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A 'Smart' Investment

by Dennis G. Hogan



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Todd Beattie was all smiles. “I’ve got about twenty minutes,” the trainer offered, “but then I’ve got to run.” It wasn’t post time that was pulling him away. He had an appointment to watch his son Cody compete in his high school wrestling competition. It appears that wrestling is a Beattie family tradition. Todd had once immersed himself in the sport. As a young man growing up in Wisconsin he too was drawn into the circle of competitive wrestling. Now he trains horses, and is content to watch Cody go to the mat. “Is he any good?” I asked. “17 and 0,” answered Todd, in

a tone steeped in pride. "That's pretty good," I replied, somewhat incredulously, before turning the conversation toward another stand-out athlete close to Todd's heart, his Pennsylvania-bred superstar Fabulous Strike.

Striker, as he's known around the barn has strung together an impressive resume highlighted by several wins in graded company. Foaled in 2003, he began turning heads when just a yearling, frolicking about the fields of Xanthus Farm near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. "He stood right out," noted Sandee Beattie, Todd's wife. "There must have been about fifty or so yearlings there but you could see he was a cut above the rest. His spirit, the way he moved, you name it - he was a special colt."



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**Fabulous Strike with trainer Todd Beattie at home
at Penn National Race Course**

Fabulous Strike is by Smart Strike, out of the mare Fabulous Find, by Lost Code. Yet it wasn't the Smart Strike line that grabbed the attention of Walter Downey, the Massachusetts-based owner of Tea Party Stable, Inc. "Back then Smart Strike wasn't as popular as he is today," recalls Mr. Downey. "I was more interested in the mare. She just happened to be in foal to Smart Strike when I bought her. She was a Lost Code mare, which I liked as a broodmare sire. The mare hadn't run much but her speed figures were impressive so I thought she'd make a great broodmare." Downey prefers to breed and sell as opposed to race. He received some good offers for the colt yet no sale occurred. Walter knew the value of the youngster and he certainly understood finances, having once successfully managed the portfolios of numerous investors for Boston's Fidelity Investments.

It was at this point he received the type of solid investment advice he himself was known for. Todd Beattie believed that Striker was a one-of-a-kind colt so he suggested to Walter that he hold onto him. Downey listened to the words of his young trainer. The colt was broken in Florida and raced once as a 2-year-old. He was then sent up to Todd's facility, nestled closely in the shadow of Penn National Race Course.

He began 2006 in fine fashion, breaking his maiden by 5 and 3/4 lengths in only his second lifetime start. That year he won 6 of 9, and banked a little over \$200,000. In 2007, he continued his winning ways with front-running efforts in the Grade III Aristides at Churchill Downs, and the Grade I Vosburgh at Belmont Park. A smile crossed Walter Downey's face on that September day, but it was bittersweet. The mare he had once prized, Fabulous Find, had coliced and died shortly after giving birth to another foal back in 2004. Now, the colt she was carrying when Downey originally purchased her was being heralded as one of the nation's top sprinters. Certainly, Smart Strike also deserves more than casual mention in any breeding discussions. On that same afternoon two of his other sons also captured Grade I events: English Channel repeated in the Joe Hirsch Turf Classic Invitational, and Curlin took the first of his two Jockey Club Gold Cups.



© Adam Coglianese, 2007

Owner Walter Downey leads Fabulous Strike into the winner's circle after the 2007 Vosburgh at Belmont Park

By the fall of 2007, all projections had been confirmed - Fabulous Strike was indeed something special. Yet shortly after his triumph in the Vosburgh, something went terribly wrong. The horse's breathing became labored and he wasn't his normal self. He was sent to Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center where a series of tests revealed a small abscess on his lung. As a result he missed the chance to compete in the 2007 Breeders' Cup. The infection soon grew to full-blown pneumonia. A stent was placed into the horse's chest, through which he received doses of antibiotics multiple times per day. "It was touch and go for a while," recalls Todd. "We were confident that he would pull through but unsure as to whether he would ever regain the type of form he had shown." Slowly they brought him along, and although he could have returned to training earlier, his owner insisted upon being patient. Every few weeks Striker would have his lungs scanned at New Bolton. The Fabulous Strike team would not gamble with the health of the horse. Walter Downey knew how to protect his investments.

Encouraged by the good reports they received from New Bolton, the colt was returned to training after a nine-month layoff. He made his 2008 debut in the Vincent A. Moscarelli Stakes at Delaware Park, and he made it a winning one. Under regular rider Ramon Dominguez, Striker went wire-to-wire. Next, in a return to the Vosburgh, he was a game second, but it may have been shoe problems that cost him the win. According to Todd, "he has a habit of stepping on his own feet, and in the paddock he ripped his shoe off. He was re-shod in a hurry, and after the race we could see that the shoe had come loose."

He next finished 5th in the 2008 Breeders' Cup Sprint, chasing Bob Baffert's return-winner Midnight Lute. Despite the loss, his trip to Santa Anita acted like a tonic. In his following start, the Fall Highweight at Aqueduct, Striker recorded the highest Beyer of the year on the Queens' oval, a 113. Amazingly, he was also carrying 136 lbs. Then in December he took the Grade III Gravesend Handicap, coming off the pace in the final strides to run down John P. Campo, Jr.'s True Quality. Any questions about Striker's health had been put to rest. He was back - and his form was better than ever.

He went 3 for 5 in 2008, and improved his overall record to 12 for 19. The team was honored by an invitation to the 2009 Golden Shaheen, a 6 furlong race for 3-yr-olds and up, which is part of the undercard for the Dubai World Cup. But both owner and trainer were concerned about what such a trip might do to the six-year old. "It was a tough decision," remarked Mr. Downey, "ultimately, we decided to not put the horse through another test that might compromise his overall health."

Preferring to stay close to home they opted for the General George Stakes, at Maryland's Laurel Race Track. Stretching out to 7 furlongs, Striker again lined up against True Quality. Six horses went to the post, yet within a furlong after the gate opened, the General George was a two-horse race. True Quality was again loose on the lead, and Fabulous Strike was right behind him. Enjoying a 10 lb. break in the weights, the leader set softer fractions than he had in the Gravesend. Striker remained at his flank and appeared ready to make his move as they entered the stretch, yet True Quality had paced himself well and was able to edge away for the win.

True Quality may have evened the score, yet Walter Downey remains patient. 'Minimize your losses and maximize your gains,' is a mantra he's come to live by. As a financial advisor he's made millions for his clients. Now, Fabulous Strike stands poised to return the favor. His next start will be in the Grade I Carter Handicap at Aqueduct on April 4th, and a win there will push his total earnings over the million dollar mark. "He's the horse of a lifetime," remarks Walter. "As long as he stays healthy and shows his speed, we'll continue on."

I recently contacted Todd Beattie to find out how his son's wrestling match turned out. "Cody won again. He finished up his JV season at 31 and 1." he offered, proudly. "And how's Striker coming along?" I asked. The trainer's tone suddenly changed. "Just fine," he replied, guardedly. It appears True Quality has also been pointed toward the Carter, and judging from the sound of Todd's voice, it's more than just a race - it's a rematch. And for the visiting team from Pennsylvania, it's not as much about the purse as it is about pride.



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