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Dawn Kelly, Ph.D.
(Studbook Administrator)

BREEDING COUNCIL

Luke Cafolla (Showjumping)
Louise Doheny (Dressage)
Mandy Driesch (Eventing)

LANAKEN REPRESENTATIVE

Nicole Galbraith

LION D'ANGERS REPRESENTATIVE

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MEET A BREEDER: LUKE CAFOLLA

WSI: Luke, when and how did you get involved in breeding sport horses?

Luke: Initially I bought my first sport horse in 2015, a 3-year-old chestnut mare that we named LSS Barbados. She went on to win the Irish Breeders Classic and subsequently sold at the Goresbridge Supreme Sale of Showjumpers. Her sale allowed me to invest in my first two foundation broodmares, Tosca (Cassini I x Athlet Z) and U. Renaissance M (Carthago v Calypso II) . A year later my first sport horse foal was born, a colt foal by Hotspot named LSS Toscassini that went on to be approved by the Warmblood Studbook of Ireland and then sold to America where he's now starting his competition career."

WSI: Does your family also breed horses? Is your family involved in other equestrian pursuits?

Luke: My parents bred thoroughbred racehorses at Leinster Stud from the mid-1980's up until 2015 when we changed direction to the breeding of sport horses. At one point we had over 60 broodmares and several group and listed winning stallions at stud.

WSI: What is your breeding philosophy or strategy?

Luke: Most of our foals are born via the means of embryo transfer and ICSI. We avail of these procedures to maximise the potential quality of our production. I'm a strong believer that these reproductive advances can lead to a notable improvement of a breeding program regardless of breeding direction." Normally we would breed between one to three foals from each of our mares in a year, however we have had up to six ET foals from a mare in the past.

WSI: What guides you in decisions about what mares to have in your breeding program?

Luke: I believe it's very important for the mare to have athleticism and elasticity or to show that she is capable of breeding these traits. There is no guaranteed way to breed a top jumper, however it will become difficult if you do not start from a good foundation. I also believe it's a good idea to use lines that are established at producing

top jumpers. It makes sense to choose a maternal line that has Grand Prix performers in each generation rather than one that doesn't. It's highly likely that with the appropriate crosses the line will continue to produce successful horses.

WSI: Do you like to use older proven stallions or younger stallions?

Luke: It would be dependent on the mare. I personally like to use tried and tested stallions as we usually know what to expect, although I'm not against supporting a younger stallion that shows all the signs of being a top horse, especially on a mare who has produced a good foal by something of similar pedigree or type in the past.

WSI: At what age do you sell the foals you breed?

Luke: I aim to sell them as foals and in-utero. I will in time replace my foundation broodmares with daughters of them to continue their respective lines.

WSI: You've bred a WSI Approved Stallion (LSS Toscassini), and the 2018 Champion Irish Warmblood Filly (LSS Jacaranda), which are big accomplishments. Is breeding another approved stallion a goal of yours?

Luke: Absolutely! I currently have a very nice crop of colt foals and it's my aim to specifically hold onto one to produce towards the stallion approvals again. It's not an easy task to identify and whittle them down at this stage but there are a few which I believe have what it takes.

WSI: What advice would you give a person who is starting a breeding program?

Luke: Always prioritise quality over quantity, one or two top mares is better than five average mares. It's also very important to know your breeding direction and educate yourself in order to understand what's required to be successful in your particular discipline.

WSI: Breeders have a lot of options where to register their foals. Why do you register your foals with WSI?

Luke: WSI is a very progressive studbook that I've found fantastic to deal with from day one. They have purposeful breeding policies and their breeding committees have a true comprehension of the modern sport horse. ■