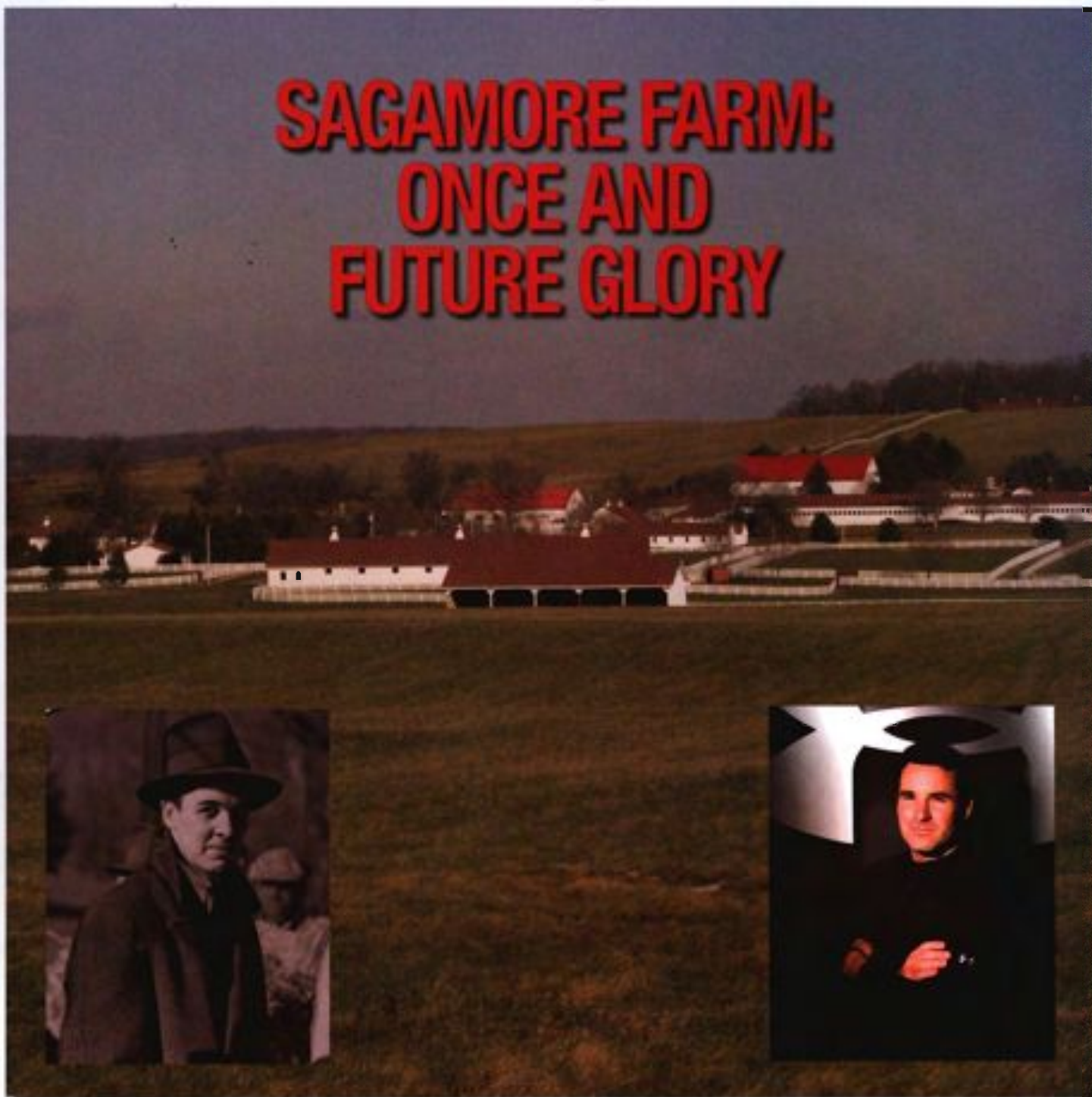


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SAGAMORE FARM: ONCE AND FUTURE GLORY



**NEW BOLTON CENTER
TAKES AIM ON LAMINITIS**

**COLE, LAKE RANK AMONG
NATION'S STANDOUTS**

Sagamore Farm REBORN





Kevin Plank (inset), founder of the enormously successful Under Armour apparel company, is bringing new life to the grand old establishment that once was home to Alfred G. Vanderbilt's famed stock, including Native Dancer.

