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The Galloping Lane Photography

Thoroughbred Geno's Bambino is a winner on and off the track.



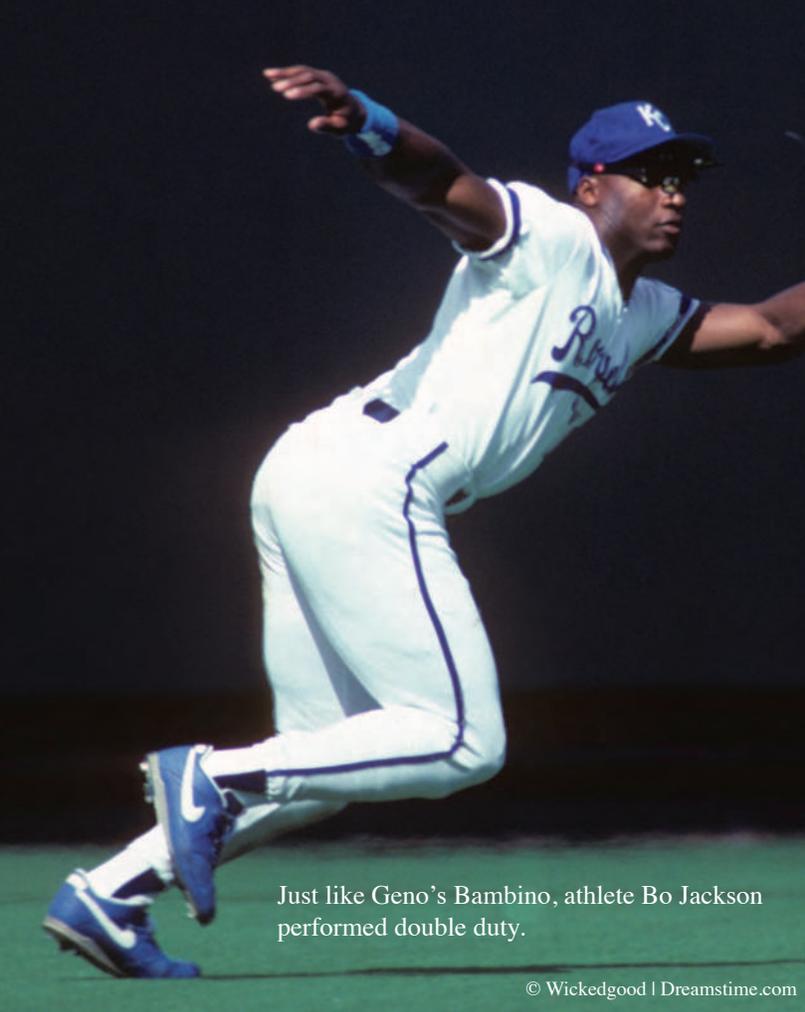
The Bo Jackson of Horse Racing



Arapahoe Park-based Thoroughbred is competing on the track and in the arena

By Jonathan Horowitz

It's now more common than ever for a Thoroughbred racehorse to embark on a second career away from the track, but rarely does one alternate between two pursuits. That's part of what makes Geno's Bambino special, as the Arapahoe Park veteran recently competed in the show arena and now has his sights set on a return to racing this year. Though perhaps not as famous as Bo Jackson, who showcased his athleticism as a rare star in both professional football and baseball, Geno's Bambino is doing his part to highlight the versatility of the Thoroughbred.



Just like Geno's Bambino, athlete Bo Jackson performed double duty.

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Because of the one-dimensional focus on speed and the year-round nature of horse racing, it is rare for racehorses to attempt a second sport while they are racing, although obviously many will go on to new careers as jumpers, polo ponies and more after retiring.

Geno's Bambino, a 6-year-old California-bred, used his off-season from racing at Arapahoe Park near Denver to train for and ultimately compete in "Colorado's Most Wanted Thoroughbred" at the Rocky Mountain Horse Expo on March 11. The competition, presented by Retired Racehorse Project, CANTER Colorado and Arapahoe Park, was designed to showcase the versatility of the Thoroughbred breed, which can succeed as race, sport and pleasure horses. The organizations also showcased booths and demonstrations about racing and riding during the three-day expo at the National Western Complex in Denver.

