



Something

S P O T L I G H T



Lorenzo Vargas welcomes Wimpy to his new home on November 17, 2010.

KATIE HENDRICKSON



Xtra

BY GAVIN EHRINGER

WHEN NEWS BROKE IN MID-NOVEMBER that Mark Schols sold Wimpys Little Step, winner of the 2002 NRHA Open Futurity and a Two Million Dollar Sire, to the recently-formed breeding outfit Xtra Quarter Horses, LLC of Purcell, Oklahoma, the “buzz” surrounding the transaction was noisy, excited, and a bit perplexed.

After all, very little is widely known about Xtra Quarter Horses, other than the fact that it is managed by a Brazilian-born NRHA Professional and backed by a Mexican businessman with no prior background in the sport.

Hoping to fill in the blanks and quiet the rumors the NRHA Reiner sent a reporter to Purcell to view the facility and visit with Lorenzo Vargas and NRHA Professional Thiago Boechat.

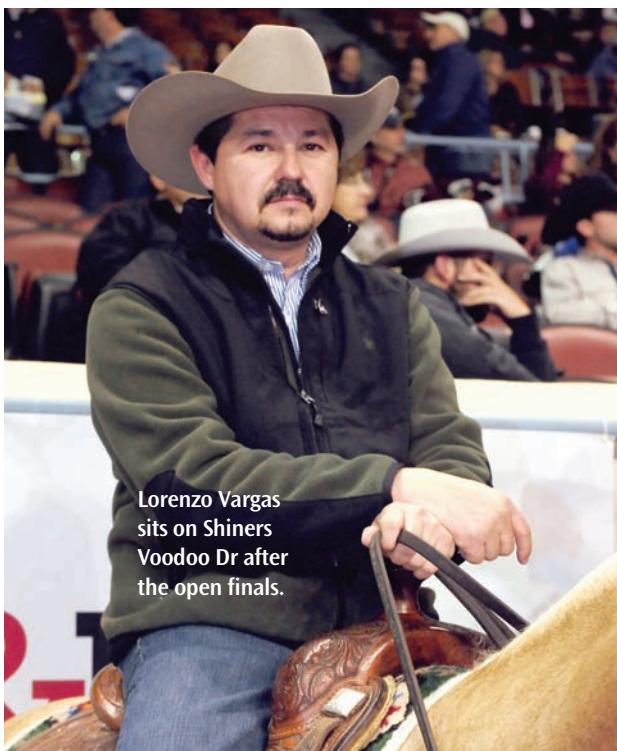
Fill in the Blanks

Vargas, 44, is a highly-successful financier and executive with Grupo Argos, a company with diverse interests in travel, tourism, and business services. Its travel division, operating as Price Travel, is the second-largest tourism and travel services company in Mexico. Those familiar with Expedia and Orbitz grasp Price Travel's role in the lives of Latin Americans. Vargas put together the technical staff that built Price Travel's online booking system. In the business services field, Grupo Argos provides outsourcing solutions and management, human resource services, and runs a corporate “head-hunting” division.

Divorced with three adult children, Vargas maintains his primary residence in the international tourist destination of Cancún. He also has separate homes in Mexico, plus a ranch house on the 125-acre breeding headquarters for Xtra Quarter Horses.

Prior to the 2010 NRHA Futurity, Vargas had never even been to the reining industry's biggest event. At the Futurity, Boechat, 35, rode Vargas' palomino Quarter Horse stallion, Shiners Voodoo Dr, to the level 4 open finals, which is an impressive result for a first-time owner whose involvement in the sport can be measured in months, not years or decades.

Who is the mystery
man behind the sale
of Wimpys Little Step
and what does he plan
to do with him?



Lorenzo Vargas sits on Shiners Voodoo Dr after the open finals.

DAWN BASTROM

So, what motivated Vargas to jump into Reining at the highest level and become a top-shelf breeder to boot?

