

ESPN.com | MyESPN | Register | Forgot Password?

Member Name:

Password:

Sign In



Search

[Download Toolbar](#) | [Shop](#)

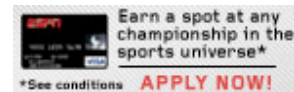
[NFL](#) [MLB](#) [NBA](#) [NASCAR](#) [Autos](#) [NHL](#) [College](#) [Golf](#) [Soccer](#) [Tennis](#) [Page 2](#) [Nation](#) [Insider](#) [Fantasy](#) [360](#) [More +](#)

[Horse Racing Home](#) | [NTRA.com](#) | [Live Racing](#) | [Race Results](#) | [NTRA Racing Calendars](#) | [NTRA.U For The New Fan](#) | [More Racing +](#)

Updated: Jan. 2, 2007, 9:51 PM ET

Birds of a feather

By Jason Shandler
Special to ESPN.com



They name their clients after football stars, have celebrities like Jay-Z, Tom Brady and Kenny Mayne as partners, and will be featured on an episode of the HBO hit show Entourage next year.

If it sounds like a well-known management agency or a chic advertising company, it's not.

It's Little Red Feather, the coolest and most happening horse racing partnership to hit the sport in some time.

And with horse racing about to hit the big time in Philadelphia, the California-based ownership group is ready to make a very big splash in the City of Brotherly Love -- and they want you to join them.

Little Red Feather is run by its general manager, Billy Koch, the 37-year old grandson of a legendary Hollywood producer. Koch started his racing group in 2001 with the intention of having some fun. An avid horse fan from the time he was five years old, Koch soon realized that racing was his passion -- and so he decided that he was going to make a career out of it.

"I've been round horses my whole life," said Koch. "My grandfather (Howard W. Koch, who produced mega-movie hits Airplane and Ghost) had a popular



Horsephotos.com

Little Red Feather's general manager, Billy Koch.



Adjust Font Size:



horse called Telly's Pop (named after partner Telly Savalas). I used to hang around the barn with him and that got me hooked. I enjoyed it more than anything else. I knew I wanted to be involved with horses from that point on.

"After college I got some investors together and bought some horses. We had all kinds, good and bad. We ran the gamut, but with every one I learned something new."

Koch's big break came in 2002 when he, with the help of an investor and trainer Don Chatlos, bought a horse at an Ocala, Fla. farm. They named it Singletary, for Chicago Bears middle linebacker Mike Singletary, one of Koch's favorite players.

"We bought three horses, Singletary was about \$30,000 of the investment," Koch recalled. "I asked everyone I knew if they wanted to get in on it. I tried to get people to just put up \$5,000, but nobody would do it. Finally I got enough guys together and that's how it started."

Two years later Singletary put Koch and Little Red Feather on the map by winning the Breeders' Cup Mile in long shot fashion. The unbelievable victory not only gave the partnership enough money to get off the ground (they earned \$1.8 million for the victory), but it attracted a ton of investors.

"I can't tell you how many people came to me later and said, 'was Singletary the horse you asked me to invest in?' And I'm like, yeah, he was the one.

"It was such a surreal and incredible feeling to win the Breeders' Cup. It was one of those things that you don't know how great it is until you experience it. It made me realize that this is what I want to do and this is my chance to do it. My philosophy is that you are much happier in life if you enjoy what you are doing."

After the telecast of the Breeders' Cup in 2004, TVG ran a feature on Koch and his partners. In it, it showed a group of young businessmen who not only loved horse racing, but also looked to be having an extraordinary amount of fun. Coupled with the success of Singletary, it helped Little Red Feather take off. Koch realized that he now had a whole new way to market his partnership. He would sell the idea of horse racing ownership as being fun.

What a novel idea.

"We purchase horses and sell them to investors," said Koch, who lives in Hidden Hills, California with his wife and three sons. "Each individual horse is a separate LLC. Sometimes each partnership has multiple horses in it. We want to give each person multiple chances to win.

"The biggest thing is that people have fun with it. It doesn't matter if you own five, 50 or 100 percent of the horse. It's still a thrill to be a part of it. To see the horse train and race, to follow it, that's what it's all about.

"I'm the general partner, but I'm a hands-off guy. I trust the trainer to make all the decisions. No one knows the horse better than them."

While Chatlos trains many of Little Red Feather's horses on the West Coast, in the near future they will have another well-known trainer working for them -- John Servis.

Servis got his break in 2004 when Smarty Jones captivated the sports world with his miraculous Kentucky Derby and Preakness victories.

The success of Smarty Jones, a Pennsylvania-bred, helped horse racing immensely in the Keystone state, increasing the sport's popularity, which in turn played a big part in helping the state legislatures pass a gambling bill that would allow slot machines at Pennsylvania racetracks. The bill was passed in July of 2004. Since then, Afleet Alex and Barbaro, two other Triple Crown race winners with ownership and breeding ties to the Philadelphia area, have come along to fuel the fire even more.

With \$3 billion per year projected in slot machine revenues, the horse racing industry in Pennsylvania will directly benefit, as it will reap about 18 percent of that profit, which will among other things, increase race purses at racetracks like Philadelphia Park and Penn National. Ownership groups are now going to be flocking to Pennsylvania racetracks, including Little Red Feather.

Servis and Koch recently agreed to join forces.

"Billy contacted me and asked if I'd be interested in buying some two-year olds," said Servis, who is based out of Philadelphia Park. "I didn't know much about their group, other than what I saw on TV. But after talking to him I was very impressed.

"I felt like he was genuine. I liked that he cared about the sport. I've had a lot of people approach me after Smarty and ask if I wanted to train their horses. But I felt like they were just jumping on the bandwagon, trying to use my name. They weren't really fans of the sport.

"Billy wants to have fun. He wants to win. That's his main focus. That's pretty refreshing to hear as a trainer.

"You can feel the excitement around here. The purses (at Philadelphia Park) are supposed to reach \$250,000 (per day) by next June and \$300,000 later in the year. It's going to be amazing to see the transformation of horse racing in this state. The sky is the limit around here."

Little Red Feather, which also has a base in New York, plans to start its Philadelphia venture early in 2007. They are in the process of recruiting investors in the area, which already includes Bob Brittingham, co-owner of 2005 Preakness and Belmont winner Afleet Alex. Brittingham says the experience of owning a horse with the right people can be a lot of fun.

"Billy and the group at LRF understand how hard the game really is and can be. That is why having fun is so important.

"At our LRF Philly Partnership meeting Billy showed a homemade movie on the experience at the (2004) Breeders' Cup, something I lived through with Afleet Alex. The movie showed everyone how horse racing isn't just race day. It's a whole week of fun leading up to the race - the works in the morning, the excitement of seeing some of your favorite horses at the track and the post position draw. Horse racing isn't just two minutes of a race, it's like watching a child mature.

"Yes there are bumps along the way, but when he or she is at her best, you are so proud."

View Little Red Feather's full bio, including the video series 'The Singletary Life', at NTRA.com