

*After a tough year, Brandon Staebler
wins NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity
aboard Starlight Captain.*

By Tonya Ratliff-Garrison

Against All Odds

JOHN O'HARA PHOTO

Brandon Staebler won the NRCHA Snaffle
Bit Champion title on Starlight Captain.



RENO IS A GAMBLING TOWN, AND THE ODDS WERE CERTAINLY stacked against Brandon Staebler.

The 35-year-old trainer brought a horse to the National Reined Cow Horse Association Snaffle Bit Futurity that didn't start training until 12 months ago. And, to make matters worse, Staebler's attention for the past four months has been focused on his infant son, who is in need of a heart transplant.

Needless to say, it was a long shot for the Santa Maria, California, trainer to make it into the open finals, much less win the tough event.

But the gamble paid off ... to the tune of \$100,000 and a futurity trophy.

With only his second trip to the Snaffle Bit Futurity and his first time in the finals, Staebler won the open on October 3 with a score of 655.5 on Starlight Captain, a chestnut stallion by Captain Nice and out of Starlight Sally by Grays Starlight.

"When the owner brought him around the beginning of September last year, he was barely halter broken," the soft-spoken trainer said.

But "Goose" was a willing student, even if he was a little spooky at times.

"When you start one in September, you don't usually think about going and showing them, but he turned out to be a pretty amazing individual," he said. "He's really athletic and has such a great attitude and ability. We never had a bad day and there was never a day I didn't get off of him that I didn't enjoy riding him."

Staebler asked the owner, Maria Benko of Arroyo Grande, California, to leave the colt with him.

"But she didn't want to, so we worked out a deal in February to where I leased the horse," he said.

Things appeared to be looking up for the trainer. He finally had a horse he thought worthy of the Snaffle Bit Futurity, and he would go in as its owner. But then misfortune struck.

On June 9, Staebler's son, Zane, was born with congestive heart disease.

"The first month Zane was born, I spent in UCLA at the hospital," he said.

Staebler's partner, Barney Skelton, took over riding his horses while he stayed in Los Angeles with his son and wife, Kris.

Zane went in for surgery when he was a week old, but around July 4, he came down with an infection, further damaging his heart.

"As of now, we are on a transplant list waiting for a heart for him," he said.

While Kris stayed behind in Los Angeles, Staebler returned home to work on his horses and give lessons to his non pros.

"I ride during the week and then on Saturdays I give my lessons. But I tell my non pros 'Don't be late because when noon shows up, I'm not here any more, whether your lesson is done or not,'" he said.

He then drives 2½ hours to the UCLA Medical Center and spends Saturday afternoons and all of Sunday with his family.

"Before Zane was born, the horses were my first priority, but that all changed with a drop of the hat," Staebler said.

But he still hadn't given up on his dream of winning the Snaffle Bit Futurity with Goose. Although a stifle injury sidelined the colt and kept him out of the Fresno Futurity Bridle Horse Spectacular, Staebler was able to get him sound and healthy for the Reno event.

"I knew I had a really good horse coming in, and I hoped for the best," he said.

Staebler scored a 216.5 in the herd work and a 220.5 in the dry work.

"I screwed up the first lead departure, so I ran him really hard because I knew he was listening to me," he said. "I hadn't got him shown yet in reining, so I was going to be a hero or a zero."

But Staebler was most proud of Goose's fence work.

"He's really cowy, really gritty and he really likes it down the fence," he said, adding that the steer he drew in the finals didn't want to turn and was pushing on them during the run. "He just got mad, and it was like he was telling the cow, 'You're going to turn, and you're going to turn now.' And I was happy about that."

The pair scored a 218.5, bringing the composite score to 655.5, just enough to keep Todd Bergen and Love Em N Lena

