

'Secret' Agent...
Courtesy of the TDN
By -Steve Sherack

Classic winner? Check. How about a Breeders' Cup winner? You bet. Did you see that pair of unbeaten Grade I-winning juveniles in Southern California this summer? Yes, those are his work as well.

Enter Donato Lanni. The 43-year-old native of Montreal, Canada has been responsible for selecting all of the above at recent public auctions for various clients of Hall of Fame conditioner Bob Baffert. Lanni, who also serves as Hill 'n' Dale's Bloodstock Services Director, found two-time champion and 2010 GI Preakness S. hero Lookin At Lucky (Smart Strike) (\$475,000 2yo '09 KEEAPR) for Karl Watson, Mike Pegram and Paul Weitman. He also purchased Breeders' Cup Juvenile Sprint hero Secret Circle (Eddington) (\$165,000 2yo '11 OBSMAR) on behalf of the aforementioned trio. Arnold Zetcher's Rolling Fog (Posse) (\$62,000 2yo '12 OBSAPR) and Watson, Pegram and Weitman's Executiveprivilege (First Samurai) (\$650,000 2yo '12 OBSAPR), both winners at the highest level at the recently concluded Del Mar meeting, and Kaleem Shah's GI Las Virgenes S. heroine Eden's Moon (Malibu Moon) (\$390,000 2yo '11 FTMMAY) were selected by Lanni as well.

In addition to his bloodstock work for the Baffert stable, Lanni is also a key member of the buying team for the prominent Glen Hill Farm, the outfit behind the talented MGSW & MGISP Marketing Mix (Medaglia d'Oro) (\$150,000 yrl '09 KEESEP), and the late MGSW & GISP Banned (Kitten's Joy) (\$130,000 yrl '09 FTKOCT).

"What I do is a very small part of an equation of what is a complete team effort," Lanni stressed. "Yes, buying and selecting horses is my job, but the owners have to step up and spend the money for the horses that we want to buy. I really hate saying the word 'I' when talking about the horse business. We all work together. You assemble a team and everybody does their job. And if you do that and get lucky, you might have some success in the business."

Lanni caught the horse bug at an early age from his family, who raced Standardbreds in Canada. He began working as a groom at the tender age of 10, and hasn't wanted to do anything outside of racing since. Lanni packed up his car and made his move to the Bluegrass in 1996, catching his first break at Walmac Farm.

"I was at the track every summer and was always at the farm, and it was pretty much all I ever wanted to do," Lanni commented. "I was introduced to racing at a very young age. When you grow up around horses, you either gravitate toward it or run from it--it's something that's innate. The Thoroughbred capital of the world is Lexington, Kentucky, and that's where I wanted to be."

Lanni is quick to pay tribute to all that have helped show him the ropes along his journey. "John Sikura, Johnny Jones, Bob Baffert and Tom Proctor--those four guys have been my mentors," he said. "I've learned a lot from them."

It's been business as usual for Lanni throughout the first week of the Keeneland September Sale, assisting Baffert and Glen Hill with their purchases, while also handling his duties as seller with Hill 'n' Dale.

During the select session, Lanni signed for hip 45, the \$1.3-million Smart Strike half-sister to Bodemeister (Empire Maker) on behalf of Sikura and Bruce Lunsford. "

It's all about the owners and the horses," Lanni concluded. "Without the owners, none of us would have a job. We're lucky enough to work for these great owners. This is a 'we' business and a team business. I'm very lucky to be involved with really good people and the horses are the reason why we're all here."