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THE EUROPEAN VIEW ~ By Klaus Koch

A SWEDISH INNOVATOR INVADES NORTH AMERICA

He has become famous in Sweden by founding the huge international Internet betting platform UNIBET. Now he joins Standardbred racing in North America by purchasing the amazing two-year-old trotter Buckhams Bay. His name is Anders Ström, and this is his story.



Klaus Koch

Photo by Monica Thors

In the northern and western outskirts of the Swedish capital Stockholm you do not have to pass many houses before you meet someone involved in harness racing. The small town Sala, which has four harness racetracks within a 70 mile distance, is such a place.

It was here Anders Ström was born in 1970. His father and other relatives brought him to the racetracks at an early age. But it wasn't the horses that kept him coming to the track when he grew older, it was the betting!

In 1990 Anders moved to Karlstad in western Sweden in order to study economics. The studies were partly financed through wins at the tote, but he needed more income and started a handicapping paper which became quite popular.

From 1992 to 1997 Anders freelanced as a harness racing writer and handicapper for a number of papers and magazines. In 1995, when the Internet was still

brand new, he had the idea to introduce a platform for betting on horses and other sports. However, this couldn't be done in Sweden where all sports betting was split between the duopolists Svenska Spel (state owned) and ATG (racing industry owned).

Initially Ström aimed to settle in Antigua (West Indies) with his new company, but London became the final choice and UNIBET was inaugurated in 1997. The company developed fast, and in 2009 the gross turn over was approximately \$4.4 billion in US dollars!

The Swedish harness racing industry has for many years been very concerned about the presence of the Internet betting platforms, but the fact is less than 0.5 per cent of the total wagering is placed on Swedish races, about \$20 million in 2009. Betting with UNIBET also means that the takeout is small, maximum 10 per cent, which led to a net

revenue of approximately \$250 million last year.

Anders Ström can not accept the criticism which claims that privately held Internet betting companies will hurt the horse racing industry:

"We must work together in order to benchmark and secure any possible punter for the industry," he says.

"There are enough customers out there, but we must retrieve them with suitable products. UNIBET is willing to contribute to the industry with an affordable percentage, and all predictions that UNIBET just wants to strip the industry and leave when there is nothing more to earn, is totally wrong.

"Speaking for myself, I just love the horse racing world, both in term of people, betting and being a horse owner. Everyone who knows me understands where I am coming from. I believe that this is quite a guarantee for my arguments regarding

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JERSEY BOY (Yankee Glide-Atlanta Games)
SAINT ANDREWS (Yankee Glide-Sweet Little Devil)
FORE SEASONS (Yankee Glide-Victory Slide)
BOLT BI (Equinox Bi-Lady Matador)
MARKET SHARE (Revenue S-Classical Flirt)
TALMUDIC SESSION (Like A Prayer-Ens Tag Session)
MORELS N CAVIAR (SJ's Caviar-Maurel Hanover)
COCO BINO (Chocolatier-Rose De Vie Stena)

PACING COLTS

CRAZY GOOD (Ponder-Bunny Quest)
WATSON'S WISDOM (Western Terror-Have A Heart)
BANTAM BEN (Dragon Again-Million Wishes)

TROTTING FILLIES

CIOCCOLATA (Chocolatier-Queen Mum)
SHEZHOTNCHOCOLATE (Chocolatier-Hot N Balanced)
CRYSTAL DOWNS (Yankee Glide-Armbro Carroll)
BEBOP BEA (Striking Sahbra-Bebop Baby)
THE FIRST TEE (Broadway Hall-Dormy)
STRIKING FOREVER (Striking Sahbra-Stay At Home Mom)
ELIN (Angus Hall-Too Good For You)

PACING FILLIES

MARTY PARTY (Yankee Cruiser-Noble Marty)
CRUZIN TO THE DANCE (Yankee Cruiser-Dancewiththebest)
OL' BETSY (Cambest- Model A)
MALITA ISLAND (Dragon Again-Terri Hall)
GOLD STAR DEUCE (Armbro Deuce-Kikin Up Dirt)
JUST THE GIRLS (Jate Lobell-Violin)
SINGH SONG SUNG (Dragon Again-Family Effort)





Photo by New Image Media

Ström purchased Buckhams Bay from owner/trainer/driver John Smith of Woodlawn, Ontario earlier this summer. The Ken Warkentin rookie, four for four in his career to date, is the latest top performer from the Balanced Image mare Merles Image.



Photo by Stefan Melander

To watch an interview with Ström and The Harness Edge at this year's Hambletonian, simply click on the video icon on the photo above.

the future development of the sport."