Charreadas Connection

"I love horses. They are something that gives me great pleasure going back to when I was a small boy," said Vargas. "My family always kept horses, mostly for working in the countryside."

For many years, a busy business career forced Vargas to saddle a desk and ride a jet rather than straddle a horse. He admits he hadn't ridden a horse in 18 years when, one day about seven years ago, he got the urge to go for a ride.

"I decided to do it for my mental health," he chuckled. "And I found it was very powerful for me to connect [with horses] again."



Schols (far right) hands over the lead of Wimpys Little Step to Vargas and Boechat.

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Soon after, Vargas became involved in charreadas. Comparable to rodeo but with a greater emphasis on style than speed, charreadas include a form of reining called cala de caballo. The national charro association boasts about 20,000 members, and competition is keen among the various teams. Vargas wanted to find good horses for his charros, a quest that eventually led him to the door of NRHA Professional Thiago Boechat.

Boechat grew up in Brazil, making his American debut at the 2003 NRHA Futurity. He and the stallion Roosters Tru Luck earned a place in the finals with 222 points, finishing seventh in the open out of a field of 434 entries and earning nearly \$51,000.

Boechat had long before established himself as a leading Brazilian reiner, winning prestigious events such as the Brazilian Reining Breeders Cup Championship.

Buy A Better Horse

Vargas met Boechat through an international business associate. After buying a few horses for charreada events from Boechat, Vargas expressed an interest in getting established in Reining.

"He sent me a horse to train, and I was very straight forward with him that the horse wasn't going to work well for the Futurity," said Boechat. "That's how, basically, he got started in this. He said, 'Well, what would it take to work?'" "And I replied, 'Well, we have got to buy you a better horse.'"

Realizing that Vargas had the competitive desire to be the best and the means to achieve that goal, the partners found Shiners Voodoo Dr, a son of NRHA Three Million Dollar Sire Shining Spark and out of a daughter of Five Million Dollar Sire Smart Chic Olena. The flashy, deep-gold palomino was then in training with Kevin Stallings.

"We went to the National Reining Breeders Classic (NRBC) to try the horse and, I mean, Kevin had done a great job, and he was a fabulous horse," said Boechat.

Boechat debuted his client's first reining acquisition this past September at the John Deere® Futurity in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where "Voodoo," as he's known, won the level 2 and 3 open division championships with a score of 224.5. The payoff was \$10,808.

"¡Si!"

Boechat voiced his desire to do "a little more," and Vargas enthusiastically said, "Si."

The trainer developed a business plan aimed at creating a steady stream of high-caliber futurity prospects, along with an outstanding breeding facility and training center in Purcell. The duo acquired the facility last June. It includes 52 stalls, a 220- by 125-foot insulated indoor arena, pipe-fenced pastures, a round pen and outbuildings, along with housing for the owner and trainer. According to Boechat, near-term plans call for the creation of a mare motel, onsite full-service reproduction facilities, and an expansion of the existing arena. The trainer's background as a veterinarian will serve them well as Xtra Quarter Horses develops its breeding program and caters to outside mares.



GAVIN EHRINGER

Xtra Quarter Horses will house both breeding and training operations.

At present, Xtra Quarter Horses will stand three stallions: Shiners Voodoo Dr, Wimpys Red Berry, and, of course, Wimpys Little Step.

“Wimpy,” as he’s come to be called, exploded on the reining scene by winning both the 2002 All American Quarter Horse Congress Open Reining Futurity and the 2002 NRHA Open Futurity under all-time NRHA money earner and NRHA Professional Shawn Florida. His offspring surpassed the \$2 million mark in earnings more quickly than any sire before. His daughter, Wimpys Little Chic, is the only horse to win an NRHA “Triple Crown,” consisting of the NRHA Futurity, NRHA Derby, and NRBC, in consecutive years and is the NRHA’s highest money-earner with over a half million in her bank account.

