

Big week ahead for Robisons



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The Robisons' Mico Margarita, shown winning the Sen. Byrd Memorial Stakes in August, will start in the Breeders' Cup Sprint.

By Mary Rampellini

J. Kirk and Judy Robison are standing at the threshold of what could be an unforgettable week for their breeding and racing operations. The couple has five homebreds in four stakes on the \$2 million New Mexico Classic Cup card at Zia Park on Sunday, while their Mico Margarita is revving up for a start in the Grade 1, \$1.5 million Breeders' Cup Sprint at Santa Anita on Nov. 1.

The Robisons have extensive holdings in the sport. Based in El Paso, Texas, they are part owners of the stallions Diabolical, who in 2013 was tied as North America's second-leading freshman sire by wins, and Southwestern Heat, a son

of the champion racemare Xtra Heat. The couple also has 20 broodmares, 40 horses at tracks throughout North America, and a dozen yearlings being prepared for the 2015 racing season.

It's an operation that's been built over the last decade but has taken flight in the last five years. Isn't He Clever has been a flagship horse for the Robisons ever since winning the \$104,200 Riley Allison Futurity by 11 3/4 lengths at Sunland Park in 2011. In his most recent start, the 5-year-old set a track record in the \$100,000 Downs at Albuquerque Handicap on Sept. 21. Mico Margarita won his second straight stakes a week later in the \$150,000 Remington Park Sprint Cup.

The performance has sent him to Santa Anita, where last Monday he was pre-entered in the Sprint.

"It doesn't get any bigger than the Breeders' Cup," Kirk Robison said. "Really, those are two of my favorite days of the year. We're very fortunate to have a horse good enough to even be considered. The breeds, of course, are something fairly new to me. I started breeding my own horses about two or three years ago. The New Mexico Cup, it's important to do well in these races. When you win races like that, it really helps pay the bills. It also makes the mare that much more valuable, and it gives stature to the stallion."

The Robisons will be repre-

sented by multiple stakes winner Lakehouse Fun in the \$130,000 New Mexico Classic Cup Filly and Mare Sprint Championship, Free Expression and Muy Rapido in the \$140,000 New Mexico Classic Cup Juvenile Fillies, Mays Or Mantle in the \$140,000 New Mexico Classic Cup Championship for colts and geldings, and Liberty Lover in the \$140,000 New Mexico Classic Cup Juvenile.

All of the horses are trained by Henry Dominguez, a perennial leader in New Mexico.

"The Robisons are my biggest clients," Dominguez said. "Kirk is really, really sophisticated on horse racing."

Continued on page 14

Continued from page 12

That's his passion. They're great people to train for. They buy good horses. They place their horses where they believe they belong. They're excellent owners. They're good contributors to the horse industry."

Dominguez handles the New Mexico runners for the Robisons, while trainer Peter Miller tends to their horses based in Southern California, and trainer Steve Asmussen oversees their racing interests in Arkansas, Kentucky, New York, and Oklahoma. Asmussen is the trainer of Mico Margarita, a \$25,000 yearling purchase whom Robison said was selected by the trainer. The 4-year-old by Run Away and Hide has since banked \$480,251 and is in top form heading into the Breeders' Cup.

"I think my colt will be pretty competitive," Robison said. "He's got back-to-back Beyers of 102 on dirt. I think his style of running will do well. There's never a shortage of pace for the Sprint, and he's kind of a colt that comes from out of it. A red-hot pace can't do anything but help."

The Robisons plan to be in attendance at the Breeders' Cup, and it will be something of a homecoming. Kirk Robison moved to Southern California not long after his birth in Dalhart, Texas. His father owned a grocery store about an hour from Santa Anita and often brought his son along to the track, an experience that made a big impression on the young Robison.

"Santa Anita and Del Mar are probably the two tracks I've been to the most in my life," Robison said. "I started at Santa Anita as a kid. I thought, 'This is really a cool sport.' It's been the No. 1 sport all of my life."

Robison's principal business is the restaurant industry. He owns 50 Peter Piper Pizza establishments and 40 Burger Kings between Texas and New Mexico. Many years ago, he decided to develop his restaurant interests before delving into horse ownership.

"I wanted to wait for a time



Lakehouse Fun, a homebred for J. Kirk and Judy Robison, has won 3 of her 7 starts this year.

in my life when money would not be a huge problem," he said.

Robison annually purchases a handful of yearlings at Keeneland, claims some runners in Southern California, and supports his New Mexico-based stallions with the couple's broodmare band. Diabolical is owned in partnership with Fred Alexander, and the Artax horse stands at Alexander's A&A Ranch in Anthony, N.M. The Robisons also keep their mares at A&A. Diabolical, a Grade 2 winner and earner of \$1.4 million, was purchased from Godolphin.

"He's ranked nationally among the leading second-crop sires this year," Robison said. "The 20 mares that are in New Mexico for the New Mexico-bred program, unless they don't nick at all, they're bred to

Diabolical and Southwestern Heat. Those two boys get our mares."

One of Diabolical's chief earners is the Robison homebred That's the Idea, a three-time stakes winner of \$291,275. Other progeny raced by the couple include Muy Rapido, who will vie for favoritism in the New Mexico Classic Cup Juvenile Fillies, and Mays Or Mantle, another leading contender at Zia on Sunday after popping a career-high Beyer Speed Figure of 90 in winning the Road Runner Handicap at Ruidoso Downs.

As for the couple's open-company runners, Isn't He Clever has a long-range goal of the \$150,000 Zia Park Distance Championship on Nov. 26, said Dominguez. Wine Police, who last year ran a close eighth in the Breeders' Cup Sprint for

the Robisons after winning the Remington Park Sprint Cup, is on deck for the Lea County at Zia on Nov. 11, the trainer said. Another popular runner for the couple, Show Some Magic, a stakes winner of \$411,689, has been retired and was given to Dominguez for use as a stable pony, said Robison.

For the Robisons, the perfect storm of their breeding and racing pursuits that hits Zia and Santa Anita this week is a realization of goals set for their operation.

"My big plan is to try to figure a way to get a good horse, a really good horse at the breed level or in open company," Robison said. "I just want a really good horse, a stakes horse that wins and is competent on a regular basis. I don't care how much you spend, that's hard to do."