

Gold Circle Racing Board Elections



Mr Moga Pillay

Gold Circle is pleased to announce the election of longstanding owner and board member, Mr Moga Pillay, as Chairman of the KwaZulu-Natal Regional Racing Board.

Mr Pillay is well-known in local horseracing circles as a successful businessman, racehorse owner and a board member of some years standing. In acknowledging his election, Mr Pillay thanked the outgoing Chairman Mr Michael Holmes as well as the previous board for the sterling work done and solid foundation laid for the future.

He said that South African horseracing was entering interesting and trying times and that he was looking forward to facing the challenges that lay ahead with the support of his board. He went on to say that he was well aware that the board was accountable to members and that he intended adopting an open-door policy, where any member wishing to meet with him personally would be given the opportunity to do so. He also said that he was looking forward to working closely with the Chairman of the main board of Gold Circle. Mr Craig Massey was elected as Mr Pillay's Vice-Chairman.

The Western Cape Regional Racing Board elections have seen no changes with Mr Ashraf Mohamed re-elected as Chairman and Mr Vidrik Thurling Vice-Chairman.

FELIX COETZEE

One of South African horseracing's favourite sons, Felix Coetzee, arrived back in the country just before Christmas and will settle in Cape Town after spending 16 years in Hong Kong.

Coetzee has no plans beyond the saddle at the moment and was workriding at Milnerton virtually as soon as his plane had touched down and racering less than a week later.

His first race back in the saddle was for old jockey's room colleague, Basil Marcus, and got off the mark almost immediately when he steered the Marcus-trained Saluki to a comfortable victory at Kenilworth.

However, Coetzee said that he had no firm commitments to any trainer. "I am still feeling good and my aim is simply to carry on riding as many winners as I can."

"I am thrilled to be back," he continued. "I will miss Hong Kong but I missed South Africa when I was over there and I have been given a very warm welcome back here by all my old friends."

He said that it would be "wonderful" if he could still ride in feature races in Hong Kong and other overseas venues but added, "Who knows what the future holds. But more importantly I am back here to ride and will give of my best."

Coetzee is currently staying with his family in an apartment he

owns in Cape Town and will be looking for a house.

He paid a visit to his old "guv-nor", Terrance Millard, just a day or two after arriving.

In their hey-day together the pair won three Julys, four J&B Mets and five Gold Cups as well as many classics. Coetzee has won a joint record seven Gold Cups in all and the only coveted prize in South African racing missing from his CV is the Queen's Plate. He won the National Jockey's Championship three times, in 1984/85, 1987/88 and 1989/90.

Coetzee's well documented career in Hong Kong could be split into two-halves; a frustrating first half, in which his fortunes had dwindled substantially from his heady days as stable jockey to the great Cape trainer Terrance Millard; however that all changed in the 1999/2000 season when he became stable jockey to Tony Cruz, first helping him win the Trainer's Championships and then becoming associated with the legendary racehorse, Silent Witness.

Silent Witness was unbeaten in his first 17 runs, breaking the world record sequence previously held by Cigar and Citation. He finally tasted defeat in his 18th start when pipped at the post by Champion miler, Bullish Luck, when tried over a mile for the first time.

Coetzee was the only jockey to ever ride Silent Witness and built up an amazing rapport with the superstar sprinter.

"When he first arrived in Hong Kong he wanted to show us what he had and wouldn't accept slow work," he said. "He also wanted to take on every horse he saw, so we eventually had to bring him out when the track was empty. He later became the laziest horse in Hong Kong, but he was always an extremely perceptive animal. He didn't miss a thing. If a horse did happen to come up behind him in training I could feel his back rippling in readiness and he wouldn't let anything go past him. At the races he seemed to know exactly what to do. He timed his jump to perfection and would outpace everything early and secure the rail. He would then relax, prick his ears and idle along gazing at something in the distance. In the straight he would simply change gears and see them off. The pressure mounted as he neared the record and I obviously felt nervous on occasion. But we had this amazing connection and there was something about the positioning of his ears before the start that would say to me, 'Don't worry, I've got it

under control'. He's now retired and I went to visit him at his home on a retirement farm for champion horses in Melbourne. The first time I was there he was with me when a horse came too close to his feed. He turned around and literally marched this horse off 50m away before coming back to me. There is no mistaking who is boss of his paddock!"