For the event, Geno's Bambino and four other finalists were asked to demonstrate a variety of skills in a freestyle format. The bay gelding's competition included award-winning Colorado-based eventers Churchita and Faster Than Duke, hunter-jumper Light After Dark and racehorse-turned-ranch-horse-turned-eventer Royal Mr. G.

Geno's Bambino's most recent start came at Arapahoe Park on August 13, 2016, in a 5 1/2-furlong claiming race that he captured by a half-length under jockey Mike Ziegler. Trainer Neil Koch claimed Geno's Bambino out of that race for \$2,500 on behalf of owner Kate Anderson. Because Koch races exclusively at Arapahoe Park—the trainer's last start outside of Colorado came in 2012—Geno's Bambino will likely return to racing when the 2017 season at Arapahoe Park begins on May 19.

The long break allowed the veteran of 38 starts and four wins in Colorado, California and Nebraska to begin a second career in com-

petitive trail and obstacle training at Golden Creek Equine in Cheyenne, Wyoming—and to show off what he's learned at the March expo.

"To have a horse who is still active in racing and be able to do what he does is quite simply amazing," said his rider, Kaitlyn Rinker, 19. "He is extremely trustworthy. I have not only put my own life into his hands but would trust him to take care of any little kid."

The Most Wanted Competition

The eventer Churchita claimed victory in Colorado's Most Wanted Thoroughbred by soaring over big jumps and being ridden bridleless by Ashley Gubich. In addition, the 6-year-old chestnut mare demonstrated her ability to teach new riders like Gubich's 3-year-old son, Chase, and myself, an aspiring eventer and the Arapahoe Park announcer.

"She's 'the people's horse' because she is compatible with all levels of riders," said Gubich, who acquired Churchita from CANTER Texas as an unraced 3-year-old after her original owners decided to

downsize their racing operation. “She has never let me down and does all the crazy things I’ve thrown in front of her—from big jumps with me to being a lesson horse for Chase, Jonathan and other new riders at my barn.”

The winner was decided based on feedback from the audience and a panel of judges with \$1,000 in prize money up for grabs.

Like Geno’s Bambino, Royal Mr. G, who shows under the name Thalweg, also previously raced at Arapahoe Park. After retiring, he worked cattle on a ranch in South Dakota and then became an eventer with rider Kristi Radosevich. Royal Mr. G wowed when Radosevich jumped him in Western tack and Arapahoe Park trainer Cimmarron Gerke roped and pulled a sled with the horse.

“He can jump the moon and rope a steer and throw down a gorgeous dressage test and beautiful show jump round,” Radosevich said.

Light After Dark, also known by the show name Nightlife, has gone from racing at Arapahoe Park to competing as a hunter over 2-foot-6-inch and 2-foot-9-inch fences, which he demonstrated with his 18-year-old trainer, Molly Dunn, aboard. Dunn also rode him bareback at the show.

“I never thought I would be owning or training my own horse, but he proved to me dreams can come true,” Dunn said. “With hard work and a ton of hours serving, lifeguarding, and riding polo ponies, I was finally able to find my dream horse.”

Faster Than Duke was stakes-placed with a second in the 2012 Chinook Pass Stakes at Emerald Downs in Washington and had a comprehensive racing career with starts on dirt, turf and synthetic tracks. Now showing as Dukes Up, the horse competes as a beginner novice eventer whose rider, Dominika Hanson, won the Mountain State Eventing Association Central Colorado Chapter’s award for top first-year beginner novice rider.

Geno’s Bambino and his brethren may never earn the headlines and accolades of a two-sport star like Bo Jackson, but their accomplishments are impressive nonetheless and their appearances at events like this serve as another example to the uninitiated that Thoroughbreds can be all-stars both on and off the track. ★

Jonathan Horowitz (jjhorowitz.com) became the youngest person ever to announce a horse race in the United States when at age 14 he called at Los Alamitos Race Course in California in 1999. He has announced at 23 racetracks in the United States and Great Britain and is currently calling at Arapahoe Park in Colorado.



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Churchita and Ashley Gubich took home the top prize in the Colorado’s Most Wanted Thoroughbred competition.



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