

By Bill Finley

WALLKILL, NY—Like most everyone else, Mike Kimmelman was a Rock N Roll Heaven (Rocknroll Hanover) fan. He watched the 3-year-old dominate the competition in race after race as he developed into the best, most celebrated pacer in North America. But Kimmelman figured the best he could ever do is admire him from afar. Rock N Roll Heaven was headed to New Jersey and Perretti Farms. Kimmelman, the president of Blue Chip Farms, had been waiting to lure the next great thing when it came to pacing stallions. He figured he'd just have to wait a little bit longer.

And then the phone rang.

With the situation at the Meadowlands remaining very much unsettled, Rock N Roll Heaven's owner Frank Bellino began to have some second thoughts about standing the horse in New Jersey. He started to think of New York as a better option and when you think of top farms and breeders in New York the head of the list begins and ends with Blue Chip Farms. Out of nowhere, Kimmelman and Tom Grossman, the owner of Blue Chip Farms, had the star they had been looking for.

That Rock N Roll Heaven wound up at Blue Chip is a bigger story than one sire going to one farm. It's emblematic of the troubled situation in New Jersey, the rising status of New York breeding and racing and the fact that Blue Chip Farms, always a top farm and breeding operation, is soaring to new heights.

Though Blue Chip has been and still is the home of many top stallions, the one that really made the place is Most Happy Fella. He entered stud duty at Blue Chip in 1971 and immediately started to produce an assembly line of stars like Silk Stockings, Tarport Hap, Oil Burner, Doc's Fella and Cam Fella. Just 17 at the time, he died in an accident in 1984. His demise forever changed the way the people at Blue Chip ran their business.



“The most significant pacing stallion in the world is buried under that rock,” Kimmelman said, pointing to gravestone just outside Blue Chip's main office. “Between him, my father, my grandfather and Bill Brown and the benefits of a terrific New York State sire stakes program, that's what built this farm. We had Most Happy Fella here and we had an opportunity to get Cam Fella and figured we didn't really need him at the time. Most Happy Fella had a terrible accident and his life and his stud career got cut short.

“That sort of thing leads you to pay attention and stay on top of things and realize that when an opportunity comes along you better take advantage of it. That's what we really saw here with Rock N Roll Heaven. It was someone else's misfortune that brought him here. I got a call when things were getting a little dodgy in New Jersey and was told there was a possibility of having him stand here. Prior to that, we were debating about whether or not to breed mares to him in New Jersey and trying to get a feel of the temperature of the water there. Now, that decision is much easier.”

Rock N Roll Heaven, a certainty to be named 2010 Horse of the Year, arrived at Blue Chip shortly after his final race, a winning performance in the Nov. 28 Matron at Dover Downs. He

joined a star-studded list of stallions that also includes American Ideal, Art Major, Bettor's Delight, Credit Winner, Shadow Play and Crazyed. But whether it's just because he's the new kid on the block or something else, Rock N Roll Heaven is the one putting the biggest smiles on the faces of the people who make up the Blue Chip team.

"Bruce Saunders told us we was very intelligent and he couldn't have been more right," Kimmelman said. "He looks at things and sizes them up and analyzes it and off he goes. He's like the teacher's pet."

With an attractive book of mares lined up, Rock N Roll Heaven may soon go from teacher's pet to top stallion. That, at least, is the plan.

"He's going to get every opportunity to become a great sire," Kimmelman said. "He's an incredibly attractive horse. He fits New York. He's great gaited and great on a half-mile track. He can race from the front or the back. He's a fantastically bred horse. His conformation is very good. He'll get really good mares bred to him, nothing but top mares. The fact that there's a little turmoil in other regions and that he has New York state behind him will help. But he also has Bettor's Delight and Art Major and horses likes that in the same barn standing in the state with him, so he's not all alone but he will get first look at many of the fancy girls."

Rock N Roll Heaven will be bred to a full book of 140 mares while in New York. His stud fee is \$12,000. In July, he will go into quarantine before being sent to Pepper Tree Farm in Australia for stud duty there. Kimmelman said he will be bred to as many as 300 mares there.

Blue Chip probably didn't need Rock N Roll Heaven. But having him has only added to the farm's prestige and continued its momentum. Some 10 years ago, when laying the foundation for the next era at Blue Chip, Kimmelman and Grossman thought they could be in the position they're in now.

"In 2001, when Tom Grossman took over the farm we laid out some of the things we were hopeful would happen," Kimmelman said. "One of them was to work very hard to get legislation for VLTs in New York and another thing that was very important was to acquire what we felt was the best pacing stallion prospect going into the following breeding season. Through a lot of developments that we may have seen or may not have seen and a lot of pounding the pavement, we wound up with Bettor's Delight. And there was a change in the legislation with the slot machines. So now we go into 2011, and I'd say that one of the things that is most important is that we continue to build our product in New York. Not just at Blue Chip, but as a group, the state as a whole."

Having hit one out of the park with Rock N Roll Heaven, the next goal at Blue Chip is to acquire the next big thing when it comes to trotting stallion prospects.

"We need another good trotting stallion," Kimmelman said. "They don't just fall out of the sky. My biggest wish for 2011 is I would like to see the horse that dominates in the major 3-year-old trotting races, if there is such a horse, come here. If you have the next Muscle Hill? Yes, you need to come talk to us."

If there is such a horse, probably its owner will be calling Kimmelman and Grossman, just like Frank Bellino did. New York is hot. Blue Chip is hot. It's quite a combination.

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