Coetzee, who turns 50 in March, recently revealed in a magazine article that a course he had attended given by the legendary "horse whisperer" Monty Roberts had left him feeling humbled and with a new understanding of both horses and himself.

He has consequently changed his approach to racetraining, despite having been in the saddle for forty years.

He was known by South African fans for his strength in the saddle and his ability to get a horse up in a tight finish, so it will be interesting to see how this new philosophy has complimented his style.

COETZEE WILL BE MISSED



Hong Kong racing will miss Felix Coetzee. The 49-year-old South African returned to Cape Town after 16 years in Hong Kong, most famously as the riding part of the record-breaking C team with Tony Cruz.

It's hard to accurately assess the benefit of a jockey like Coetzee to the racing game here, because jockeys like him are just so rare. He was hard-working, professional, respectful of authority and brought great integrity to the role. If he was suspended for careless riding and disagreed with the findings of the stewards, that disagreement would be communicated in an appropriate way, or not at all.

The moist-eyed, parting remarks of ardent fan Willie Leung, 36, on Saturday night said much about his idol. Coetzee's 30 seconds of consideration for Leung in Japan in 2005, after Silent Witness won the Sprinters Stakes, gave the fan a moment he'll treasure for life. Apart from everything else, as wonderful as his contribution has been, Coetzee (pictured) should be adorned for teaching the fans to believe in the integrity of the racing game.

Leung's simple but heart-felt sentiment mirrors this column's view of the magnificent Coetzee era: "A great jockey and very honest - I am [we are] going to miss him."

ALYSON WRIGHT

Former Zimbabwean and now Summerveld trainer Alyson Wright has made a remarkable start to her training career, assembling an owner base from scratch and sending out 16 winners in her first full season, and now building on that success in her all important second season.

The yard's 14 winners before Christmas this season placed them sixth on the Kwazulu-Natal log and of the province's top ten only the quality stock of Joey Ramsden's Clairwood satellite yard have achieved a higher strike rate.

Wright's husband, former Zimbabwean Champion Jockey Kevin Wright, is her assistant and the pair's skill compliments one another perfectly.

Kevin described Alyson as the one who does the "guts of the job", the breaking in, training and horse care, while he does what he called the "easy side", the placing of horses and selecting of horses at sales.

Alyson also does a lot of work-riding, a role Kevin can no longer fulfil due to a leg injury that ended his career in the saddle.

The importance of Kevin's role as selector can't be underestimated and the fruits of his labour in this regard will soon tell.

"Our strategy in the beginning was to buy horses in training rather than having to go a whole season without a runner," said Alyson. "We bought horses from the likes of Neil Bruss and our string grew to about 40. They have done very well for us, but recently, on our suggestion, 10 of them were sold on to Mauritius. Kevin has had a long and successful relationship with buyers in Mauritius and our owners will benefit from the sale as they are getting money that would have been very difficult to reap in stakes earnings at this stage of those horses' careers."

The future will now lie largely with the youngsters in the yard, and Kevin said, "We are after a big horse now, a Grade I winner, and we are hopeful that one of our five very nice two-year-olds will have the X-factor that will take us to the next level."

Regarding his selection methods, Kevin said, "We work strictly to a budget. I like a certain stamp of horse and match the specimen to the pedigree. If a horse doesn't have the pedigree I will pass it by and would rather buy a well-bred horse with a fault and then work around that fault in training. I have learnt that blood comes through at the racetrack, even with some horses that show nothing at home. I do have my favourite sires."

The yard currently has horses bought from the likes of the National Yearling Sales and from Australia and Kevin will shortly be attending the January Magic Millions Sales with well known KZN owner, Mary Liley, one of the yard's supporters.

The Wrights have horses in their blood, Alyson, an active showjumper, being the daughter of former Zimbabwean trainer Penny Fisher, and Kevin having had his first job in horseracing as a fifteen-year-old, when assistant to Neil Bruss before joining the Zimbabwean jockey's academy.

