



Guest Forum

Winning At The Claiming Game

by **MARCIE HEACOX**

If claiming horses is a game, Eric Niiya has already reached MVP status.

In the span of two years, Niiya, in partnership with long-time friend Jay Harris, has earned \$140,310 while amassing a record of 10 wins, three seconds and one third in 19 starts, all with California-breds.

Niiya was a racing fan for two decades but wanted to be more involved, so he and Harris formed a 50-50 partnership. Before claiming a horse, they review past performances of horses in their price range. They drop a claim if they independently come up with the same horse and then also get their trainer Dean Pederson's approval.

"We have had to wait as many as two months to come up with something we really like," Harris said.

Niiya prefers Cal-breds because of the purse supplements. "Sometimes it makes the difference whether or not we can cover our expenses," he said.

Niiya's first taste of ownership was with You Is What You Is.

In January of 2008, Niiya bought shares in the three-year-old colt who went on to win three out of five starts, earning \$29,800. He was then claimed for \$12,500.

You Is What You Is was bred by Tommy Town Thoroughbreds LLC, California's leading breeders of 2009. He is sired by their stallion Old Topper out of the mare Betrayer, a half-sister to four black-type winners in Brazil.

Niiya made his first claim on Oct. 18, 2008, when he and Harris obtained Go Flags Bro for \$20,000. The four-year-old gelding won one out of two races and banked \$18,300 before he was claimed away for \$25,000. By Skimming out of the five-time winner Dawn Miranda, Go Flags Bro was bred by St. George's Farm. He is a half-brother to stakes-placed Flags At Dawn.

One of Niiya's most lucrative claims was Plaza Queen, whom he acquired for \$12,500 in December of 2008. Twenty-seven days later, the three-year-old filly won her lone start for Niiya and Harris while collecting \$18,000 in purse money and being claimed for \$25,000.

Plaza Queen is by her breeder Rod and Lorraine Rodriguez's Cottonwood Creek Ranch sire Popular, out of the winner Queen Nichole.

In March of 2009, Niiya and Harris claimed Portland Storm, a four-year-old gelding by Storm Creek out of Premo Copy, a stakes winner with two black-type siblings. Bred by John Roche, the \$8,000 purchase won once in two starts to earn \$7,050 for Niiya and Harris before being claimed for \$6,250.

Niiya followed Portland Storm by buying a share of Quick Meeting in April of 2009. He won once and placed three times to garner \$22,980 for Niiya, Harris, Harris Farms Inc. and Per Antonsen. John and Carole Harris' Harris Farms bred the now six-year-old gelding in partnership with Sheila Williams.

Quick Meeting is by the late General Meeting and his dam, Super Tuesday, won two stakes while accumulating \$265,910. She is a half-sister to stakes winner Vaderator and \$290,509-earner Only One Way.

Niiya and Harris' most recent acquisition is the four-year-old colt Lucky Bet. Claimed for \$12,500 on May 7, 2009, his record since is three wins in five starts with earnings of \$44,180.

Bred by Richard Pasko, Lucky Bet is by the pensioned Beau Genius, out of stakes winner Timely Bet. Lucky Bet's half-siblings include stakes performers Timely Weave and Ippodamia, the latter dam of the 2007 California Champion Two-Year-Old Male, Georgie Boy.

Looking to the future, Harris and Niiya have considered buying at auction with hopes of developing a stakes level horse. "But, the claiming game seems to fit out temperament and budget," Harris said.

Niiya and Harris said they plan to continue with at least one horse in training at all times. "I cannot believe how successful and how much fun it's been," Niiya said. "We've been able to win at many different tracks. . .and it's a great feeling going to the winners' circle each time."



Eric Niiya

Jay Harris

Go Flags Bro—Golden Gate Fields—December 11, 2008