

BEACH COMBER

BY PAUL VOLPONI



ADAM COGLIANESE/NYRA

Ara Aprahamian, left, with Futurity winner Uncle Benny

Ara Aprahamian's Beach Haven Thoroughbreds strikes with state-bred Sassy Agnes

IF YOU'VE KEPT a keen eye on the Thoroughbred racing scene in New York, you're undoubtedly familiar with the seemingly sudden rise of owner Ara Aprahamian, who has quietly spent the last five years in the sport preparing to get it right.

In 2018 Aprahamian's dozen or so horses carried his red, blue, and orange silks (a color scheme reflecting the Armenian flag and the owner's heritage) into the winner's circle at a 36% clip for a combination of trainers Jason Servis and Linda Rice.

But Aprahamian, along with his partner John Sakkos, has also managed to find immediate success with their fledgling syndicate stable Beach Haven Thoroughbreds, boasting a rising star in the New York-bred filly ranks in Sassy Agnes (by Central Banker).

The now-3-year-old Sassy Agnes, who is out of Bullish Sentiment, an unraced mare by Stormy Atlantic, triumphed in

a trio of consecutive black-type affairs in 2018 and was second in her finale while flashing the blue and white ocean-themed colors of Beach Haven Thoroughbreds—named after a section of Long Beach Island on the Jersey Shore where Aprahamian and his family enjoy many summer days.

As a maiden, the Linda Rice-trained Sassy Agnes captured the Sept. 8 Lady Finger Stakes at Finger Lakes Gaming and Racetrack, giving Central Banker his first stakes winner. The then-freshman filly followed with a pair of stakes scores: the Oct. 22 Shesastonecoldfox Stakes, also at Finger Lakes, and a flashy gate-to-wire, 1¼-length victory Nov. 23 in the

Key Cents Stakes against state-breds at Aqueduct, where she raced six furlongs in 1:11.79. In the Dec. 15 Fifth Avenue division of the New York Stallion Series Stakes she was a game second as the 1-2 favorite.

Bred by Klaravich Stables and foaled at McMahon of Saratoga Thoroughbreds, Sassy Agnes, who breezed a furlong in :10 flat at the Ocala Breeders' Sales' March 2-year-olds in training sale, was acquired by Aprahamian for \$105,000.

The blaze-faced chestnut filly has earned \$198,182.

"We were looking for a 2-year-old for Beach Haven Thoroughbreds, so I sent Linda Rice to the sales," Aprahamian said. "She's a big New York-bred advocate. She gave me a call about a filly by a (first-crop, New York) sire (Central Banker) she really liked."

Aprahamian, who cut his teeth in racing by being a minority owner in a syndicate stable, ventured out on his own after gaining some experience. He first approached trainer Jason Servis, with whom his previous syndicate had horses stabled.

On Thanksgiving Day at Aqueduct, Aprahamian and Servis captured the Fall Highweight Handicap (G3) with Life in Shambles (by Broken Vow), an 8-year-old gelding bred by trainer Christophe Clement and Don M. Robinson of Winter Quarter Farm.

"It was gravy on my Thanksgiving potato," said Aprahamian.

The pair's biggest success, however, has come on the national stage with the rough-trip runner-up in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (G1T), Uncle Benny (by Declaration of War), a late-bloomer who needed to grow into his big body.

Uncle Benny, who was bred by Peter Magnier and was purchased at the 2017 Fasig-Tipton Saratoga select yearling sale for \$185,000, broke his maiden on the dirt at Monmouth before scoring over the turf Oct. 7 in Belmont's Futurity



CHELSEA DURAND/NYRA



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New York-bred Sassy Agnes winning Aqueduct's Key Cents Stakes (top) Nov. 23 and the Sept. 8 Lady Finger Stakes at Finger Lakes Gaming and Race Track

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— Ara Aprahamian



ADAM COGLIANESE/NYRA

The Beach Haven Thoroughbreds team includes John Sakkos, far right

Stakes, guaranteeing the colt a spot in the Breeders' Cup starting gate.

Aprahamian can be quite superstitious, often not attending his horse's races in person.

He did, though, travel to Churchill Downs for the Breeders' Cup where he had to wait out a tense inquiry, as the winner, Godolphin's Line of Duty (by Galileo), eventually stood up to a heavily scrutinized bumping incident in

deep stretch with Uncle Benny taking the worst of it.

"Uncle Benny's moving to the dirt this year (looking toward the Triple Crown trail). He's training at Palm Meadows with Jason right now, and we'll be aiming him for the Mucho Macho Man (Stakes, Jan. 5, at Gulfstream Park)," said Aprahamian, who is semi-retired from the pharmaceutical business and now spending even more time



SUSIE RAISHER/NYRA

Life in Shambles scores Thanksgiving Day in the grade 3 Fall Highweight

on racing.

Recently, Aprahamian transferred ownership of Uncle Benny to Beach Haven Thoroughbreds.

"I did it to bring more awareness to Beach Haven. It's always difficult to get new people into racing. I've been tapping my (pharmaceutical and family) networks for new people. We continue to try various ways to get the message out, but it's been some work," said Aprahamian.

He knows what he didn't like about his previous partnership experience.

"I wanted this one to be smaller, more personalized, and with closer communication (with the minority owners). I also wanted to make it more attractive from the standpoint of fee structures."

Aprahamian plans to debut a second New York-bred Central Banker filly, a 3-year-old out of Newbie, by Bernardini, in the Beach Haven Thoroughbreds colors. Bred by Chester and Mary Broman and acquired at the OBS April 2018 sale for \$110,000, the filly has been named Newly Minted.

"It's very exciting. Linda's (Rice) been very high on Central Banker, and we feel very good about it," said Aprahamian.

Among his personal stock, Aprahamian has also succeeded at playing the claiming game. He acquired Life in Shambles in June for \$62,500. In the Fall Highweight Handicap alone, the gelding returned \$115,500 to his owner, whose horses earned approximately \$700,000 in 2018.

"We claimed him because of his back numbers. I believed that Jason and Henry (Argueta, Servis' assistant in New York) could get him back to his previous form, and they did," said Aprahamian, who recently claimed hard-knocking New York stalwart Mr. Dougie Fresh to place under Servis' tutelage.

How does Ara Aprahamian assess his current string of successes in racing?

"It's much easier when you have a great team around you. And that's exactly what we have in Jason Servis and Linda Rice—trainers you can trust," said Aprahamian. "This sport is supposed to be about having a good time." 🐾