Through their grounding and the subsequent plying of their trade in Zimbabwe, Singapore and South Africa, they have been able to apply a very professional approach.

"Successful trainers don't alter the tried and tested," said Alyson, "Rather they add to it."

She pointed out that "the tried and tested" varied between different training centres and it

was very important to know what worked at a given centre.

Alyson's time at Summerveld with Neil Bruss, from whom she sub-let stables, helped her learn the in's and out's of KZN's biggest training centre, and like all good trainers she has now adapted the use of the facilities to best suit her horses.

The most important addition they have made to the "tried and tested" has been the purchase of a horse-walker.

"It has been a tremendous investment," said Kevin. "Horses can use it in all weather conditions and it also relieves work pressure on our grooms. The horse-walker has played a big part in our success."

However Alyson emphasised that the most telling factor in a yard's success was the staff.

"We were lucky to acquire grooms from Neil Bruss - you can't buy experience. We have incentive schemes and have an excellent team spirit. The motivation to succeed is reflected in the pride our staff have in their work."

Kevin added that they are blessed with good workriders and his opinion on academy jockeys puts a different light on some recent reports.

"There are a batch of about five apprentices coming through that I think have very bright futures," he said before praising stable jockey, Alec Forbes, and mentioning Brandon Lerena as a "fantastic jockey".

The Wrights believe KZN racing is burgeoning and think that alongside the Cape it is the place to be in South Africa.

"We are enjoying training at Summerveld and Hillcrest is a very nice place to live," concluded Kevin.



Dubai World Cup Venue Construction on Hold

The most popular and most lucrative annual thoroughbred horserace in Dubai, one of the seven emirates and the most populated city of the United Arab Emirates, is the Dubai World Cup Meeting, but plans to construct a new \$1.25-billion racing venue in the city by 2010 have been cancelled.

The construction of the state-of-the-art Nad Al Sheba racetrack and new home of the Dubai Racing Club was cancelled this week by the project's developer, Meydan LLC, it is thought as a result of a missed deadline and an increasing trend to scale back on large projects as financing becomes harder to get.

The news has sent shockwaves through the UAE, as the new racecourse was expected to become the premier horseracing venue in the Middle East and the new home of the Dubai World Cup. This may mean that the fate of the race - which attracts the best runners from all over the world - is now up in the air.

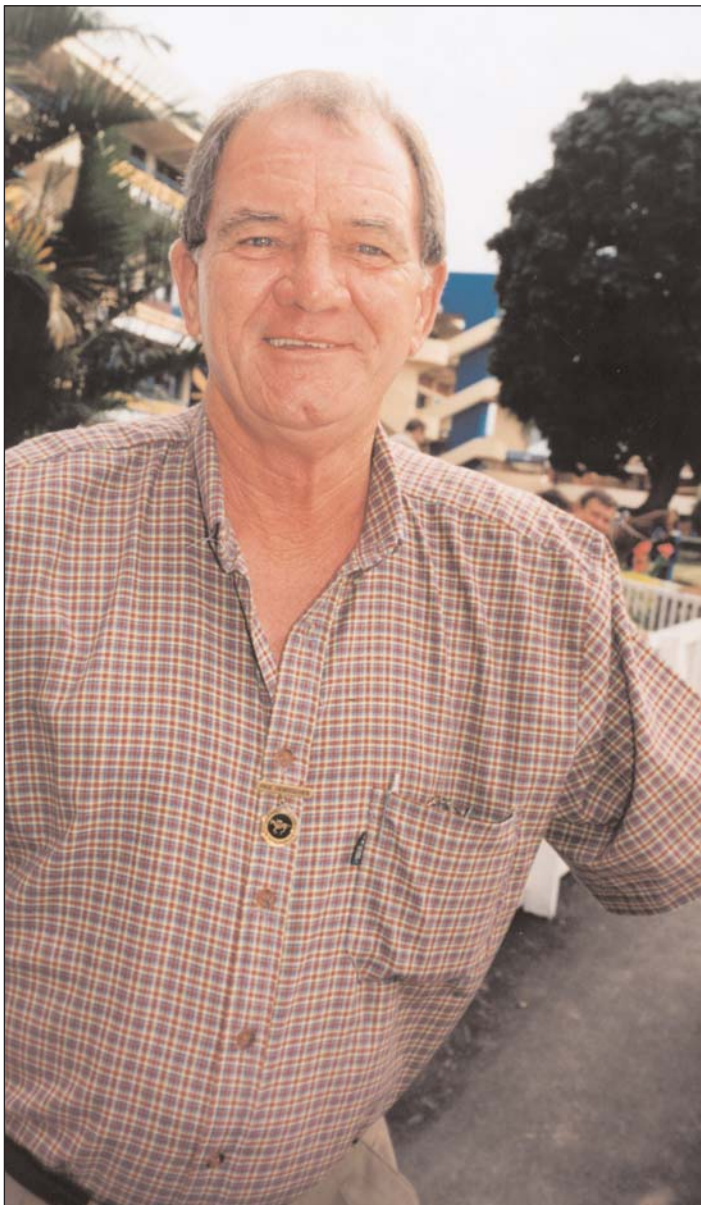
Apparently the two companies that were awarded the contract by Meydan LLC - Malaysian-based WCT Bhd and Dubai-based Arabtec Construction LLC - were unexpectedly informed about

