



Champion Groupie Doll, left, enjoyed a winter break from racing with pasturemate Brass Hat at the Bradleys' Indian Ridge Farm.



the BRADLEY Bunch

Father-and-son horsemen defy the odds to reach racing's pinnacle

By Maryjean Wall | Photos by David Stephenson

first came Brass Hat. Groupie Doll followed. The story behind this dynamic pair of homebreds tells like an epic about plain Kentucky folk struggling to beat the odds and win big at the racetrack. The ending has been pure Hollywood.

Fred Bradley, 81, realistically could not have pictured winning a Breeders' Cup race back when he drove his own fence posts, nailed planks, cut hay, housed tobacco, foaled mares, and sometimes galloped 17 racehorses before going to work for the remainder of the day. His day jobs included lawyer, state senator, and, for a time, owner-operator of and chief hauler for Fred's Fast Freight, a small trucking firm out of Frankfort.

Or perhaps he did dream. Perhaps in some secret recess of his mind Fred teased himself with tantalizing visions of the family farm scaling impossible heights. Whenever the posthole digger hit hardpan or a nail sliced Bradley's thumb or the mares kept him up too many nights, the engine driving him had to be some crazy kind of dream. Same for Bradley's son and trainer, Buff, and Buff's wife, Kim, and their children: daughters Korey, 17, and Jett, 9, and son Drew, 13. The Bradleys are three generations enduring the self-inflicted trials that go into building and maintaining a small family horse farm that never had superfluous cash to throw around.

Bradley bought some 320 acres near Frankfort for about \$40,000 in the late 1960s and named the farm Indian Ridge. With every dime his horses made he traded for better mares or built paddocks and added whatever a working farm needs until over time Indian Ridge evolved into a slice of Bluegrass heaven. He powered his dream with work ethic, a driving force the entire family has embraced. The payoff was Brass Hat (owned by Bradley) coming along to win nearly \$2.2 million, then Groupie Doll (owned by Bradley and his son along with Carl Hurst and Brent Burns) winning the Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Sprint in November. The Breeders' Cup marked Groupie Doll's fifth consecutive graded stakes win, three of those in grade I races.

Fred Bradley built Indian Ridge Farm with his own sweat and determination, instilling the same work ethic in his children.

Her stellar season earned Groupie Doll the Eclipse Award as champion female sprinter. Buff Bradley trained both horses.





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es, but the process of getting them to the races was the family's combined effort, with the elder Bradley as patriarch.

So look at them now, do-it-all father and son, standing next to the fireplace at home on the farm, their reflections shining ever so brightly in the bronze of the Breeders' Cup trophy on the mantel. "It's not really a rags-to-riches story. It's a rags-to-break-even story," said Buff Bradley, who 49 years ago was born William Bradley but as a child became Buff, short for "Buffalo" Bill. After working for five years as assistant trainer for the late Clarence Picou, Buff Bradley opened his own training operation in 1993. The short version of his story was the moderate success he realized on Kentucky race-tracks with horses coming from blue-collar pedigrees straight off the family farm.

From foaling mares to fixing fences, the Bradleys are involved in all aspects of Indian Ridge.

For the longer version, Buff Bradley's story begins much as his dad's, with the younger Bradley waiting through freezing nights with the foaling mares in Frankfort and then driving 80 miles in the wee hours to arrive at Turfway Park before dawn to train his racing stable. "Those were the toughest times, especially during the cold," Buff Bradley reminisced.

A lot can change on a dime in horse racing, and that's pretty much what happened for the Bradleys. Their \$15,000 claimer, Brass Hat, reinvented himself into a stakes horse, and from there the popular gelding was off to the big show. The Bradleys had won races at tracks such as Keeneland, but Brass Hat took them other places and eventually to Dubai. Brass Hat also brought them a few welcome perks. For example, Buff Bradley still foals mares during late spring nights, but four years ago he rerouted his stable from winter racing at Turfway Park to Gulfstream Park. He races 15 horses at Gulfstream and another 15 at Tampa Bay Downs before returning home for Keeneland racing.

The older Bradley does not travel to the races as much these days, but a lifetime around horses has left him with plenty of memories. His first Keeneland memories were working at the track as a clerk at the \$5 pari-mutuel window. He was attending the Uni-



versity of Kentucky at the time. Soon he wanted a better job and reasoned that the best-paying position was track bugler. "I played sax a little bit, but I wanted to play bugle to get bigger money," Bradley said. No way, however, was he going to unseat the one and only bugler Keeneland has had, Bucky Sallee, so Bradley took an ushering job in the grandstand. From there it was on to law school, a choice he made "to make enough money to buy a racehorse." Fred instilled this notion of working hard to get what you want in his children, including Buff's sister, Margaret Coffey, who keeps the books for the farm, and her son, Gunner Coffey, who works on the farm and helps Buff at the track.

One thing that has not changed with the Bradleys' success is their work ethic. Clients and longtime friends of the family remark on this and point to more factors they believe are the reasons the Bradleys are realizing increasing success. Louisville native Jack Reisz, a retired lawyer who has placed horses with Buff Bradley's racing stable for about 10 years, sums these up as the time and patience the younger Bradley puts into the horses.

"He gives them all an opportunity, and he's done this

with what others would regard as unpolished bloodstock,” said Reisz. “It’s just hard work and dedication. There’s no magic to it.”

It doesn’t hurt that father and son always upgraded their breeding stock to whatever they could afford. Fred Bradley says every dime the horses made for him went back into the farm and buying better-quality mares. He said the reason they could survive in the horse business was because they did all the work themselves, keeping their overhead low.