OPEN FINALS

PLACE	HORSE/PEDIGREE	RIDER	OWNER	TOTAL SCORE	EARNINGS
1.	Starlight Captain (<i>Captain Nice x Starlight Sally by Grays Starlight</i>)	Brandon Staebler	Brandon Staebler	655.5	\$100,000
2.	Love Em N Lena (<i>Smart Little Lena x Slide Me Again by Isle Breeze</i>)	Todd Bergen	Jim & Camela Essick	651.5	\$70,000
3.	Shirley Shine (<i>Shining Spark x Shirley Mclain by Ima Cougar</i>)	Anne Reynolds	Anne Reynolds	651	\$47,000
4.	Mister Smart Remedy (<i>Mister Dual Pep x Ima Smart Remedy by Smart Little Lena</i>)	Jon Roeser	Larry & Sharon Rose	650.5	\$33,500
4.	Shiners Little Rita (<i>Shining Spark x Little San Rita by Peppy San Badger</i>)	Ted Robinson	Ted Robinson	650.5	\$33,500
6.	Hickory Starlight (<i>Grays Starlight x Jackie Hickory by Doc's Hickory</i>)	Brad Buttrey	Scott Gaddy	649.5	\$25,000
7.	Spooks Starman (<i>Grays Starlight x Lynx Star Lady by Doc's Lynx</i>)	Ron Ralls	Jose Maria Gomez	647.5	\$20,000
8.	CD Survivor (<i>CD Olena x Have A Lil Lena by Peppy San Badger</i>)	Sandy Collier	Nancy Crawford-Hall	645.5	\$17,500
9.	Paid By A Starlett (<i>Paid By Chic x Starwards Ginger by SMF Lenas Award</i>)	Jake Gorrell	Dana Roulet	645	\$15,000
10.	Starlights Rhonda (<i>Grays Starlight x Smokin Hickory Lena by Smart Little Lena</i>)	Ted Robinson	San Juan Ranch	642.5	\$13,000



Dema Paul was the Snaffle Bit Futurity Non Pro Champion aboard Shiners Dulena.

in second place with a score of 651.5.

"My horse tried really hard today. I was an adequate passenger," he said. "I didn't disappoint him and that was good."

Although Bergen wanted the win, he was delighted for Staebler.

"I'm so very happy for him," he said. "All us guys out there know what is happening in his life, and we were all kinda pulling for him."

Shortly after his win, Staebler still couldn't believe his gamble paid off.

"It's like a dream. It hasn't sunk in yet," he said. "It's like rolling the dice. You can draw a good cow and be good. Or you can draw one that can be tough and make a mistake and it all goes to hell in a hurry."

Most of all, Staebler is appreciative of the people of the NRCHA.

"This has been such a tough year, and we're grateful to so many people," he said. "These are the greatest people in the world."

Three are the Charm

DEMA PAUL HAD THREE HORSES GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity Non Pro event, but she couldn't decide which one to bring. So, she brought all three.

And it paid off big. She won the \$40,000 championship on September 30 aboard Shiners Dulena, who is by Shining Spark and out of Docs Sulena by Doc O' Lena, with a composite score of 650.5. She then won the reserve championship with a score of 650 on Maggie Hickory, who is by Doc's Hickory and out of Doc O Sugs by Doc's Sug, earning another \$19,500. And to top it off, she marked 636.5 for eighth place on Asmartday, who is by Smart Zanolena and out of Departure Day by Miss N Cash, to earn another \$6,094.

"I knew that all year they were good, but I knew it would all come down to luck of the draw," the Cave Creek, Arizona, resident said. "Whoever drew the best cow and showed the best would win."

Although she felt Asmartday was her best horse, it was the Carol Rose-bred gelding, Shiners Dulena, who won the event for her.

"The sorrel horse was really good at home but just turned out to be a little immature and got scared in there," she said. "But the palomino is a very physical horse. A very powerful horse. He's got a lot of guts and a lot of style."

Paul, who won the Non Pro Futurity in 2000, also qualified

for the open finals on Maggie Hickory, placing 22nd and earning another \$3,200. With the advancement in the open preliminaries, the bay mare also earned her owner even more money. Her score of 649 in the open competition made her the highest advancing preliminary horse that sold in the Snaffle Bit Select Sale in 2003. That accomplishment earned Dema the Futurity Sale Incentive in the form of a check for \$19,782.50.

Little Help From Her Friends

FOR NELLE MURPHY, THE 50K NON PRO SNAFFLE BIT WIN WAS bitter sweet.

Her mother, Melene, was recently diagnosed with cancer and was in Texas for radiation treatments. Murphy's father, Don, also stayed behind.

"It was weird not having them here and getting ready this morning all by myself," the 29-year-old said. "But I just put it out of my mind and focused on showing."

But she was far from alone. Boyd Rice helped her with her herd work. Todd Crawford lent a hand with the reining run. And Robbie Boyce coached her on the fence work.

"I had more people telling me stuff to do than ever," she said with a smile. "Robbie said he's never been so nervous in his life. He said 'It's worse watching, helping you, than it is for me ever showing.'"

But the help and advice paid off.

Murphy scored a 649.5 aboard Stylish Rey Gay, who is by Playin Stylish and out of Tari Rey Gay by Doc Tari. Besides the \$3,300 50K Non Pro win, she also took home \$15,844 for placing third in the Non Pro Snaffle Bit.

Murphy purchased the sorrel stallion last year at the National Cutting Horse Association Futurity sale.

"For me, I like one that is really quiet with a lot of stop, and that's exactly what he is," she said, adding that he might be just a little too quiet at times. "I think he was just born an old man, but he comes alive quickly when I ask him to."

