

Great Friends Stables



Del Mar, California

“Great Friends” of Racing

Owner Profile: Scott Kaplan and Billy Ray Smith

By Mary Forney

Meet Scott and Billy Ray, aka “Scott & BR” of San Diego drive time radio fame. Hosts of the popular “Scott & BR Show,” they are fun, young, high-profile ambassadors of racing, bringing the sport of kings to a wide audience of rabid sports fans, in a fashion that could be more effective than any formalized marketing campaign mounted from within the sport in decades.

Earlier this year, Scott and Billy Ray formed a partnership to introduce 27 leading California business people and celebrities to horseracing as horse owners during this summer’s Del Mar meet. In a sport always in search of “a sure thing,” one thing for sure is that these two are making horse ownership a totally fun experience for the 27 partners, as well as for their huge audience of sports-minded listeners. After all, what could be more fun than a summer of racing at Del Mar?

On a typical weekday morning, radio listeners from San Diego to San Francisco tuned into San Diego’s XX Sports Radio (1090 AM, 105.7 FM) enjoy a unique and humorous view of the day in sports, courtesy of Scott Kaplan and Billy Ray Smith. Their show airs Monday through Friday from 5:00 to 9:00 a.m.

“We’re going into our seventh year,” said Kaplan. “It’s rare in the radio business to have this kind of successful run.” One lis-

ten to the show will tell you just why that is. Depending on the season, they cover the Padres, the Chargers, and just about every other sport imaginable, including racing from Del Mar, using a format that offers in-studio guest appearances, listener call-ins, wacky contests, and a healthy dose of humor. Members of their ever-growing audience of devoted listeners call themselves the “Great Friends.”

“When people call the show and we say ‘Hey, you’re on the line,’” explained Kaplan, “they’ll go ‘Great Friends!’ and we’ll go ‘Great Friends!’”

“It’s a salutation when you come into the environment,” added Smith. “Kind of an official greeting.”

Smith and Kaplan aren’t shy about getting out and mingling with their Great Friends radio audience, and regularly take their “Scott & BR Show” bus out to home games. “We pull up at the stadium and have a tailgate, essentially,” said Kaplan.

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“We pull a giant TV out, set it down, put a tarp over the top, and people that don’t have tickets to the game take out their lawn chairs and watch the game in the parking lot.”

On air, Kaplan and Smith complement each other perfectly. The slightly more talkative one, Kaplan tends to steer the show’s conversation. “My mother would say some day that big mouth is going to get you into trouble,” said Kaplan. “She was right. It has... but without the big mouth, what else do I have?”

A place kicker for the Panthers while at the University of Pittsburgh from 1988 to 1992, Scott Kaplan was an All Big East Conference selection in 1990. In addition to the morning radio show, for the past several years he has worked the sidelines, covering both college football and the NFL for CBS. He

Scott and BR designed their own silks, in powder blue – Chargers’ throw back colors – sporting the “Scott & BR” logo. On June 21, they acquired their first runner, when they claimed the three-year-old filly, Miss Josiey Wales (GB), for \$62,500 at Hollywood Park – where she was an impressive winner.

Each of their investors owns one share, with Kaplan and Smith managing the partnership. The partners, most of whom prefer to remain anonymous, include local sports celebrities and entertainers, well-known local restaurateurs, and the CEO’s of some large companies – including sponsors of the Scott & BR Show. “Then there are a couple of people – like our limo driver – who just kind of scraped it together and said ‘I’ve got to be part of this thing,’” said Kaplan.



Members of Great Friends Stable share a toast to racing luck at Mils Fleurs in Rancho Santa Fe. Left to right: Smith, Corky Mizer, Kaplan, Bertrand Hug, Paul Vaden, Donnie Nusbaum, and Kelly Mikules.

lives in Del Mar with his wife Gayle and their four children.

Former San Diego Chargers linebacker Billy Ray Smith was a first-round draft choice of the Chargers and a second-generation NFL defender. His father, Billy Ray Smith, Sr., was a 13-year pro for the Rams, Steelers, and Colts. But BR played his entire ten-year career in San Diego. He has worked as the Charger pre-season analyst, Fox Sports Net’s College Football Saturday analyst, Charger Power Report analyst on XETV Fox 6, and Charger Preview host on Channel 4 San Diego. He also lives in Del Mar with his wife, KUSI news anchor Kimberly Hunt, and daughter Savannah.

