious 2-year-old season that saw him post a Grade III and Grade II victory, Backtalk's third place in the Illinois Derby put him in position to edge his way into the Kentucky Derby gate in the event a couple of higher-placed prospects were to defect from the field.

The graded stakes earnings for the son of 2004 Kentucky Derby-Preakness Stakes winner Smarty Jones stand at \$225,916, usually enough to qualify to start in the Run for the Roses, but the bar has been set higher this year, leaving Backtalk on the bubble.



A start in the Derby will be a first for Gold Mark Farm and a second for trainer Tom Amoss.

THE OWNER

Gold Mark Farm is the nom de course of Paul Buhlman and Backtalk, a son of 2004 Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes winner Smarty Jones, is the owner's top horse so far. Backtalk was precocious at 2, winning the Grade III Bashford Manor Stakes at Churchill Downs and the Grade II Sanford Stakes at Saratoga before finishing fourth in Saratoga's Grade I Hopeful Stakes.

Buhlman, whose business is oil and gas in Texas, is relatively new to racing, coming into the racing and breeding industry in 2002 when he bought the Ocala, Fla., property that has become a state-of-the-art, 2,500-acre horse farm. At present, the farm is home to about 140 horses, about a third belonging to Gold mark and the others being boarders or youngsters to be broken and trained.

Buhlman founded ATP Oil and Gas Corp., a Houston, Texas, corporation that develops and produces oil and natural gas in the Gulf of Mexico and the North Sea. He serves as chairman and chief executive officer of the company. He has a home in Houston and one on the farm. He is widowed with no children.

After purchasing the land and creating the farm, Gold Mark didn't get into racing until 2006. The farm's first major winner was Elusive Lady, won the Grade III Tempted Stakes as a 2-year-old in 2007 and was runner-up in the Grade I Demoiselle. The following year, the filly, trained by John Kimmel, was scheduled

to run in the Kentucky Oaks but was scratched because the track came up muddy.

Gold Mark buys at yearling sales and plans to race those that it buys.

THE BREEDER

Clover Leaf Farms II is the former Ocala, Fla., farm owned by Tampa, Fla., entrepreneur John Sykes, who sold the farm in 2007 and moved his breeding operation to Kentucky under the name Woodford Thoroughbreds, a new breeding/sales entity based on the previous ClassicStar Farm near Versailles, Ky.

Sykes, a native of Charlotte, N.C., and a resident of Tampa, created Clover Leaf Farm II in 1997 for a reported \$5 million. The 1,000-acre farm was owned previously by Robert Brennan's Due Process Farm.

Sykes' Clover Leaf Farm made what has been considered its most notable sales acquisition when it bought I'll Get Along, the dam of 2004 Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner Smarty Jones. She was bought for \$130,000 in foal to Doneraile Court in 2001 and was sold in 2004 in foal to Elusive Quality and therefore carrying a full sibling to Smarty Jones for \$5 million, making her the highest priced broodmare sold at public auction that year.

Top horse raced under the Clover Leaf II silks was graded stakes winner Sister Fiona, bought by Sykes for \$50,000 at the 1998 Ocala yearling sale. Other good runners bred by Clover Leaf include Grade II winner Bsharpsonata; her half-brother Backtalk, who is heading toward the 2010 Kentucky Derby, and Crown of Thorns, runner-up in the 2009 Breeders' Cup Sprint.

Sykes was educated at High Point College and Queens University, both in North Carolina, as well as Rollins College in Florida. He founded Sykes Enterprises (SYKES) in his hometown of Charlotte in 1977 as a small technical engineering firm with three employees. In 1993, the company relocated its headquarters to Tampa. It is now a global leader in the business process outsourcing arena and provides customer contact management services to Fortune 1000 and leading global companies.

The company now has more than 20,000 employees in the United States, Canada, Europe, Pacific Rim countries and Latin America.

Sykes was inducted into the Tampa Bay Business Hall of Fame in 1998 and the Hall of Fame of the International Sales and Marketing organization in 2005. He is a former chairman of the University of Tampa Board of Trustees and has donated some \$38 million to the university. The university has honored him with the John H. Sykes College of Business.