Murphy plans to show him next at the National Reining Horse Association Futurity in Oklahoma City. Hopefully, her family will be there to cheer her on.

Out of the Pen and into the Arena

FOR NRCHA SNAFFLE BIT FUTURITY AMATEUR WINNER DOUG Koontz, his sorrel gelding, Young Widower, was too good to pass up.



Nelle Murphy won the 50K Non Pro on Tari Rey Gay and placed third in the Non Pro Futurity.

Koontz, who lives near Twin Falls, Idaho, and a friend were in Oklahoma at Terry Riddle's place looking for some young colts to break and sale. Riddle offered Koontz a pen of four 2-year-olds and two yearlings for an incredible price.

"It was so good, I stood there with my mouth wide open and didn't know how to respond," Koontz recalled. "My friend told me to 'Giddy up. What's it going to be?' So I said yes. We got a lot of nice colts out of it."

Out of that pen of colts was the 2-year-old "Wilson," who is by Young Gun and out of Doc Widow Wilson by Doc Wilson.

"This horse is a big gift," Koontz said. "I've never had one like this before. He was just a dream to train, and he tries so hard."

Koontz and Wilson won the amateur division title with a composite score of 651. The pair also did well prior to the Reno event, winning the limited open at the Magic Valley Reined Cow Horse Association in Jerome, Idaho, and a reserve at the Stallion Stakes in Elko, Nevada.

And there still might be another winner in that pen of colts he brought home.

"I've got two 2-year-olds by Young Gun that I really like," he said. "Hopefully, one of them will work out." 🐾



JOHN O'HARA PHOTO

Doug Koontz took the Amateur division title aboard sorrel gelding Young Widower.

NON PRO FINALS

PLACE	HORSE/PEDIGREE	RIDER	OWNER	TOTAL SCORE	EARNINGS
1.	Shiners Dulena <i>(Shining Spark x Docs Sulena by Doc O'Lena)</i>	Dema Paul	Jim & Dema Paul	650.5	\$40,000
2.	Maggie Hickory <i>(Doc's Hickory x Doc O Sugs by Doc's Sug)</i>	Dema Paul	Jim & Dema Paul	650	\$19,500
3.	Stylish Rey Gay <i>(Playin Stylish x Tari Rey Gay by Doc Tari)</i>	Nelle Murphy	Nelle Murphy	649.5	\$15,844
4.	Classy Luna <i>(Tangys Classy Peppy x Baroak Again by Doc's Oak)</i>	Tish Wilhite	Tish Wilhite	645	\$13,406
5.	Snappy Chicaria <i>(Smart Chic Olena x Snappy Skeet by Snapper Cal Bar)</i>	John McCarty	John McCarty	641	\$10,696
6.	Mclain to Fame <i>(Chic Please x Nancy Mclain by Ima Cougar)</i>	Anne Reynolds	Anne Reynolds	640.5	\$8,531
7.	To The Top With A Plan <i>(APHA)</i>	JoAnne Carollo	Jim & JoAnne Carollo	639.5	\$8,531
8.	Asmartyday <i>(Smart Zanolena x Departure Day by Miss N Cash)</i>	Dema Paul	Jim & Dema Paul	636.5	\$6,094
9.	Young Widower <i>(Young Gun x Docs Widow Wilson by Doc Wilson)</i>	Doug Koontz	Doug Koontz	633	\$6,094
10.	Pennys From Smokum <i>(Smokum Oak x Penny Starlight by Grays Starlight)</i>	Eric Freitas	Eric Freitas	598.5	\$4,875

50K NON PRO

PLACE	HORSE/PEDIGREE	RIDER	OWNER	TOTAL SCORE	EARNINGS
1.	Stylish Rey Gay <i>(Playin Stylish x Tari Rey Gay by Doc Tari)</i>	Nelle Murphy	Nelle Murphy	649.5	\$3,300
2.	Classy Luna <i>(Tangys Classy Peppy x Baroak Again by Doc's Oak)</i>	Tish Wilhite	Tish Wilhite	645	\$2,640
3.	Snappy Chicaria <i>(Smart Chic Olena x Snappy Skeet by Snapper Cal Bar)</i>	John McCarty	John McCarty	641	\$1,980
4.	Young Widower <i>(Young Gun x Docs Widow Wilson by Doc Wilson)</i>	Doug Koontz	Doug Koontz	633	\$1,320
5.	Paddys Stolen Heart <i>(Paddys Irish Whiskey x Thief of Hearts by Peppy San Badger)</i>	Jennifer Unzicker	Jennifer Unzicker	629.5	\$990
6.	Color My Lucky Star <i>(APHA)</i>	Michelle Cowan	Cowan Ranch Inc.	625	\$770