the cancellation of the contract this week, and were given 14-days notice to halt construction and pack up their things. Said a spokesperson from WCT Bhd upon being informed of the decision, 'We see this sudden cancellation as a breach of contract on the part of the employer (Meydan LLC) and we will certainly weigh up our options and take the necessary steps in order to protect our interests regarding this project.'

The directors of WCT Bhd are understandably upset considering that the contract to build the new home of the Dubai Racing Club as well as a 60,000-capacity grandstand and a luxury hotel, was expected to account for 37 percent of the company's profit this year.

Arabtec Construction LLC, on the other hand, which entered into a 50-50 joint venture with WCT Bhd in September 2007, has yet to make a statement about the recent developments. As to how the cancellation of such a mammoth project will affect the future of horseracing in Dubai, remains to be seen.

Leading SA Trainer Dies After Long Illness



The South African horseracing industry was in mourning after one of its leading racehorse trainers and a consummate horseman, Paul Denysschen, passed away recently at the Pietermaritzburg Medi-Clinic after a lengthy fight with cancer, just one week shy of his 64th birthday.

Denysschen gained notoriety in South Africa for being a lively character and a 'straight shooter', as well as for his enormous love for all animals, not just the multitude of top-notch thoroughbreds that passed through his hands over the years at his stables in the town of Ashburton, Kwazulu Natal.

During his long and illustrious career, Denysschen was credited with training some of the country's most successful racehorses. One of his most successful charges was the son of Model Man, Amberpondo, who famously won the Kings Cup in 1996 and the Champion Stakes the following year.

As news of Denysschen's death began circulating around the country, the tributes from South African horsemen began pouring in from far and wide. Well-known racehorse owner Mario Teixeira, for instance, described the gutsy trainer as a legend, a man's man and a die-hard animal lover.

He said, 'I owned many horses with Paul and knew first-hand that horses, dogs and koi fish were his passion. He always did things his own way and in times of trouble was the first to step up and take control. He was not a yes man and did not suffer fools gladly. He was a top trainer and a true friend'

Cape Town-based trainer Izak Cronje said that Denysschen would be sadly missed. 'Paul was not only a colleague, but a very close friend who could only be described as a salt of the earth character with a shining personality and endless energy. His passing will leave a void in both my and my wife's lives.'

Director of Gold Circle Racing, Graeme Hawkins, described Denysschen's death as an enormous blow to Kwazulu Natal horseracing, and went on to say that throughout his long and illustrious career he had deeply enriched and contributed to the South African horseracing industry as a whole.'

SEAN CORMACK



Sean Cormack arrived back in South Africa two weeks before Christmas and is likely to be here for a while.

He and his family left South Africa last June and have been living in Brisbane, where he was contracted to ride for Bruce McLachlan.