But something else powering the Bradley success story has been the genuine pleasure racing fans and many in the horse business get in seeing these regular folks do well. Ask anyone and you will hear consistently how Buff Bradley simply is a nice person. Trainer Dale Romans, for one, has sat on several boards of directors with Buff Bradley, finding his fellow trainer to be, above all, “a very good person” not to mention an excellent horseman. “You just don’t get grade I horses without doing a lot of things right. You don’t get lucky twice,” he added.

Romans also noted Groupie Doll’s coming along after Brass Hat and grabbing the brass ring at the Breeders’ Cup dispelled any notion of the Bradleys simply getting lucky.

Susie Oldham, who practically grew up with Buff Bradley when his dad had horses in the stable of her father, Clarence Picou, said the younger Bradley is not afraid to give his horses all the time they need and that has been a big key to his success.

Success might have been a long time coming but proves that something in this family’s business model is working. Nonetheless, the Bradleys pinch themselves over these two horses. “We always did with Brass Hat,” said Buff Bradley. “Fred and I knew at the time that this was a once-in-a-lifetime horse and this was what we’d worked our whole lives for.” They could not have foreseen that the filly would amply fill his horseshoes.

The younger Bradley said people ask him all the time to compare the two horses or disclose his favorite. He says he can’t do either. He will say that Groupie Doll probably possesses more raw talent and speed while



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Brass Hat’s modus operandi was the heart and determination to win. But pick out one as his favorite? No way.

Brass Hat and Groupie Doll came along like all the others at Indian Ridge, with father and son pulling the foals from their dams and squinting through sleepy eyes to see what they had there, lying in the straw.

“When Groupie Doll was born, Fred and I were there, present for her foaling,” Buff Bradley said. “It was the best-looking foal out of that mare, so we were pretty excited because the mare was getting older.” The mare was Deputy Doll, a daughter of Silver Deputy whom the Bradleys had purchased for \$25,000 as a yearling. The mating with Bowman’s Band that produced Groupie Doll cost \$6,000. Compared to stud fees on the glamour side of the horse business, this \$6,000 did not seem like much. But neither had the \$3,500 spent to breed the \$5,000 mare Brassy to Prized, the mating that produced Brass Hat. The Bradleys had purchased both mares at Keeneland.

So Fred and Buff Bradley would have sat in the straw after foaling Groupie Doll one April night in 2008, wondering what kind of filly she might turn out to be. As the younger Bradley said, “You have eight or 10 a year, and you don’t really always know which ones [will turn out successfully].” But then, they hadn’t known at his foaling that Brass Hat would amount to the \$2.2 million gold strike in earnings. When it came to baby Groupie Doll, however, father and son felt strongly from the start that they might be looking at another quality runner. At the very least, they were looking at a quality looker.

Brass Hat, winning the 2010 Sycamore Stakes, had quite a following at Keeneland.

**“Groupie Doll stood out for being the mare’s best-looking foal.”
— Buff Bradley**



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"Groupie Doll stood out for being the mare's best-looking foal," Buff Bradley said. "So we had hopes. Fred and I always liked the pedigree of the mare, so we were glad to get a filly out of her as well." But how far can you hope to push your luck? Buff Bradley said at the time Groupie Doll's half sister was running for \$15,000 claiming. With that in mind, a Breeders' Cup eligibility nomination for Groupie Doll was not at all on their minds. They did not send in the \$500 nomination fee.

Groupie Doll's breakout year unfolded early

in 2012 at Gulfstream Park. Jockey Buff Rajiv Maragh jumped off the filly after his first workout on her one morning in Florida and told Buff Bradley that here was his Breeders' Cup mount.

Buff, left, and Fred Bradley celebrate Groupie Doll's win in the 2012 Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Sprint.

"I knew that if she was going to be that good, if we were going to put up \$50,000 [in supplementary fees], she'd better hurry up and start getting some money in the pot for us to pay it out," Buff Bradley said. Groupie Doll did just that.

Her five-race winning streak began soon after the Bradley string left Florida, when she took the Vinery Madison (grade I) at Keeneland. As the season wound down following the Breeders' Cup, Groupie Doll took on one more challenge: racing against males in the Cigar Mile (grade I) at Aqueduct. Many said she might have been considered a potential Horse of the Year had she won that race. She narrowly lost to Stay Thirsty. But she proved she could stay the mile against males.

The day after Groupie Doll returned from the Cigar Mile, the Bradleys turned her out with another horse at Indian Ridge. But this did not suit Groupie Doll. On a previous vacation she had shared a pasture with Brass Hat and now, on this vacation, she caught sight of the gelding and demanded that pasture arrangements be changed. In fact, she put up a ruckus until the Bradleys returned her to the pasture with her old buddy. She and Brass Hat spent a delightful winter nibbling grass and grooming each other and bringing the younger Bradley to ponder, "I wonder what stories they tell each other in there."

Locker room stories, no doubt. Stories of races won and lost and, oh, the places they've seen.

Buff Bradley recently drove his father up to their paddock from the house in Fred Bradley's '59 Cadillac that has logged a lot of memorable miles up and down the roads to the races. The older Bradley approached the paddock on a walker he has used since suffering an injury. You could see all over his face how much he loves these two horses. But then, he never met a race-horse he didn't love.

The pleasure has been all his, as it has been for all in this family. He says: "We walk down the street here and people never say, 'Hi, Fred, howya doing?' They say, 'Hi, Fred, how's Groupie Doll doing today?' They're all interested in this horse. It's a Kentucky horse. A Frankfort horse. And people really like that." It's been a Hollywood story with a proper ending, for sure. 🐾

Father and son give kindly pats to the two horses that have brought them renown.



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