

Hager Ventures Out With Taproot Bloodstock

by Joe Nevills | 07.08.2018 | 4:57pm



Phil Hager of Taproot Bloodstock

Phil Hager has made a career out of doing his best work away from the spotlight. That fact made stepping out on his own to form Taproot Bloodstock a bold step, not only for creating a new business, but being the face of it.

Still, Hager said he hopes to keep a similar mentality in his new venture. Even the name of the company is reflective of this ideal, with the logo featuring a picture of a tree above ground, as well as the deep network of roots below it.

“We kicked around a bunch of names,” Hager said. “The way I like to do my business, I’m usually pretty behind the scenes. Really, it’s like everything that’s going on behind the scenes – or underground – to produce the results that people see.”

Hager, a 30-year-old native of Paris, Ky., and third-generation horseman, has spent the past seven years working for the McLean family's Crestwood Farm most recently handling stallion seasons, bloodstock services, and sales recruitment. He branches out with the farm's blessing, and said he planned to keep close ties with the operation in his new role, still maintaining the clients he had with the farm and likely basing himself out of Crestwood's offices, but stepping back from the farm's day-to-day activities.



As a bloodstock agent, Hager has recently worked with clients including trainers Bill Mott and Tom Bush, Donegal Racing, and Ballylinch Stud. He has also purchased horses for Hall of Fame football coach Bill Parcells. Moving forward, Hager said he envisioned Taproot Bloodstock being a boutique operation with a handful of clients and deep relationships.

"I had built up enough of a client base where it didn't feel fair only spending some time on that and spending some time on stallions, and I'm probably more passionate about doing the bloodstock, so I figured it was a good time to do that," he said.

Building that trust between himself and his clients was an important tenet Hager wanted to establish with Taproot Bloodstock, even if it means waiting things out for the right horse to come along.

"I got this from the McLeans, for sure, but we value the long-term relationships a lot more than the short-term, so I'll never push people to buy things just to buy them," he said. "You want that horse to have every chance to be successful so [the clients] can come back. I think that's important."

Among his recent clients, Hager said one that gave his career a boost and some fond memories was Mott. Hager worked as a barn foreman for the trainer in 2013, and he began shortlisting horses for Mott on top of his regular duties.

The trainer liked the lists he was producing, so Mott called upon Hager to scout prospects at the 2014 Keeneland September yearling sale. Hager and the trainer's son Riley Mott landed on a \$32,000 Tizdejavu colt, later named Site Read. Running under Bill Mott's own name, Site Read opened up by 4 1/2 lengths to win on debut in Saratoga at 21-1 odds. The race took place on Hager's wedding day, prior to the ceremony, giving the group another reason to be festive.

Putting shortlists together is only a facet of the services Hager said he plans to offer, but he said crafting them is a combination of the client's wishes and personal tastes. In making his decisions, Hager prefers the physical to the page.

"I think it depends on what your orders are," he said. "Certain owners might give you all the leeway you need, and in that case, if I only have one order in the sale, I can look through them pretty quick and make a shortlist of what I like. Then, somebody might be looking for something to pinhook or something to go long on the grass, and then you have to take that into account when you're thinking about what this horse might be in front of me."

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