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**PROFILE**

CAL-BASED  
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CLASSIC  
HORSE TALE

# JOHN AND DIANE FRADKIN

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Six horses based in California have won the Preakness Stakes (G1) since 2010. On May 15, Rombauer raised that number to seven when the son of Twirling Candy took the 2021 edition of the Preakness at Pimlico Racecourse in Baltimore, Md.

It was the first Triple Crown race win for John and Diane Fradkin, who have been successfully breeding and racing in California for years. Rombauer has vaulted to the top of the list of horses campaigned by the couple, but before him came a parade of classy runners, many of them California-breds.

John Fradkin was working one of his first real jobs out of college as a small-time institutional bond salesman when he was introduced to racing. A co-worker, Robert Allen,

grew up near Santa Anita and knew how to handicap.

“We were young guys keeping Wall Street hours while working on the West Coast,” said Fradkin, “which meant that by 2 p.m. we were looking for trouble. He said we should go to the races and that I might be good at it.”

Fradkin did have vague memories of an earlier racing experience, going with family friends to Delaware Park as a kid.

“It left an impression,” Fradkin recalled.

He had no idea that one day he would be entrenched in all things racing. At first, his new trips to Santa Anita led to entering handicapping contests in Las Vegas.

“I finished second in the ‘wimpy division’ four times in a row and made a few bucks,” he said. “It’s really the consistency division; you bet favorites and try to pick

winners, no matter the odds. Eventually, I thought that if I claimed a horse, I might learn the game from the inside and improve my handicapping skills.”

The Fradkins met with trainer Ron Ellis, who helped them drop in four claims. But they were outshook every time. They finally claimed Kentucky-bred Ruff Hombre for \$25,000 in their fifth attempt; the gelding finished last of 11.

“It was not good,” Fradkin said. “Ron said after the race that the horse had an ankle, and we weren’t sure if he would make it back. But two months later at Del Mar he won with Laffit Pincay Jr. aboard. I thought, ‘Gee, this is easy!’ That’s how the racing gods sucked me in, I suppose.”

Diane was quick to point out the John was never in it alone.

“This was something we embarked on together,” she said, noting that they got married on Breeders’ Cup day in 1993. “We don’t have children, so the horses are substitute kids, in a sense. We started doing this together and have grown it together. Now here we are.”

The Fradkins took the money they had made in the Del Mar race to the Keeneland September yearling sale that year.

“We didn’t know what we were doing, but we hired a guy to be our bloodstock agent, Larry Richardson,” said John.

The former general manager of Nelson Bunker Hunt’s Bluegrass Farm, Richardson was “looking for something



John and Diane Fradkin and jockey Flavien Prat with the Woodlawn Vase replica trophy for winning the 2021 Preakness Stakes with homebred Rombauer

SKIP DICKSTEIN

to do,” according to John, “and took us around the sale when we were nobodies. He showed us conformation on different horses and showed us an example of a little filly where the bones lined up well on the front end. We ended up buying her; that was Ultrafleet.”

“I remember going to Keeneland and walking around the sale for the first time to find Ultrafleet,” Diane said. “We thought it would be fun to bid and went to \$10,500.”

The daughter of Afleet never even hit the board for the Fradkins, and they were stoutly advised not to try to make the diminutive filly a broodmare. But previously they had a good experience with Keith Card and his Hi Card Ranch, so they sent Ultrafleet there and “were treated like family,” according to John.

“Ultrafleet started producing some nice-looking foals that sold well as 2-year-olds,” he added. In 2002, along came Cambiocorsa.

The California-bred daughter of Avenue of Flags—Ultrafleet went for \$90,000 at the Barretts May 2-year-old sale in 2004, then went on to win nine of 18 starts and earn \$522,055. Cambiocorsa was a star down the hill at Santa Anita, and among her victories were two grade 3 wins over that course.

Cambiocorsa has since gone on to be a powerhouse broodmare for Ran Jan Racing, with grade 2 winners Schiaparelli and Moulin de Mougine, as well as stakes winner Alexis Tangier and stakes-placed Vionnet to her credit. Vionnet went on to produce Cartier Horse of the Year Roaring Lion.

Fradkin repaid Keith Card’s kindness by allowing him to breed a full brother to Cambiocorsa in 2004. That colt, California Flag, went on to win the 2009 Breeders’ Cup Turf Sprint and earned \$1,288,825. Card died midway through California Flag’s career, but the gelding continued running for his wife, Barbara; the Fradkins; and other partners. California Flag tied with Dancing



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in Silks for the 2009 Cal-bred Horse of the Year.

The Fradkins’ success with Ultrafleet didn’t stop there. She produced the Cowboy Cal mare Cashmere in 2011, and Cashmere, in turn, foaled Preakness winner Rombauer.

“It was the pandemic that caused us to own him,” John said. “The OBS (Ocala Breeders’ Sales) April sale was delayed last year, and we had no confidence that the sale would actually happen. Eddie Woods recommended we run him, win early, and then sell him at the track.”

Rombauer did win early, breaking his maiden on the turf in July 2020

at Del Mar. But the time was inexplicably slow and no offers came. The Michael McCarthy trainee finished second in the American Pharoah Stakes (G1) at Santa Anita in September, proving he could excel on either surface.

“We started turning down offers then,” John said.

Fifth in the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile (G1), Rombauer won the 2021 El Camino Real Derby at Golden Gate Fields by a neck. After the colt had run third in the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes (G2), the Fradkins had a choice regarding the Kentucky Derby (G1)—every owner’s dream—or heading straight for the Preakness.

“It was us, not Michael, who decided that,” Diane explained. “We felt that if he was going to run the race of his life, we’d rather it be while winning than finishing fifth, which is what we thought might happen in Kentucky. We ran against tired horses in the Preakness, but we were tickled with his effort. John always said we could breed a better horse than we could buy, and that has been proven true time and time again with this female family.”

The Fradkins typically have two broodmares in their band, and they have only bred around 40 foals in their entire career.

“We’ve got just one mare in Kentucky and that’s Cashmere,” said John. “She appears to be another magic mare, like Ultrafleet.”

Rombauer finished third in the June 5 Belmont Stakes (G1), pushing his earnings past \$1 million. Their only other horse currently on the track is Cono, a stakes-placed, Kentucky-bred son of the late California stallion Lucky Pulpit.

In addition to Cashmere, the Fradkins own California broodmare Let-the-party\_begin, a daughter of Bertrando. She is boarded at Old English Rancho and has thrown two winners from three starters. Could she be another Ultrafleet for the couple? **CTB**