



## RINGSIDE... with Lucas Marquardt

### 'HOOK' OFF TO A GOOD START

The website urbandictionary.com defines the phrase 'off the hook' as: *something fresh and new (ie. literally right off the store shelf or hanger--the hook).*

That's an apt description of the pinhooking operation that has chosen the phrase as its moniker. Off the Hook

is the burgeoning partnership between native New Yorker Joe Appelbaum and Venezuelan Carlos Morales. Launched in 2005, Off the Hook has grown in size and scope in the past three years, and last season was the seventh-leading consignor at the OBS March Sale with seven horses bringing \$1,046,000--a solid average of nearly \$150,000 per horse that put



**Morales & Appelbaum**  
*horsehook.com*

them near the top among consignors in that category. Off the Hook hopes to continue the momentum this year with a draft that includes juveniles by the likes of Giant's Causeway, Lemon Drop Kid and Johannesburg.

But how did a horse-loving handicapper from New York with no actual hands-on experience with horses, who plied his trade as a football coach and then working with children's organizations, hook up with a trainer who was a dominant conditioner in his native country but who was a relative unknown in the States?

As is so often the case in racing, it was serendipity more than anything that drew Appelbaum and Morales together. Or, more accurately, a sizeable winning Pick 6 ticket.

**Ocala Forecast for Monday:** Sunshine and some clouds. High 79F. Winds E at 10 to 20 mph

Born and raised in New York City, Appelbaum began going to Belmont Park with his buddies as a teenager. In the summer, he and his pals would rent a house in Saratoga. After graduating Yale University, where he played football as a strong safety, Appelbaum began coaching college pigskin. He skipped around to a few universities as a quarterback and receivers coach, including Hofstra, where he tutored a small but gritty sophomore wide receiver--and future NFL star--named Wayne Chrebet. But as the Off the Hook website explains, "it became clear that August training camp was cutting into too much of the Saratoga meet."

Appelbaum switched careers, eventually becoming the president of Kids Interest Development Services Inc. before founding Oasis Children's Services LLC, businesses that provided school, camp and after-school programming for children in the Northeast. But he was still taking those trips to Saratoga.

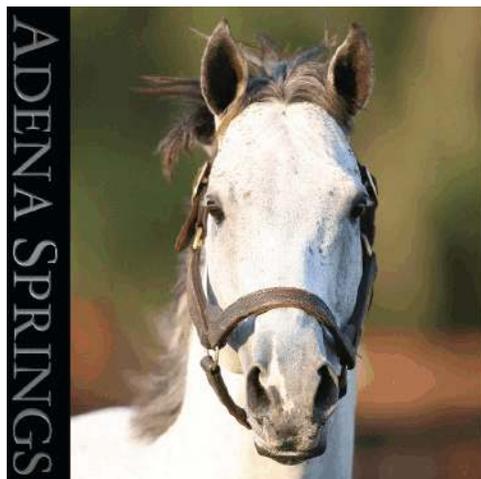
It was during one of those vacations at the Spa that things took a turn for Appelbaum. One afternoon, he and a couple friends invested \$1,000 in a Pick 6 ticket. One by one, their horses began winning. And winning. And winning. And when the last race on the card was declared official, Appelbaum and his friends had a slip worth \$110,000.

In a pragmatic move that would make the parents of any young 20-something proud, Appelbaum and his friends invested a large portion of the winnings in claiming a racehorse. That claimer led to another, and for the next few years Appelbaum was in and out of the racing business.

About six or seven years ago, he was in the hunt for a new conditioner when he met Carlos Morales, who, by the time he was 30, had several times claimed the leading trainer title in Venezuela before moving tack to Calder Race Course in the U.S.

Morales had reached a level of recognition with Yankee Victor, a son of Saint Ballado who Morales had purchased as a two-year-old in training for \$75,000. Yankee Victor won eight of 19 races, including the GI Met Mile, before being retiring to stud.

But when Appelbaum approached Morales, the trainer wasn't sure about training claiming horses.



# MACHO, Macho Man

Champion **MACHO UNO** has sired four stakes horses and \$1.2M from his first crop. Both his SWs are graduates of 2YO sales.