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“Our whole business model was based on buying before Del Mar, racing at Del Mar, and selling after Del Mar,” explained Kaplan. “We do have what we call the ‘Lava Man’ clause,” he added. “If we tap into something we weren’t expecting and have a stakes winning caliber horse, then we will hold on to that horse at the discretion of the management.”

“We’ve told every one of our investors right from the get-go,” continued Kaplan, “the money that you’re giving us – plan on never seeing it again!” On the other hand, their investors won’t have to worry about being asked for more. “It’s a one-time deal,” he said. “Part of the money is committed to buying horses. Part of the money is committed to feed, training, legal expenses, and things like that.... Roughly 65 percent of the money has been allocated to purchasing horses.”

Kaplan explained why they chose Gallagher as their trainer: “We think Paddy is pretty much the most friendly guy, of suc-



Corky Mizer, Smith, Kaplan, and Bertrand Hug.

cessful trainers... Paddy is one of those guys that would love to have everybody out, and loves talking to people. I certainly don't want to waste all of his time with 27 separate investors going out there and bugging him. But I think Paddy's the kind of guy that, if you called him and said, 'Hey Paddy, this guy's coming out and wants to bring his kids, do you mind?' Paddy would say, 'No, it's fine. Bring them out!' We had to think beyond just who's considered the best, whose stats are the best, who's won the most. We had to think a lot more about hospitality."

The move into horse ownership was a natural for Kaplan and Smith, especially with their connection to Del Mar Racetrack. "I can't tell you how many times in the last four years I've walked into the paddock area, talked to owners, socialized with jocks before the race, talked to trainers, and thought to myself, 'I want to own a horse so badly,'" said Kaplan. "Then some guys taught me how to operate a syndicate, and I said that's the way to go."

"To me, it's an automatic link between the audience and the track," added Smith. "We are 'the show' of the Del Mar Racetrack. That works for me on all angles. We have a legitimate emotional tie-in to the track and the races. And if we also win a little money, that wouldn't be bad!"

"It's like owning your own sports franchise – versus just going there and playing the game," Kaplan concluded.

Kaplan got serious about racing several years ago when HRTV senior producer, Steve Nagler, told him there would be a lot more television opportunities for him as a young broadcaster if he knew the horse racing game. "So I thought, okay, I'll learn it," Kaplan said. "Then I came to Billy Ray and said, 'Let's get into this a little bit.' Billy Ray always liked the horses because he's the luckiest human being alive!"

Smith's only previous exposure to horseracing involves memories of his father lending his support to the establishment of horseracing in Texas. "When my dad, a former Baltimore Colt, moved to Dallas," he recalled, "I remember him being the 'face guy' behind an effort to get pari-mutuel betting and horseracing in Dallas."

Then two years ago, the Scott & BR Show went to the Kentucky Derby. "It was the most incredible sight I've ever seen when they came around that backstretch," said Smith. "I'll

never forget it. My first Kentucky Derby made a dramatic impression on me."

Kaplan was also exposed to the world of horse racing as a child. His grandfather was a pari-mutuel clerk at Monticello raceway – a Harness racing track in Monticello, NY. "As a kid," he recalled, "at night we would go to the track and my grandfather would be working there. It was his second job."

The two have, quite naturally, fallen in love with horse racing and the Del Mar race meet in particular. They both live within a couple miles of the track and during the meet broadcast their show live from the paddock. This year, Bob Ike – the show's handicapper – will be on the show four days a week, and will participate in a "Beat the Pro" segment. Also this summer, they plan to do a weekly segment with Gallagher and Eddie Delahoussaye.

"They'll come on the show and give all the Great Friends, the audience, the update on the Great Friends Stables," said Kaplan, who believes the audience will have a feeling of ownership in the stable. "For people who aren't into horseracing or have never been out to Del Mar, we think they're going to really get into what we're doing and then come out to Del Mar, take part in all of this, and be around all the fun of their favorite radio show having a horseracing stable and having the same name as the audience."

Great Friends, the audience, can also follow the progress of the stable on the show's webpage at www.xxsportsradio.com – where a roster of their racehorses and racing/workout schedules will be posted and updated.

The Scott & BR Show may have hit on something that will do more to effectively market horse racing than has been done in years. "You have young guys who have a popular radio show all throughout Southern California who are now horse owners," explained Kaplan. "This might provide motivation for young, successful, sports minded people to get into this game. It's going to provide more visibility for the sport and the track than ever before."

Thousands of people will be exposed to racing in the most fun environment and way possible – helping to build a new generation of horseracing fans while mitigating negative stereotypes about the sport. It's definitely a win-win situation for the Scott & BR Show, as well as horseracing!