Along the road Anders Ström has changed from a "betting freak" into a "sports freak."

"I had a couple of horses in the beginning of the 1990s, but after I went to Great Britain in 1997, I didn't have any."

In 2000 he went back to owning horses. "I joined my old friend and colleague Marcus Lindgren, who had sold his share of the handicapping medium we had owned together earlier in order to train some of his own horses. He was very dedicated to this, and it caught me as well, although I stay out of the sulky," he smiles.

"After cashing quite a big V75 win in 2004 we decided to make an effort in order to build up a quality breeding and racing operation. Now we own more than 100 horses, which is too many, 60 would be a suitable number."

The stable name Courant (Ström = (water) stream = courant in French) was

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introduced and well known owners' silks, red with a golden horseshoe, started appearing on the tracks. In December 2004 the Courant Stable made a huge investment by buying 50 per cent of the Swedish top trotter Gigant Neo, who one month later won the world's most prestigious race for older trotters, the Prix d'Amerique in Paris.

Anders Ström likes to race horses in many countries, Scandinavia, France, Italy and North America. He had his Gift Kronos

(now a sire in Sweden) racing in the US for a while and fairly successfully. The now seven-year-old son of Viking Kronos finished third to Lucky Jim in last year's Nat Ray at the Meadowlands and took his record of 1:52.4 with a win at the Meadowlands in May of 2009.

Recently he discovered a Canadian horse on the Internet. The colt caught his attention not only because he was undefeated but also because he is by Ken Warkentin, a sire in which Ström has big

confidence. The colt's name is Buckhams Bay.

Ström has in the meantime become a well known investor of expensive horses, and when a trainer finds a prospect in the higher price classes and doesn't have an owner for it, he calls Anders Ström. A few days after discovering the horse, Swedish North America based trainer Tommy Andersson called Ström and informed him about Buckhams Bay. Ström immediately send his vet Nicolas de Mitri to Canada in order to inspect the horse, and soon the deal was done.

"My plan is to keep the colt in Canada in order to stake and race him there as a two and three-year-old," Ström explains. "Then I hope to have a good horse for Europe after the three-year-old campaign is completed in just over a year."

He left the colt in the care of his trainer and breeder and previous owner John Smith of Woodlawn, Ontario. Unfortunately the colt was scratched from his first start for his new owner, an Ontario Sires Stakes Gold elimination at Rideau Carleton,

When I was a boy and started to go to the racetrack, I was thrilled by the sport, and so were all the friends I eventually met at the track. Nowadays the scenario has changed, at least in Scandinavia. Our new owners are coming from the punters community just like Anders Ström. And we have many punters.

A racetrack like Solvalla has 2,000 on track attendance on a normal Wednesday night, but in addition to that there are 30,000 people following the races online, and these people are all potential owners. You have not come so far in North America, but I trust that you will have the same experience within the coming years.

This was all this time. Please do not hesitate to comment my articles. My e-mail address is ontrack@telia.com and as usual I would be more than happy to receive reaction from North American harness racing fans. 📧

Till next time,
Klaus Koch

Klaus Koch is one of Scandinavia's leading racing administrators and is perhaps best known for his former role as director of racing at Solvalla Racetrack.



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283. **HOLD HER TIGHT** br.f.

Kadabra – Angie Blue Chip – Credit Winner
First foal from multiple NYSS winner (third in NYSS final)
ANGIE BLUE CHIP 2,2:05.3h, 3,1:57f (\$183,810).

186. **SPEED AND SASS** b.c.

Angus Hall – Too Sassy For U – Yankee Glide
Second foal from stakes winning TOOSASSYFORU
3,1:58.1s, 4,1:56.1s (\$102,389).

144. **DRIVING DEON** b.c.

Thunder Road – Pure Sable – Balanced Image
Great looking colt from a half-sister to
PURE FOX 3,Q1:57.3, 1:57f (\$108,471).

34. **REMEMBER THE MUSIC** b.c.

Pegasus Spur – Olympic Dreams – Andover Hall
First foal from a daughter of multiple stakes
winning CURITIBA 2,2:00f, 3,1:57.4f (\$243,499).

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Lisa Photo

MUSCLE MASSIVE

2,1:57, 3,1:51 (\$995,192)

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The 1-2 finish by Muscle Massive and Lucky Chucky in this year's Hambletonian reaffirmed New Jersey's position as the industry leader. Year after year New Jersey bred horses are front and center in the major stakes across the United States and Canada.

We encourage everyone to continue to participate in this great state for harness racing. Be sure to think Jersey-bred at the upcoming yearling sales.

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