

TDN Q&A

On Breeders' Cup Friday, the small-but-select Bobby Flay stable will send three runners postward in Breeders' Cup filly events—nearly half of the entire stable. Dear Lavinia (Grand Slam), just purchased from France, will contest the Juvenile Filly Turf; Her Smile (Include), is entered in the Filly and Mare Sprint; and Super Espresso (Medaglia d'Oro) will take a swing at the Ladies Classic. The next day, Her Smile will get on a van and head for Lexington, where she will join Flay's 2010 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Filly Turf Champion More Than Real (More Than Ready) in the sales ring at the Fasig-Tipton November Sale. They will sell as [Hip 114](#) and [Hip 141](#), respectively.



Chef Bobby Flay owns over a dozen restaurants and three Breeders' Cup starters

Ben Fink photo

The TDN caught up with Flay, one of America's best-known chefs and restaurateurs, to talk about running in the Breeders' Cup, his involvement on its board, and his reflections on his first decade in horse racing.

Three of your horses are running in the Breeders' Cup. How many horses do you have in your stable altogether, and what is it about the Breeders' Cup that is so special to you?

I have the three horses running in the Breeders' Cup and I have four others in training right now. So 43% of my stable will be out on the track on Fillies' Friday. I have a couple of two-year-olds who have not gone into serious training yet and then I have bloodstock.

As an event itself, to me it's the Super Bowl of horse racing. I like the big events. I love when lots of people show up for racing. I love the pageantry of it. I love putting on my best suits to go racing. I love bringing a bunch of people to experience it. The Breeders' Cup is not just one race; it's a weekend of races, one after the other. I find it to be incredibly exciting. It's almost like excitement overload. It's six races Friday and nine races Saturday and, basically, on Breeders' Cup weekend is I can't sleep because I can't contain my excitement. Whether I'm running in the races or not running in the races doesn't matter. The fact that I'm running in the races this year sets it apart. Now, this year, on Saturday, I can concentrate on my handicapping.

Have you met Dear Lavinia yet?

I haven't. She just arrived Saturday night at 7:00. She has cleared quarantine and I look forward to seeing her on Thursday.

Do you think she speaks English?

You know, I was wondering about that. I'm going to have a translator on hand so that I can speak to her trainer and jockey.



'Qu'est-ce que tu viens de dire?' Dear Lavinia is Flay's French import for this year's Juvenile Filly Turf. Horsephotos

Most people have

Derby fever. You have Breeders' Cup fever. Why?

One of the great things about the Breeders' Cup is that it really is the world championships in terms of divisional racing. If you want to win the Derby, you need a colt, and you need a three-year-old. And that really eliminates me unless I get really lucky, because I'm in no way in the market for colts. It doesn't make any financial sense to me. That doesn't mean you can't pick one of the four or five colts that are going to be worth a lot of money at the end of the year, but the percentages don't work for me.

Buying and racing younger horses is a pattern for you, not just for the Breeders' Cup, but for your ownership interests in general. What is it about younger horses and developing them rather than racing them as older horses that is so appealing to you?



Flay's Breeders' Cup fever was stoked last year when More Than Real won the Juvenile Filly Turf. Wife Stephanie March is to his left

Horsephotos

I love the idea of seeing potential be realized. I do that with people who work for me. I take young cooks and I try to develop them into great chefs. I feel the same way about young horses. If you see a germ of potential and talent, your mind wanders as to what could possibly be, and it's exciting to see

it before somebody else. I like buying fillies with good pedigrees, because I know they'll have residual value going forward, no matter what. At least it gives me a shot.

Q&A cont.

Everybody is in a different situation. There are so many different kinds of people in racing. There are people who want to put in \$1,000 with 30 guys and try to get lucky and hit the lottery. There are captains of industry, and there are people who are running their own region--not just their own country, but their own region of the world--and who have a tremendous amount of resources to put into racing. I'm somewhere towards the lower end. I've had some success in business, but by no means is it a bottomless pit. I think that a lot of people think that when you're on television that you're rich beyond belief, and that's just not the way it works. I'm a restaurateur and every day I go to work. I'm selling one salmon at a time. I'm selling a lot of salmon, but I'm a chef, I'm in the restaurant business. Television gives people a different perspective. And so ultimately, I do play at a high level in the horse business, because I'm willing to take the risk. I'm not afraid to go at it, but it's not a one-way street. I can't just fire away and keep and hold everything. It just doesn't make sense for me.



Flay won his first Grade I race with Her Smile in this year's Prioress

Horsephotos

You're selling Her Smile and More Than Real in November. That's a lot of memories. Is that hard for you, to watch someone lead the horses away that you stood with in the winner's circle?

