



Face The Attitude and Craig Schmersal

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FACE THE ATTITUDE REINS CRAIG SCHMERSAL TO THE OPEN FUTURITY CHAMPIONSHIP

NRHA Three Million Dollar Rider Craig Schmersal has only missed the finals once since 1995. On Saturday night — last to enter the Jim Norick Arena in Oklahoma City — he burst into the pen knowing he had a nice enough horse to challenge for the lead. He knew he needed a 225 or better to win the coveted title. He focused on performing a clean pattern and trusting his mare for the rest. As the run built, the crowd sensed this could be the one. It was.

BY SIMONA DIALE - PHOTOGRAPHY BY WALTENBERRY

A magic Disney veil fell over State Fair Park where the 2017 NRHA Futurity & Adequan® NAAC Show was held. A mare, aka Ariel, was part of the magic as she steered her rider, NRHA Three Million Dollar Rider Craig Schmersal, to claim coveted NRHA Lucas Oil Level 4 Open Futurity Championship. "It's been a long time coming," said Schmersal following his win, and indeed it was. The talented professional has won just about everything there is to win in his career. The Futurity Championship was the one title missing from his impressive show record.

"There was so much emphasis on this show when we were young and it was the only horse show that paid that kind of money. When it paid \$100,000 everybody wanted a piece of it. Showing 3 year olds is what I like the most; I just want to ride the babies. Training 2 and 3 year olds for me is the most enjoyable part of this job," said Schmersal during an interview a couple of years ago. When asked what Futurity horse of his he would have liked to show again, he said that out of all the ones he had shown, Boomshermic would be the one. "He was a team player — he wanted to win just as much as I did — he always tried. Some of those horses walk in the pen and

try to get you and are less of a horse than they were in the make-up pen. Every time I went in the arena with him he would say, 'let's go,' and he never cheated - he was stone-sober every time. There's no other horse that can do the same!"

Face The Attitude (Pale Face Dunnit x Miss Lil Addy Tude), a mare owned by Schmersal's Hickory Creek Ranch LLC, bred by KC Performance Horses LLC and nominated by Ginger Schmersal, proved she could do the same. The duo was the last draw in the Open Finals with a 224.5 to beat posted by NRHA Professional Andrea Fappani — who surpassed the five million dollar mark during the Futurity — riding All American Vintage. Following a powerful ride that thrilled the crowd, Schmersal and his mare conquered the crowd and the Championship with a 226.5 score.

"We finally made it," said Schmersal, who did not try to hide his tears following his



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winning ride. "This mare reminds me of her mom and dad, and I had the pleasure of showing them both. The babies by and out of them try so hard and are so steady," said Schmersal. "This mare in particular has the ability, but most importantly she has the brain to back it up. You can have a horse with a great ability, and you can have a horse with a great brain, but if you don't have it all, it's a hard deal."

"I'm so grateful that nobody bought her," said Craig's wife, Ginger. "I put a high price on her, and I'm sure most thought I was nuts. In the last few months she bloomed



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and grew up. That brain has always been beautiful, but now she's growing into what she is and I am thrilled with this title that Craig so deserves. It's never been that important to me, but I've always known it is to him - he deserves it."

Schmersal's longtime friend, NRHA Million Dollar Rider Mike McEntire, had told him in the warm up pen that he could do it. NRHA Hall of Famer and Million Dollar Rider Bob Loomis had told him that Face The Attitude was a mare the would love to have in his breeding program. "The

support from my family and my friends was incredible," said Schmersal. "What was even more amazing were the messages we received from people we hardly knew. Our whole family keeps bursting to tears... I guess I lost my macho image!"

All American Vintage (A Sparkling Vintage x All Ruffed Up), a stallion owned by Cuoghi Reining Horses USA Inc., bred by Petra Zeitler and nominated by Harper Conner, settled for reserve honors with Fappani in the saddle. "This horse is amazing," said Fappani. "I

purchased him because my son Luca convinced me to buy him. He wasn't the easiest horse to ride as a 2 year old, and after the first time I rode him I decided not to buy him. Luca told me I should go back and try him again. We did, and I guess he was right. We won the Tulsa Classic and the All American Quarter Horse Congress Open Futurity [with a 232 score], and now earned the Open Reserve Championship here. The mistakes we made tonight were determined by me, so at the end of the