Story by John Eisenberg, Photographs by Barrie B. Reigbster



Clockwise, from left: Sagamore's signature white fences have been rebuilt, and some new paddocks added. Nine miles of fencing have been completed, with five more to be added this spring. Barns like the one at top are being remodeled with skylights and full outside doors to enhance air flow. Plank's four broodmares (right), in foal to Kentucky stallions, will give birth on the farm in 2008. The stud barn will be restored in a manner befitting its history.

When Kevin Plank, founder and president of Under Armour, the Maryland-based apparel-maker, decided to start a racing stable in 2006, he asked his future farm manager, Tom Mullikin, to scout property to buy. Mullikin, a high school football teammate of Plank's 20 years earlier, located several 100-acre parcels in Baltimore County, Md., and showed them to Plank.

"He liked them and all, but every time we were driving home, we seemed to wind up going by Sagamore Farm," Mullikin recalled recently. "Kevin would stop the car and get out and stand there looking at Sagamore, and then he'd turn and say, 'What do you think about that?' I acknowledged that it was beautiful, but I was approaching the idea more conservatively."

Eventually recognizing that Plank, 35, had bigger dreams, Mullikin suggested his friend look into buying the famous farm where Native Dancer held court and Alfred G. Vanderbilt bred generations of champions. Regarded by many in the horse industry as hallowed ground, it had fallen on hard times and become a weedy, dilapidated ghost town. Plank contacted

the owner, James Ward, a developer who bought the farm from Vanderbilt in 1986, and closed on a purchase in February 2007.

"We're going to take the farm back to its glory days. It should be spectacular," Plank said in a recent interview at Under Armour's Tide Point headquarters.

A year into the renovation, the 425-acre farm already looks much better than it has in decades. Last spring Mullikin and a crew filled more than 30 dumpsters with refuse that had accumulated in the barns and other buildings. The entire property has been mowed and edged, and in some places, repainted. More than 150 acres that had been leased as corn fields are grassy pastures again. Nine miles of new white fencing is up around the perimeter and paddocks. The foaling and broodmare barns are being rebuilt as state-of-the-art facilities.

More is in the works. The training track will become operable again with a new dirt surface in 2008. Down the line, the historic oval training barn, Vanderbilt's signature building with its enclosed quarter-mile track, probably will be renovated.

"The vision I have for Sagamore is to be the Disney World of horse racing, a place that is so magical and different that you drive by and get inspired by it," Plank said.

Of course, he isn't doing it just to own an attractive, historic farm that inspires people. Plank is diving headlong into the racing business. He wants to own a major stable that competes at the sport's highest level.

"Our mission statement is to win the Triple Crown, period. That is our maniacal mentality," said Plank, who has no background in the horse business other than being a racing fan.

He began buying horses at Keeneland in 2006, and now has a dozen runners aged 2 and 3. Competing as Sagamore Farm, with silks that reflect the cerise diamond and white design Vanderbilt used for more than 60 years, Plank scored his first victory when a 2-year-old filly named Bourbon Maid won a maiden special weight at Laurel Park late last season. Most of the horses are being trained by Barclay Tagg, and Mike Trombetta also has several. Plank also has purchased four broodmares and plans to breed his own runners as well as buy young prospects

at sales. The mares will be bred to Kentucky sires, but they will deliver at Sagamore, making them Maryland-breds.