Definitely. If I said it wouldn't be hard I would be

lying. Unfortunately, the way I look at it, the only way for me to survive financially in this business and enjoy it is to sell some of the good things. It's not just selling things off that don't work out. You have to sell some of the things that do work out to keep the motor running. I think that anybody could understand that. But to see someone lead them out of the ring and take them home will definitely be a sad moment.

What would you tell potential buyers, looking at those two right now?

Well, first of all, they're 100% sound and they're only three. Just as I had fun and success with them from the time that I acquired them, this is an opportunity for other people to do the same, and have the option of racing them at four, five and even six. More Than Real is a Breeders' Cup winner. You can't take that away from her. And she's placed in a bunch of other graded stakes. Her potential is gigantic in terms of talent. She ran in the QEII Cup October 15th and unfortunately, she threw a shoe and didn't run that well, but she's perfectly sound.

Her Smile was my first Grade I winner and she's running in the Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Sprint, and I think there's great potential there for somebody. We've done the work to get them where they are, and we've added to their pedigree page. This is an opportunity for me to take a little money off the table so I can restock my stable and for somebody else to have fun racing them.

What's your first live Breeders' Cup memory?

Arthur Seelbinder had sold me a piece of a couple of yearlings. And he had a horse running in the Breeders' Cup, a two-year-old juvenile filly named Gastronomical. I remember going to Belmont in 1995, and that was my first live Breeders' Cup.

But my favorite Breeders' Cup memory was Tiznow's second Classic win. It was when I was first dating Stephanie (Flay is now married to actress Stephanie March) and I took her to the Breeders' Cup, and it was her first. I bet a whole bunch of money on Tiznow. We were in the car on the way home, and there was money all over the car. I just killed it. I had the horse, I had the exacta. She had never really been around horse racing. And she was talking to me about some kind of boots that she wanted to buy which were like \$700. And we talking about it and we were all excited, and I said, 'Here. Here's \$700 for the boots.'

And I guess she took it the wrong way, because she takes the money and she throws it back at me, and said something along the lines of, 'I don't want your money.' I said, 'What are you talking about? We just made money betting.' I said, 'don't take offense. I'm just having fun. Here; go buy the boots. It's found money. That's the way it works.' And she said, 'Are you serious?' I said yeah. And she goes, 'Alright, well they were \$800.' So I've always wanted to have a Tiznow filly and name her Tiznow's Boots, because that was our first Breeders' Cup memory. I actually have one that's a weanling, and I'm probably going to keep her because it could be fate.

You don't seem like a guy with a lot of free time, so when you were asked to run for the Breeders' Cup board, what was it that made you say, yeah, this is something I'm going to do?

The thing I like about the Breeders' Cup is that I still think of it as a young event, although it's not that young any more. It's in its twenties now, and I think that the Breeders' Cup board is made up mainly of people who make their living in the horse business--breeders, farm managers and professional people in the horse business. I bring a more outside-the-industry perspective that I feel can be very helpful as we try to get people who would not otherwise be interested in racing to pay attention--to get people from the mainstream interested, and create a bigger event.

As an owner, what do you do differently now than when you first started? What have you learned along the way?

I think about it a lot more in terms of what I purchase and what I sell. When I first started, I thought, well it will be fun to be in the horse business, so I'll just swing away here and there and take a shot here and there. But I don't want to take shots like that any more. I want to give myself a chance every time I buy something, whether it's bloodstock or a horse that's run, like Dear Lavinia. She's run five times and I've watched her races over and over and she has talent. There's no doubt about it. How much talent does she have? I guess we'll find that out on Breeders' Cup day, and down the road. Right now, I know that she can get out of the gate and win races and that she has potential.

As a business, how are you doing?

It's hard to say. I have a good amount of money in the breeding business. It would be like buying a building in New York. It might take me 10 or 12 years to recover, but ultimately, I'm in a really good position to do really well as long as I breed smartly and I don't have the temptation to try to keep everything, I think that I should have a certain amount of success from the breeding perspective, for sure.

You've had quite a year. Any mountains left to climb?

This has been an exciting year for me racing. I've run in over 10 Grade 1's, in races like the Kentucky Oaks, Blue Grass S., Personal Ensign and of course the Breeders' Cup. I took More Than Real to Royal Ascot, which was an amazing event for myself and my family. The back-and-forth travel probably shortened her season a little, but the upside is that she's lightly raced. I dropped out of high school



Bobby and Stephanie dressed in their finest this summer at Royal Ascot

Racing Post photo

because I couldn't learn through books. I learn from living the life in front of me. Having the opportunity to stand next to someone like Todd Pletcher and watch him train my horses has been as satisfying as leading More Than Real into the Breeders' Cup winner's circle and Her Smile taking down my first Grade I victory. After this weekend, they'll most probably be led out of the sales ring with new colors attached but I look forward to early spring when Todd turns to me at the training track after taking a long sip of coffee and says, 'Hey Bobby, I think this new filly you bought can run.'



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