Andrea Fappani and All American Vintage, Lucas Oil L4 Open Futurity Reserve Champions

Andrea Fappani and Futurity are two words that instantly come to mind when thinking about the reining industry. The combination of the two have always seemed to bring about great success, and this year was no different. During the 2017 NRHA Futurity, Andrea Fappani became NRHA's second Five Million Dollar Rider. In 2006, Fappani crossed his first million dollar milestone. Since then, he has raced through the ranks as a top rider, and has become a household name within the reining industry. At the early age of 33, he was the youngest rider to cross the two million mark. Qualifying two horses for the Lucas Oil Level 4 Open Finals, the milestone was within grasp. First in the arena was All American Vintage (A Sparkling Vintage x All Ruffed Up) owned by Coughi Reining Horses USA Inc. The run earned a 224.5 and landed the pair in second place. Lil Patron (Lil Joe Cash x Miss Rey O Shine), owned by Tim Roper, placed 26th with a 216. Fappani added \$129,000 to his lifetime earnings making him NRHA's newest Five Million Dollar Rider.



SHAWN FLARIDA BECOMES NRHA'S FIRST SIX MILLION DOLLAR RIDER

In 2003, Shawn Flarida became the third rider in NRHA history to earn the distinction of NRHA Million Dollar Rider following NRHA Hall of Fame Inductees, Bill Horn and Tim McQuay. After hitting the initial million dollar mark, Flarida's career began an upward trajectory that just kept growing. His quest to become NRHA's first Six Million Dollar Rider became reality during the Lucas Oil Level 4 Open Futurity Finals. With two horses in the competition, his chances of crossing this historic milestone were high. Flarida's first run on Garry Ray Smith's

Missin My Tinsel (Hollywoodstinstown x Dont Miss This) scored a 220, earning him ninth place and \$22,287.89. George and Carol Bell's Mr. Masota Star (Wimpys Little Step x Cee Another Masota) was Flarida's second ride. Their score of 222.5 fell in third place and earned \$73,554.10—pushing his earnings just over six million. At 48 years of age, Shawn Flarida has achieved many successes during his time as an NRHA Professional. It is only a matter of time before the iconic green shirt hits his next record in the NRHA history books.

day, even though my goal was to win, I am happy with the way he went for me."

According to Fappani, the athletic stallion – a full brother to Not Ruf At All - had a great week. "We started where we wanted and he had a solid run to make it to the Semifinal, which he won, so I felt ready for tonight," he said. "I lost the Futurity, he won it, so we're good. We went in, he stopped great, and we had two nice turns that I was really happy with. I had been schooling him because in the Semifinal he was leaning towards the gate a little bit, so when I asked him to change, he thought that he wasn't supposed to go there. He hesitated about a stride, and that cost us one point per judge and that was the Futurity Championship gone right there. After that, I put the hammer down and asked him for everything he had and he stepped up for me. He's an incredible athlete."

All American Vintage was sold after the Congress to Roberto Cuoghi, a longtime friend and client of Fappani. "Roberto has been involved for a long time. He stepped up and told me it was a longtime dream of his to have a real contender here. He asked me after the Congress if I thought this horse was special and I told him I don't think I've ever ridden a 3 year old that stepped up as much as he did for me this year, so we're not going anywhere, we'll be back next year."



NRHA Six Million Dollar Rider Shawn Flarida and Mr Masota Star (Wimpys Little Step x Cee Another Masota) tied for third place in the Lucas Oil L4 Open Futurity with a 222.5 score. "I won the Open Futurity in 2002 with his sire and it's always pretty special when you get to ride offspring of horses you've shown successfully," said Flarida. "He's a little lazy so you cannot ride him a lot. Managing his energy is more difficult than some as he takes very little riding. When you get on him, you need to do your work and you gotta get away from him and understand him from a horseman's point of view. He's a really good one and as long as his owners [George and Carol Bell] let me keep him in the barn I'm happy."



NRHA Professional Trevor Dare rode Silver Spurs Equine's Xtra Dun Step (Wimpys Little Step x All That's Dun) to a 222.5 to tie for third place honors. "Making it to the Level 4 Final for the second year in a row is amazing - a dream come true," said Dare. "I've been calling this horse 'the little pony that could' all year long. We all love him and he's been one of my favorites. We weren't sure if he had enough to step up to this kind of stage but it was his time and he did."