He spoke of his time in Australia, "It was a huge adjustment due to their totally different style of racing and I battled to get into a comfort zone but was eventually enjoying it. As far as the racing goes, they

tend to go a lot quicker there and there are no false rails and the run-ins are very short. This means you have to start looking for a run very early. It is not the same as over here where you can just relax a horse and then have them coming back to you in the straight. The nomination system is a lot different too. They will nominate on a Friday and accept on a Monday for racing on a Wednesday, so it all happens very quickly. Unlike here they usually run their horses when they nominate and probably only the outside three scratch. But those who scratch will nominate again and are likely to run in that next race. There is no 14 day scratching rule for carded horses that are scratched. There are also barrier trials there so once you are riding for a trainer you usually know exactly when the horse is likely to run. I think it is a good system they have over there."

Cormack's yard went through a lean spell after he had arrived in Brisbane.

"They are not as strong a yard as they were five years ago so I struggled in the beginning and battled to get outside rides. It was like starting from scratch again but eventually, through word of mouth, I began getting rides for some other trainers on a regular basis."

He rode 30 winners in his time there.

Cormack's predecessor as stable jockey for the Dennis Drier yard before he left for Australia was Glyn Schofield, who lives an hour-and-twenty minute flight away from him in Australia in Sydney. He speaks to Schofield on the phone at least twice a week. Jeff Lloyd also lives in Sydney.

Cormack spoke of the culture of horseracing that Australia has, "There are many, many courses in Australia. On Melbourne Cup day there is a racemeeting at virtually every one of these courses and all of them are absolutely jam-packed."

Cormack recently had a fall in Australia and bent his thumb back, tearing some ligaments and muscles in his hand.

As he was due to return to South Africa for Christmas anyway he used it as an opportunity to come over earlier than expected.

He is still waiting for residency in Australia, so will extend his stay here while waiting for this residency and sorting out other local affairs, such as trying to sell his house.

"I have proved that I can make a good living over there so expect to get my residency," he said.

Cormack will be attached to Drier's yard while here.

ALDO DOMEYER



Aldo Domeyer has pulled six winners clear of Derreck David in the race for the National Apprentice Jockey's Championship.

The title chase is of special significance to Cape Town-based Domeyer as his father, Andrew Fortune, is 25 winners and 56 winners clear of Anton Marcus and Mark Khan respectively in the race for the National Jockey's title.

"It would mean the world to me to win the apprentice title this year, not just for my career but

for personal reasons too," said Domeyer yesterday.

The pair would surely become the first in South African history to pull off such a father-and-son double.

Domeyer has ridden 30 winners this season at a strike rate of 7,89%, while David has ridden 24 winners at 5,71% and another candidate, Durban-based Karis Teetan, has ridden 21 winners at 9,17%.

Domeyer travels to Kimberly every Monday, where he is being supported by Cliffie Miller, and Port Elizabeth every Friday, where he is being supported by "Oom Nic" Claassen.

In Cape Town he gets most of his rides from Vaughan Marshall, Stan Elley, Mike Bass and Justin Snaith.

"Those helping me have been very loyal to me which I very much appreciate," said Domeyer.

He said that his father was quick to help him when he saw him doing something wrong.

"He picks up on my mistakes and advises me," he said.

Domeyer added that he has found a style that is comfortable for

him, but adapts it according to the horses he is riding.

His favourite course is the Kenilworth new course and the best horses he has ridden to date have been Our Giant and Kapil.

Domeyer currently has a two week suspension hanging over his head (subject to appeal), which could see Johannesburg-based David closing the gap.

On the downside for David is that he lost his job with one of his main supporters, Gary Alexander, last Tuesday.

However, he is still determined to win the title and will now begin travelling to both Durban and Zimbabwe in a bid to get more winners.

Currently David travels to Port Elizabeth to ride for Gavin Smith, George Uren and Jacques Strydom and to Kimberly to ride for Bill Human.

His main supporters in Johannesburg are Charles Laird, Roy Magner and a few other Randjesfontein trainers.

"It would mean everything to me to win the title," said David, "especially seeing that I battled to get into the academy. They rejected me in my first two attempts to get in, saying I'd be too big, and on my third attempt put me on a six month trial. It would be great to prove those who thought I'd never make it as a jockey wrong. I have my whole family and my girlfriend behind me. My father Eblan is very strict on me and pushes me along. My uncle, Donovan Habib, also gives me a lot of encouragement."

