



A *special* TALENT

MARK CORNETT HAS PROVEN THAT YOU DON'T NEED AN UNLIMITED BANKROLL TO HAVE SUCCESS IN RACING

Blind Luck, a filly who Mark Cornett recognized for her talent very early on, scores a game victory in the Kentucky Oaks (GI) at Churchill Downs.

With an easy win in the Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Sprint for Mark Cornett's clients, **Dubai Majesty** likely earned herself an Eclipse Award.



The sport's history is peppered with amazing stories of luck, but that will only get you so far. Luck might get you a big stakes winner, maybe even a few if you spend enough money, but to succeed over the long run you need a keen eye for horseflesh and the gut instinct to strike just at the right moment. Over the past decade, Mark Cornett has used those skills to quickly rise to the upper echelon of racing, and he's remained there.

Cornett's USA Thoroughbred Racing Management Inc. had a truly magical year in 2010 as Cornett and his clients enjoyed not one, but two, likely Eclipse Award champions. Ironically enough, one of those superstars is named Blind Luck, but despite her name, her road to stardom didn't have much to do with luck. The other horse, Dubai Majesty, has a name truly befitting the "Sport of Kings," but as Cornett has proven again and again over the years, you don't need to spend a princely sum of money to find a racing champion.

Blind Luck

Blind Luck has more than proven his instincts were correct as she quickly rolled to victories in three Grade I races – the Oak Leaf, Hollywood Starlet and Las Virgenes. Blind Luck also won the Grade II Fantasy Stakes at Oaklawn Park and finished third in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies (GI) and Santa Anita Oaks (GI). As if that wasn't enough, she scored a gutsy victory in the Kentucky Oaks (GI) in front of a record crowd of 116,046 and then won the Delaware Oaks (GII) and the historic Alabama Stakes (GI) at Saratoga Race Course. To cap off her 3-year-old campaign, Blind Luck came from dead last in the \$2 million Breeders' Cup Ladies

Classic (GI) at Churchill Downs to finish a game second.

All told, the filly who hardly anyone wanted has compiled an incredible career record while never finishing off the board in 15 starts with nine wins, four seconds and two thirds. The horse who had a value of just \$11,000 a few years ago has now banked nearly \$2.4 million, and she figures to be a big favorite to take the Eclipse Award as champion 3-year-old filly. What's more, her broodmare value is estimated between three to five million dollars.

Dubai Majesty

Every owner dreams of turning a claimer into a champion, but the reality is that almost never happens. Such is the case with Dubai Majesty, who despite her royal moniker was available for a \$25,000 price tag just two years ago. While Cornett did not get her for that bargain price, he didn't have to break the bank to pay for her either.

Cornett brokered a deal to acquire Dubai Majesty for owners Bill Martin and Dan Morgan in July 2008. At that point in her career, the modestly-bred daughter of Essence of Dubai was a solid allowance winner who had finished a distant second in one stakes race.

"She had run a very nice turf race routing the first time she ran on it," said Cornett. "I was really impressed with a lot of aspects of that race and then she was cut back to the six-furlong Azalea Stakes (GIII), and I was even more impressed even though she got beat by nine lengths. Cutting back from a turf allowance route race and then going to a six-furlong dirt sprint against graded stakes company is a very difficult thing to do. She showed a lot of desire to try to get by the third-place horse.

"I worked with a friend and representative of the existing owner and through him I negotiated a price," added Cornett. "I then called trainer Bret Calhoun and had him take a look at her and he liked her immediately. I then called Bill Martin and he decided to pull the trigger after his due diligence process. Bill is a very good evaluator of talent in his own right and has a lot of success in this business. Her purchase was a team effort that included veterinarian Jonathon Allen at Calder Race Course. I have found through experience to get a nice horse bought all the stars really have to line up with the trainer, owner, seller and the vet-out process."

After being purchased, Dubai Majesty developed into the top female sprinter in the country with victories in the Winning Colors Stakes (GIII), Thoroughbred Club of America Stakes (GII) and ultimately the \$1 million Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Sprint (GI) at Churchill Downs, where her emphatic 2 ¼-length victory likely sealed her status as the Eclipse Award winner for top female sprint horse.

"It's very rare to have a horse that handles all sorts of surfaces," said Calhoun, a rising star in the sport who won two Breeders' Cup races this year with just his second and third career starters in the event. "She's

traveled a lot this year and responded very well."

The filly that had a shade over \$100,000 in earnings when Martin and Morgan bought her, ended up leaving the racetrack with a bankroll of more than \$1.5 million. As if that weren't enough, her owners put her in the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky November select breeding stock sale just two days after her Breeders' Cup win and the mare sold for \$1.1 million.



Jerry Hollendorfer (Left) and **Mark Cornett** (Right) wait for photo finish results to be posted in the Kentucky Oaks.

A decade of success

Since getting into the horse racing business in 2001, Cornett has posted some staggering numbers for himself and his clients. Without spending recklessly or campaigning a huge stable like some others, Cornett and his clients have compiled more than 68 stakes wins with horses that were purchased privately. That breaks down to seven Grade I wins, six Grade II wins and six Grade III wins, along with a total

of 46 graded stakes placings. Those private purchases have won 114 races with total earnings in excess of \$10.1 million. While some stables would literally need hundreds of horses to put together those kinds of numbers, those results are from only 33 horses. That means Cornett has been right far more often than he's been wrong, despite the fact that he moves as fast as anyone in the industry when he sees a horse he likes.

In 2010 alone, Cornett posted numbers that most people don't achieve over the course of a lifetime – from just 48 starts with eight fillies and mares, Cornett and his clients banked more than \$3 million in purses with 14 stakes wins, four Grade I wins, three Grade II wins and two Grade III wins, plus 16 graded stakes placings. And there figures to be two Eclipse Awards come January for Blind Luck and Dubai Majesty.

"The key to buying horses privately is moving quickly and decisively or you will lose them," he said.

Cornett generally focuses on fillies and mares that can be acquired in the \$75,000 - \$250,000 range. So if he sees a \$1 million yearling that wins impressively, then he's probably not interested because the price is going to be too high and there's no value in a purchase like that.

Like any other sport, spending more money than everyone else is no guarantee of success—just ask fans of the New York Yankees or Dallas Cowboys. Horse racing is sometimes known for the exorbitant amounts of money that some owners spend in pursuit of a champion, but Cornett has proven you can play with the big boys without spending millions.

"You can't succeed in this business by just throwing a lot of money at horse purchases and your goals," said Cornett. "The most important factor is identifying the horse before other people see the talent level two or three races down the line. It takes a special skill set to be able to identify these purchases before they become stars."