



Before the Hammer

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Before the Hammer is a series presented by Keeneland that will spotlight consignors, their stories of success and their featured offerings at the upcoming Keeneland November Breeding Stock Sale.

HILL 'N' DALE BRINGS QUALITY TO KEENOV

by Amanda Duckworth

Hill 'n' Dale has a reputation for both consigning and purchasing some of the most desirable bloodstock in the world, and that was never clearer than during last year's Keeneland November Breeding Stock Sale.

As a consignor, Hill 'n' Dale led the way in gross, and by the same measure, it was also the third leading purchaser. Those statistics are not surprising when you consider it both consigned and ultimately bought the sale topper in champion Take Charge Brandi. The Giant's Causeway filly was being offered on behalf of owner Willis Horton, and when she was hammered down for \$6 million, it was the co-sixth highest price ever paid for a broodmare or broodmare prospect at the Keeneland November Sale.

"When we decide to buy something, we go through the same rigorous process as when we define something to sell," said John G. Sikura, Hill 'n' Dale's owner and president. "When something suits the marketplace, we offer those for sale, and when we are buying, we are trying to find something unique in a broodmare that we think can reproduce themselves or the best attributes of the family so we can offer those foals commercially over time.

"It's an inexact science, but I've done this for a longtime and balancing between doing both is a pretty similar process, really. There are a lot of good mares for sale, and sometimes they are heavily competed for and you don't always win, but you try to define the ones you like and bid in earnest."

The original Hill 'n' Dale was founded in Canada in 1960 by Sikura's father, John Sikura Jr., and Hill 'n' Dale Farms was



John Sikura | Keeneland photo



Lady Eli | Benoit photo

incorporated in Kentucky in 1987. Today the property in the Bluegrass encompasses about 1,300 acres, and its stallion ranks include leading sire Curlin.

Whether or not Hill 'n' Dale is a major buyer at this year's Keeneland November Sale remains to be seen, but there is no doubt its consignment is once again full of highly desirable lots. Leading the way in terms of popularity might be multiple Grade I winner Lady Eli ([Hip 466](#)), who is known for both her successful battles on the track and against the deadly disease laminitis.

"The partners in Lady Eli are racing people, and they are not breeding people," said Sikura. "It's difficult to do both. When the horses are retired, they are offered at auction. That is the sole reason the mare will be sold. Their program has a very defined exit strategy."

On the weanling side of the equation, Hill 'n' Dale should draw plenty of interest with a draft that includes, among many others, a War Front filly ([Hip 282](#)) who is a half-sister to leading sire Uncle Mo, and a Tapizar filly ([Hip 450](#)) who is a half-sister to undefeated champion Songbird.



Songbird | Benoit photo

Before the Hammer Cont.

"It is with mixed emotions we offer these types of fillies," said Sikura. "My business is the horse business, so we don't cherry pick and sell the bad ones and keep the good ones. The foals in the sale are our own foals, and then added to our own group are privately purchased foals that enhance the quality of the overall offering. A prime example of that is Hip 282, the War Front--Playa Maya filly.

"We try to offer everything for sale. We will set a fair reserve, and I think that there are several of these fillies that are can't miss/must have types, and we will see if people are in agreement with that."



Honor Code | Adam Mooshian

One of the weanling colts on offer comes from a special family to Hill 'n' Dale. [Hip 303](#) is a son of Tapit out of Serena's Cat, making him a half-brother to champion Honor Code. Sikura sold Serena's Cat herself as a weanling for

\$1.4 million at the 2003 Keeneland November Sale, but the story turned out to be bittersweet.

"It was a tragedy that her mother, Serena's Tune, got laminitis post foaling in 2006 and died," Sikura said. "We lost her, and I didn't have a filly. Now we are able to get back in the family, and Serena's Cat just needs to cooperate and have a filly for us. We sold the one she's had, and it was a record at the time, so it felt good for an evening, but now we don't have a filly out of the mare. Hopefully we will get lucky, and we will have one."

That filly, also by Tapit, sold for \$3 million at the 2014 Keeneland November Sale. She was co-bred by the Justice family's Dell Ridge Farm and Hill 'n' Dale, and Sikura was actually an under bidder on her.

For the exceptionally international-minded buyer, this year Sikura will also be offering two horses that hail from one of Australia's best known families. The Medaglia d'Oro filly ([Hip 321](#)) and the War Front colt ([Hip 408](#)) are related to three-time champion sire Redoute's Choice.

"Experiment is probably too strong a word," said Sikura. "It's really not an experiment, but I hope and think we will be rewarded for flying halfway around the world, buying two great fillies from super female families, breeding to elite sires here, and having two really good representations of those sires brought to auction. We are excited and quietly confident that the marketplace will like those two horses."

"They are very nice horses, and I think it is another sort of layering onto what we do. When you open up a segment of the market no one else has, it's good for your business. If you look around these grounds, you will find people from all over the world."

Sikura has every right to be quietly confident in his entire draft. For more than two decades Hill 'n' Dale has aimed to offer some of the most desirable pedigrees in the world, and year after year, it has returned to the Keeneland November Sale with horses that are of interest to buyers. The first big name came in 1997 when Touch Gold won the GI Belmont S. Sikura had consigned him as a weanling at the 1994 sale, where he sold for \$180,000, and it has just continued on from there.

"We've bought from the Keeneland sale, and we have had success, and we are also really proud of selling successful horses at the Keeneland sale," Sikura said. "Any time you are selling there are really two goals. Obviously you want to sell your horse as well as you can. That's how you stay in business. But equally rewarding is the fact that people who buy your horses have the chance to buy something significant."

"We are committed to these offerings. We own the mother, we own the half-sister, one is in foal to War Front, one is in foal to Tapit, etc. It's not just selling the horse and see you later. We are involved intimately with the customer because we are still in the family, too."



Click to listen to Hill 'n' Dale's John Sikura. | Keeneland photo