David has created a style most comfortable for him thanks to the help of Johannesburg riding master, Robert Moore, whom he reckons to be "the best riding master in the country."

His favourite racetracks are the Vaal grass track and Fairview and the best horse he has ridden to date has been the former Tyrone Zackey-trained Lion's Blood.

The title chase looks set to reach an exciting climax and adds further spice to an already fascinating season for racefans.

JIMMY BLONDE JOINS UP



Former top jockey Jimmy Anderson, remembered by punters as a master without peer in the saddle, has teamed up with trotting trainer Willie Mahlaba in Durban. Now 60 and at the same weight as when he was riding, Jimmy is proving equally at home on a sulky. The silky-smooth hands that produced Durban July winner Big Charles, are now driving trotters daily in preparation for harness racing's first race in March.

"I never thought driving trotting horses would be as enjoyable as it is," enthused Jimmy after a turn in the Summerveld sugar-cane fields. "These horses are fast and so beautifully schooled. This is the business".

HRSA chairman Dean Latimer said that other past champion jockeys such as Michael Roberts and Garth Puller were also vying for drives. Harness racing allows for amateur participation and has elicited wide interest from show-jumpers and polo players and also Freestate and Northern Cape farmers.

Hayley Turner First UK Female Jockey to 100 Wins



For top-rated UK jockey Hayley Turner, her win aboard 7-1 Mullitovermaurice at Wolverhampton Racecourse will be one she'll never forget, as it marked her 100th victory making her the first female UK jockey to notch up 100 wins in a single season. The 25-year-old jockey chalked up her 99th win aboard 5-4 favorite, Newlyn Art, at Lingfield Racecourse in England, setting her up for

her century the next day. In Wednesday's outing, the Bet At lad-brokes.com claiming stakes, Turner pushed Mullitovermaurice into the lead and kept him there.

Turner rode one of the most gutsy rides of her career. The only hiccup came at the end of the race, when there was some speculation as to whether Mullitovermaurice interfered with fellow runner Special Bond. It appeared that Turner's mount may have

drifted slightly over the icy track in the stretch.

However, after carefully reviewing the race, the Wolverhampton stewards did not call for an enquiry, which meant that Turner was indeed free to celebrate her magnificent milestone. Trained by English trainer James Given, many spectators said that Mullitovermaurice ran one of the best races of his career.

Said the ecstatic jockey after the race, 'I am obviously thrilled to bits. I'm really pleased and glad I achieved my 100th race victory tonight so that I don't have to worry about it tomorrow. My agent has done a fantastic job for me, as he was always insistent I was going to do it. I am absolutely delighted.'

'When I started as an apprentice rider, at times it was hard for me to get rides on certain owners' horses as they didn't want a girl up. For that reason everything's happened pretty gradually for me. After my achievement, I am hopeful that it's going to snowball next year and that I'll get more quality rides.'

Turner also gave credit to well-known UK trainer Michael Bell, who she said had given her lots of much-needed encouragement when she was an up-and-coming apprentice jockey.

CRAIG BENTON



Craig Benton riding work on the snowy Epsom Downs on Monday, January 5. The mercury had dropped to -8 degrees and the following Saturday was -11. "Ashburton has nothing on this," Benton said.

Son of former top trainer Buller Benton, Craig left Macau Jockey Club in April 2007 where he was a stipendiary steward to join his family who had moved to the UK the previous year. He is currently assistant trainer to John Akehurst in Epsom. They have a small yard of 25 horses, mostly low graders that run on the local all weather tracks of Lingfield, Kempton and Great Leighs. They do have a few nice older horses which Benton hopes will do well on the turf this year with six babies making up the yard. Benton says he's very fit and still enjoys riding work.

Greyville Public Lift

Patrons are advised that work has commenced on the replacement of the public lift at Greyville Racecourse. The lift will be out of use for approximately 6 weeks.

The lift entrances have been boarded on the respective floors for safety reasons, however if possible, avoid these areas entirely. We apologise for the inconvenience.