"What I want is to not just have a nice little successful horse operation," Plank said. "I want to re-ignite horse racing in the state of Maryland, and I think it needs a lightning bolt to do that. If we make winners and give people compelling stories to talk about, like having a local horse running in the Kentucky Derby, that's where we have a chance. It will take a while. We didn't think it would happen in our first crop. But I'm a 35-year-old CEO of a multi-billion-dollar company. You're telling me I'm not a lucky guy? If it's going to happen to anyone, I've got a pretty good chance."

Indeed, no one could have predicted Under Armour's spectacular growth when Plank, who was raised in Montgomery County, started the company as a 24-year-old former Maryland Terrapins linebacker in 1996. Under Armour now has almost a thousand employees and reported \$430 million in net revenues in 2006. Genial and stocky, Plank is a bona fide American success story who emanates casual, well-scrubbed athleticism.

"People said to me, 'How can you expect to compete against these big, established [sports apparel] companies [such as Nike]?' Plank said. 'We were smart enough to be naive enough to not know what we couldn't accomplish. Now, with Sagamore, I'm the first to admit it's going to be a long, tough climb, and there are many things I don't know. But maybe that's going to work in our favor in some cases. We will attack this over time. I like the idea that we're young and hungry. And I don't like to lose.'"

The key horseman in the operation is Mullikin, 37, whom Plank hired away from Machmer Hall, a commercial breeding establishment in Paris, Ky. After playing football with Plank at St. John's, a prep school in Washington D.C., Mullikin played baseball at Frostburg State University, graduated and began working in the information technology department at Gannett Co. in Reston, Va. But he tired of the corporate world and, through a connection, took a job at Machmer Hall. He rose through the ranks and then left Kentucky to spend two years at Edward P. Evans's Spring Hill Farm, in Casanova, Va., the Mid-Atlantic region's leading Thoroughbred breeding operation. There, he worked under his mentor, Chris Baker. He then returned to Machmer Hall and was the number two man when Plank called in 2006. Today, Mullikin runs Sagamore on a daily basis and figures heavily in all of Plank's bloodstock decision-making, leading the way on sales purchases and breeding prospects.

"I didn't see it coming when Kevin asked me to come aboard, but I was immediately excited about the chance. Who wouldn't be? Sometimes when I'm working [at Sagamore] I find myself stopping and realizing what's gone on here before me," Mullikin said. "We're going to keep it low-key and just put our heads down and work hard. I've been at [the horse business] for eight years. I'm learning every day. I'm humble."

Other members of the team include Randy Lewis, 58, who



State of the art ventilation is built into the design for barn renovations, which are well underway (top). The broodmare barns will retain catwalks above the stalls. Yearling barn (above) in current use is typical of the old style, with low tongue-and-groove ceilings. The small windows at the back of each stall were removed to accommodate Dutch doors for ventilation. Stall doors will be open screen work like that typically seen in modern barns.



Farm manager Tom Mullikin handles one of Plank's prospective runners—a 2-year-old colt named *Tabula Rasa*, the Latin phrase for “clean slate.” By *More Than Ready* out of *Silent Academy* (by *Royal Academy*), the colt was a \$190,000 purchase at the Keeneland September Yearling sale.

runs the farm office and lives on the property (he is the son of longtime trainer Charles R. Lewis and worked in the automobile business for 40 years before taking a job at Sagamore); Laura Delozier, a trainer who leased stalls at Sagamore when Ward owned it; and consultant Dan Rosenberg, former manager of Three Chimneys Farm in Kentucky, one of the most successful breeding establishments in the country. Rosenberg tried to get a job at Sagamore in 1970 but was turned down, and wound up working at Glade Valley Farms in Frederick, Md., before moving to Three Chimneys, where he became a major figure in the breeding industry. He just started a consulting business.