**At Adena:** Hips 13, 17, 31, 38, 47, 66, 74, 85, 88, 98, 119, 130

**At OBS:** Hips 32, 80, 148




Holy Bull - Primal Force, by Blushing Groom \$20,000 LF

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**Off the Hook cont.**

"He said, 'Look, I don't know much about them, but I know I can find good young horses and develop them. We should go to Keeneland and I'll buy a yearling,'" said Appelbaum. "So that's what we did. We wound up selling the claimer off, put some money together and went to Keeneland September and bought a Siphon (Brz) filly."

The filly, later named Blitzen, cost them \$60,000 and was sent to Nick de Meric in Florida to be broken.

"A couple months later, Carlos called me and said that de Meric thought we should enter the filly in the Keeneland [April] Sale," explained Appelbaum. "I knew about two-year-old sales, but didn't really know anything about pinhooking. So I told him that we really wanted to race and weren't that interested. He said, 'Listen, I'll put up the entry fee, but you have to keep it open as an option.'"

That proved to be a smart move when, after being brought to Keeneland April, Blitzen turned in the fastest breeze for a filly at the first under-tack show. Buyers swarmed, and before Appelbaum knew it the hammer fell on bloodstock agent Buzz Chace's \$500,000 offer.

"And that was that. We were in the pinhooking game," said Appelbaum.

These days, Off the Hook has grown into a sizeable outfit based in Ocala--though Appelbaum still calls New York City home. Off the Hook has a 44-stall barn as part of the Eclipse Training Center, where Nick de Meric and Murray Smith, among others, are stabled. Off the Hook also boasts a 64-acre breeding facility, where it keeps and manages broodmares for itself and for outside clients.

After skipping both the OBS February Sale and Fasig-Tipton Calder Sale, Off the Hook will offer around 25 two-year-olds for sale this spring, including 10 here.

Of the decision to wait until March, Appelbaum explained, "We like giving them some time, and we often buy April and May pedigrees, and they can use some time. Plus it fits with Carlos's training. Because he came from the race track, I think, he's a very patient trainer."

Appelbaum added that Off the Hook has focused not only on yearlings with late birth dates, but also on late-developing pedigrees, too.

"One thing that I think sets us apart a little bit is that we generally look for horses, in pedigree especially, that are going to have some distance in them," he said. "We look for a more Classic-looking pedigree. If you look in our consignment for the March Sale, we have horses by Lemon Drop Kid and Giant's Causeway; horses you might not normally associate with pinhookers. Part of our philosophy is that A), we want our clients to be able to compete in the top races, which are often at a distance. But also, if those horses aren't the super quickest, you can understand why because they're not bred to do that."

Like many other pinhookers, Off the Hook tries to upgrade its stock each season.

# Bluegrass Cat

Storm Cat - She's A Winner, by A.P. Indy

## First Foals Give Cause for Paws

Weanling filly from the first crop of Grade 1-winning Millionaire Bluegrass Cat out of Multiple Group Stakes Winner Palmarola.



"In the past few years, we had difficulty pinhooking the horses we bought for under \$40,000," Appelbaum explained. "So we wanted to cut them out of the portfolio. And there were some that cost us a little more that we wanted to take a shot on. But there were a couple at both Fasig-Tipton and Keeneland September that we were able to get early in the sale because, I think, guys were maybe a little reticent to buy that early. We were able to get some pedigree power that we wouldn't have been able to go after in the past."

One of the standouts in Off the Hook's March consignment is [hip 196](#), a Lemon Drop Kid colt who was produced by MSW and GSP August Storm (Storm Creek). Procured for \$150,000 at Keeneland September, the colt wasn't extended to post a one-furlong breeze in :10 1/5 ([video](#)) at the first under-tack show.

"He's a beautiful horse," Appelbaum said. "He's got a pedigree that looks like he'll run on any surface and get a distance, but he's really quick. I thought his breeze was really impressive."

Another to keep an eye on, according to Appelbaum, is [hip 167](#), a bay colt from the second crop of the Hennessy stallion Cactus Ridge.

"He doesn't have as much pedigree power as some of the others, but he's a New York-bred who went :21 2/5," said Appelbaum. "Since we got him, he's been any surface, anytime and anywhere. He's been a runner."