Boechat admits to having eyed Wimpy for some time, hoping the opportunity might materialize to acquire the horse and his breeding services. He watched as well-known reining professionals and friends of his tried to piece together an early deal to acquire Wimpys Little Step. Although the deal ultimately fell through, Boechat felt at the time that Wimpy would prove a shrewd investment.

“I always had this in mind. From the beginning, I felt he could easily pay for himself,” said Boechat. “He is simply the greatest horse ever. I mean, he won the Futurity by six-and-a-half points and was booking more than 150 mares a year.”

Add to that the outstanding conformation and athleticism, big strong bones and hoofs, good minds and flashy palomino coloring that have become Wimpys trademark

At Xtra Quarter Horses ranch, L-R: Gerardo Leal, Raul Leal, Lorenzo Vargas, Alberto Hawa and Thiago Boechat.



GAVIN EHRINGER





BUCKY HARRIS

Thiago Boechat is a veterinarian as well as an NRHA Professional.

“stamps” on his offspring, and you have a very potent and marketable commodity.

So, as Boechat gained the trust and confidence of Vargas, the trainer discussed the idea of going after Wimpy. Although restrained about the exact price of the stallion, Boechat acknowledges that multiple millions of dollars passed to former owner Mark Schols. In addition to buying Wimpy, Xtra Quarter Horses also acquired 38 other horses in the deal, including broodmares, foals, yearlings, and even a few embryo transfers.

These augment the broodmare band that Boechat had been building. His preferences run to Shining Spark and Smart Chic Olena mares, and the ranch has also been busy acquiring well-bred yearlings.

Managing Risk

As with many things in this startlingly rapid and recent partnership, Lorenzo Vargas is placing great trust and confidence in his accomplished trainer. But what some might see as risky, Martin Padilla, 2010 NRHA Futurity Open finalist, sees as cost-effective.

“Look at it this way,” said Padilla, who was born in Mexico and trains in Idaho, “He could have gone out and bought unproven horses, bred 60 or 70 horses a year, and tried to get them to the Futurity finals. Many people have gone this route, spending many millions of dollars without success; instead, he went straight to the top. He paid a lot of money up front, but since his goal is to win the Futurity, it may cost him much less in the end.”

Vargas said that he felt the time was right

to invest in high-quality horses. With the economies of both the U.S. and Mexico experiencing economic downturns, Vargas feels that horses may be undervalued and primed to increase in value. Similarly, there are strong indications that his countrymen are getting serious about buying quality performance Quarter Horses, especially reining horses, for use in charreadas and reining. Naturally, a Mexican national with extensive business connections throughout Mexico and a native Brazilian trainer are well-positioned to capitalize on growing interest in Reining south of the U.S. border.

What About Wimpy?

Ultimately, what many people in the reining business probably want to know is, will they still have access to Wimpy’s desirable bloodline?

“All we want to do with Wimpy is keep up with the good work Mark [Schols] has done,” said Boechat. “He’ll have an open book this year and we will keep the breeding fee the same (\$7,500). And Wimpy will stay here in Oklahoma.”

As for his own personal program, Vargas said his goal is to keep breeding Wimpy to a relatively small number of mares, but all of the very best quality.

It’s one reason the pair chose “Xtra Quarter Horses” as their ranch’s name. The word “extra,” which is the same in English and Spanish, is a tipoff of how they hope their efforts will be perceived in the competitive world of performance Quarter Horse breeding.

“Extra service, extra quality. Xtra ... everything,” said Boechat, smiling. ♦

ABOUT THE WRITER

Gavin Ehringer is a writer with more than 20 years’ experience in the equine industry. His articles and photographs have appeared in every major all-breed magazine and breed journals. He is currently working on his seventh non-fiction book *Coming To The Fire: The Unnatural History Of Dogs, Cats, Horses & Cows*. He lives in Colorado.



Vargas (far right) at the draw party for the 2010 NRHA Futurity.

DAWN BAKSTROM