“I’m thrilled to be part of what Kevin is doing,” Rosenberg said in a telephone interview. “Sagamore is such an extraordinary piece of property. It gives you goose bumps to see how beautiful it is. When I went there in 1970 it was

with awe to actually be standing there, at the home of Native Dancer and Alfred Vanderbilt. The fact that part of Kevin’s dream for this is to preserve the legacy of the farm is very important. What he is doing is truly a gift to the people of Maryland.”

Vanderbilt, who died in 1999, was a scion of industrial age wealth and one of the lions of the American horse racing business. He ran Pimlico race course during the Depression, helped start the New York Racing Association in the 1950s and was a fixture at Saratoga during the summer. Seen as having one of the keenest minds in the sport, he was a New York resident but bred and ran horses out of Sagamore.

Located in the Worthington Valley several miles north of the Baltimore beltway, the farm had consisted of alfalfa fields until Isaac Emerson, inventor of Bromo-Seltzer, turned it into

a horse farm in 1925. He built it for his daughter, Margaret, who was Vanderbilt’s mother. She owned a racing stable but gave the farm to Vanderbilt when he turned 21 in 1933. Vanderbilt soon bought the colt *Discovery* from Adolphe Pons of Country Life Farm in Bel Air, Md., and had a major racing stable going. *Discovery*, a champion and famed weight-bearer in the mid-1930s, later sired *Geisha*, the mare who delivered *Native Dancer*, acclaimed as one of racing’s all-time greats with 21 wins in 22 starts from 1952 to ’54. (The historic link between Country Life and Sagamore was renewed in 2007 when Mullikin boarded Plank’s horses at Country Life as the renovation of Sagamore was getting underway.)

Under Vanderbilt’s ownership, Sagamore was an iconic landmark for more than a half-century. Generations of horses and horsemen lived and worked in an environment of splendid white fences, scrubbed barns,

shiny brass fixtures and intricately carved and painted tack boxes. (At one point the property was almost 1,000 acres as Vanderbilt added neighboring parcels, but it eventually shrank to half that size.) Horses of all ages galloped and worked on its immaculately kept three-quarter-mile training track (equipped with a viewing stand as well as a starting gate), and grooms and exercise riders—many of whom lived in a dormitory on the grounds—bustled about. Vanderbilt frequently flew down in a private plane to view his horses. The staff presented them with military-like fanfare and precision.

The farm slowly descended from its heyday after Vanderbilt shrank his racing stable in the late 1950s and *Native Dancer* died in 1967. The great gray champion had turned white and stood as a stallion on the grounds from 1955 until his death. He was buried on the property along with *Discovery* and other famed Vanderbilt



Sagamore's six-furlong training track awaits refurbishing; old rails and paddocks in the infield have been removed. Plans call for the original observation tower built by Vanderbilt to be preserved.

runners such as Next Move and Bed o' Roses.

Vanderbilt put less and less time and money into the farm in the 1970s and '80s, and while Ward didn't develop the property after he took over, as many feared he would, he didn't invest much in it, either. A few trainers leased a few stalls. The fence paint peeled. Much of the finery from the farm's glory days disappeared.

"The place had basically been picked clean," Plank said. "I'm sure there are lots of nice Vanderbilt-era tack boxes hanging in bars all over the place."

But years of inattention couldn't diminish the emotional pull many fans still feel for the place. Since Plank took over, Mullikin and Lewis have entertained a succession of tourists, veterinarian groups, artists and curiosity seekers. Lewis said he recently came across two women who had made a pilgrimage to see Native Dancer's headstone.

"Nancy Pelosi [Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives] said one of her favorite memories of growing up in Baltimore was taking Sunday drives in the country and going by Sagamore Farm," Plank said. "It should be this spectacular place that tells you it is the heart of racing, like when you go to Fenway Park or Wrigley Field and see the heart of baseball. There should be a sense of magic. That's how Jim Ward sold the farm to me, taking the best interest of the farm into account. We never disclosed the price but it wasn't just about the price. It was 'Mr. Vanderbilt entrusted the farm to me and I've had it for 20 years, and it feels like it's time to pass it on.' The transaction was good that way."

