



Preakness coverage cont.

BIG FUN FOR COHEN

by Alan Carasso

Please forgive Andy Cohen if he's looking beyond Saturday's GI Preakness S. Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York--a stone's throw from Belmont Park--the semi-retired Wall Street executive would love nothing more than to be on hand if Big Brown, the colt he owns in partnership with IEAH Stables, Paul Pompa Jr. and Gary Tolchin, is in position to become racing's first Triple Crown winner in 30 years.

"I couldn't imagine it in a million years. That would be about as good as it gets," the 51-year-old said yesterday by phone from Baltimore. "You'd have to like our chances."

But first things first.

It's been something of a meteoric rise to prominence for Cohen, who got his feet wet in the Standardbred business, owning a few trotters in the early 2000s. A few years back, Cohen was introduced to IEAH principle Mike Iavarone and decided to become an investor in the new venture. The stable's success has been nothing short of remarkable over the last three years, given the success of GI Breeders' Cup Mile winner Kip Deville, G1 Dubai Golden Shaheen hero Benny the Bull and now Big Brown. Sometimes, Cohen admits, he needs to pinch himself to make sure he's not dreaming.

"It's been unbelievable," he stated. "When we met, no one ever imagined that in three years' time that these guys could do what they've done. It's been an incredible ride. I'm getting a little bit spoiled. Every time we run, I think we're going to win a Grade I race. It's been a lot of fun, I've really enjoyed it, a lot more than my old job. I don't go in very much any more."

Successful though he was in his professional career, Cohen admits that he was basically interested in recreation when he joined forces with the IEAH team.

"It sounded like fun," he explained. "I really wasn't looking at it like it was going to be a money-making kind of thing. I was looking to have a good time. We got one good horse, then another good horse and another and it's been terrific. Now we have horses that can go on to become stallions. It keeps growing and we seem to be doing all the right things."

IEAH and partners bought Big Brown off his maiden victory over the Saratoga turf last summer, but connections didn't really know what they had until the strapping bay colt aired in a Gulfstream allowance in March. A little more than three weeks later he overcame the 12 hole to add the GI Florida Derby and made light work of the field in the GI Kentucky Derby. No one could really fault his confidence going into tomorrow's Classic, given Big Brown's total domination of the field in the Derby 13 days ago. And, rest assured, confidence remains high--very high.

"Thankfully Big Brown didn't disappoint us," Cohen commented.

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"He ran a great race [in the Derby] and he's doing great right now. It doesn't seem like he has a care in the world. I think he likes the attention. He's doing everything right and he's going into the race perfect."

Cohen acknowledges that he has learned how to deal with the frequent trips to the winner's circle and has gradually become less demonstrative about winning, as evidenced by the following anecdote.

"The first big race we won, [IEAH Vice President of Investor Relations] Mike Sherack had an extra set of silks with him and we were on our way to the winner's circle and I was a little bit out of my mind, so I grabbed the silks and said, 'Let me put them on,'" Cohen related. "They were very tight-fitting--it wasn't my best look, but it was fun. I've calmed down a little bit now. I know that Mike's kids and Rich's kids wore the silks at the Breeders' Cup, so I guess I've handed over the gauntlet to the kids. They looked a lot better on them than they did on me."



Cohen (right) dons IEAH silks Michelle Sherack

Married with two children, ages 17 and 21, things could scarcely be better for Cohen.

"I'm having the time of my life," he says.