Like Vanderbilt in the farm's early years, Plank is going first-class as he revives the place. Faced with a choice of putting up cheaper black fencing or more glamorous, pricey white,



Randy Lewis and Laura Delozier complete the new management team at Sagamore. To carry on tradition, Kevin Plank adopted a modified version of the Vanderbilt cerise diamond and white colors for his racing silks.

he took the expensive route. Former Maryland Jockey Club track superintendent John Passero has been brought in to help make the racing strip operable again. Blackburn Architects, a Washington, D.C., firm that specializes in equestrian architecture, is designing the renovation.

"That's what a piece of Maryland history should be," Plank said. "Getting the new

fencing up was so important. It declares that this is going to be our farm, and we know it is hallowed ground. I don't see us owning it as much as being a good custodian for a period of time. We're going to build it the same way as Walt Disney World, with no detail untouched. For the people who work there, there's going to be a way you're dressed, a 'yes sir, no sir,' a way we direct people, an organiza-



Work has begun on a broodmare barn (top) soon to have small windows replaced by outside doors. A dozen Vanderbilt greats are laid to rest in the cemetery (top right): Native Dancer and his maternal grandsire Discovery, along with Bad o' Roses, Find, Good Thing, Loser Weeper, Next Move, North Sea, Now What, Outdone, Restless Native and Social Outcast. Old dormitories (above) are gutted and awaiting renovation. The farm's centerpiece, a massive training barn (below), is near the end of the long list of renovations. The interior has 90 stalls, including one with an arched doorway to accommodate Native



Dancer's height. Many original fittings were looted over the years, but built-in wall boxes remain.



tion to the way we give a tour. Every tool has a place. We don't leave anything out. There's an absolute attention to detail unlike anything you've seen before. It's a show. People should know that they're stepping back in time, stepping into an experience. That kind of pagantry and story-telling is what will bring horse racing back."

There are currently 11 horses on the grounds—four 2-year-olds, four broodmares, and three 3-year-old layups. A construction crew is putting the finishing touches on one of the renovated barns. Mullikin said he knows every step of the process is being observed.

"When I was out buying a Christmas tree in December, one of the firefighters that we bought from said, 'Hey, you guys are doing a good job,' " Mullikin said. "One day I was standing by the street that runs through the farm and a lady drove by and slowed down and said, 'Keep it up!' I think people are happy to see fresh paint and things shaping up."

Plank said, "The only downside of my involvement is that it can't distract me from what I do [at Under Armour]. I have a day job. My interaction at this point is going to the farm on Sunday afternoons, taking a drive, cruising around in a four-wheeler, going to see the horses. I'm probably spending three to four hours a week on the farm.

But we have a staff of people working there—eight through the winter and then 12 or 14 or so in the summer. This is a 15 or 20-year plan. If it was a three or five-year plan, I'd be doing it 100 percent of my time. But I want to run [Under Armour] for the next 25 years of my life as well. But there's time."

Rosenberg agreed: "We have seen in the racing industry, for decades and decades, people who come in and make a huge splash and don't last," he said. "The fact that Kevin is not doing this so much for his own instant ego gratification, and wants to do it one step at a time, learning along the way, will help ensure the success of the project."

Of course, Plank is unambiguous in his definition of what will qualify as a successful project. He cited the example of a friend, John McDonough, a Tribune Company executive who replaced Andy MacPhail as president of the Chicago Cubs baseball team in 2006.

"When he had his initial press conference and reporters asked what he was looking to do with the Cubs, John said, 'We're looking for winners, period. That's our only goal. We want to win and win and win,' " Plank said. "That's how I feel with Sagamore. We can have pretty barns and fences, and we certainly will, but we need winners."

