

More Than Just



He pushed open a compartment in his vehicle and a glint of silver shone in the early morning sun as his wife grinned at what he was holding. He handed it back to me with pride.

"It's Kiss My Hocks' shoe from his track record-breaking race," Conda Maze said. "I rub it every day for good luck."

His wife chuckled and reached up to touch it.

"Go ahead, rub it," Judy Maze said. "It's tradition."

I was already feeling lucky to be able to interview the couple, but as they spoke about their lives, my luck was soaring and I wasn't the only one who was touched by their kind hearts.

"Those two were a real big part of me getting out of college and getting on my feet and rolling," Steven Akers, Conda's former student teacher, said. "They took me in as if I were one of their own."

Upon graduating Texas Tech University in 1983 with a degree in agricultural education, Conda went on to develop a successful ag program from scratch in White Deer, Texas, with student teachers like Steven Akers.

He had a passion for his students and he said he taught them that if they left zero excuses on the table and put in their best effort, they were winners.

"I believe that winning is everything," Conda said. "But you don't always have to come in first to be a winner."

Because of his belief for winning, it was no wonder his teams were successful on state and national levels. He said he really tried to instill that in his students. He wanted to set the bar high, no matter how frustrated they got with him, even to the point he had a gavel thrown at him during parliamentary procedure practice, an FFA contest.

"I'm still in the kid business today," Conda said. "I don't think I would ever want to do anything else that doesn't involve our future leaders."

After he retired from teaching in 2002, Conda started a business and while his story about starting a business is one for the books, it's his horse racing passion that really caught my attention.

He grew up traveling to Ruidoso, New Mexico, and watching the horses run at Ruidoso Downs Race Track. He said he remembers that one day he would like to own horses and be in the racing industry.

His first step into the racing industry began on his 40th birthday. His wife Judy came to him asking what he wanted. Conda replied with, "A racehorse."

Judy also graduated from Texas Tech, but with an accounting degree.

"I'm very conservative financially and I thought 'Okay I have to put a stop to this,'" Judy said. "So I said 'If you can come up with ten partners you can have a racehorse.'"

The next day, she said he came home and while they were eating dinner he told her he had formed a partnership.



Luck

"I knew she thought there was no way we could do that because we were just barely making it on an ag teacher's salary," Conda said. "I came home with 18 partners and there was no way she could back out then."

At 40 years old, Conda Maze owned his first racehorse with a group of ag teachers, cotton farmers and corn farmers, otherwise known as the "Good Ole Boys."

Their horse went on to qualify for the Consolation of the West Texas Futurity in 2000 where a Texas racehorse publication wrote an article on the group. It said the way the Good Ol Boys reacted, you would have thought they were running the All American Futurity, the most important race in American Quarter Horse Racing.

"The first horse, Quicks Trick, didn't make a lot of money," Conda said. "But it was like when you hook that first fish deep and he can't get off the line, that was me."

Conda continued to put together groups and in 2008 he and some partners purchased a horse named Show Me Your Toole from an TQHA sale. Show Me Your Toole went on to run fourth in the Harrah's Futurity, second in the Texas Quarter Horse Association Futurity, third in the Sam Houston Futurity, first in the Dash For Cash Futurity and had cashed in \$394,000 upon retirement.

"I mean some country kid from Crosbyton, Texas, is having a race horse that runs out \$394,000 and a graded futurity win is just something you dreamed of," Conda said. "That's what started the success."

He had several successful racehorses following Show Me Your Toole, all trained by Toby Keeton. In 2013, Keeton took Conda to Southwest Stallion Station in Elgin, Texas, to help him purchase some horses and that is where he saw a filly by the name of Lovethewayoulie, who would eventually win \$456,000, and a colt by the name of Kiss My Hocks.

He said Keeton had steered him in the right direction and pushed him to go after the two young horses, but especially Kiss My Hocks.

"There was no doubt when we laid our eyes on Kiss My Hocks," Conda said. "That he was different than most horses."

After forming a partnership with Tyler Graham of Southwest Stallion Station, he was now an owner of Kiss My Hocks. He and Keeton got back in the car where Conda coined the nickname for the young colt. His name would be Rooster, or the Bad Chicken, because he said he was visibly cocky. From that day forward, Kiss My Hocks would live up to the nickname.

"It's just unbelievable to know that you have an animal that is extremely fast," Conda said.

Kiss My Hocks broke the track record at the Sam


Houston Race Park during his first race. Conda said after the record break, he knew the horse was talented.

Kiss My Hocks became a million dollar horse, meaning he earned \$1,199,385 in his nine wins and one second place career. Along with his outstanding earnings, he was named the 2014 Champion 2-year-old Colt and overall Champion 2-year-old and Tyler Graham and Conda Maze became the AQHA Champion Owners.

Kiss My Hocks is now retired and standing at stud Southwest Stallion Station in Elgin, Texas.

While Conda is continuing to pave a path of success in the race industry and awaiting Kiss My Hocks' babies to hit the tracks in 2019, Conda's feed business, Lindner Feed & Milling is now one of the toplivestock feeds in Texas and is in 22 states competing with brands like Purina.

Conda is often traveling to stock shows across Texas as a part of his business and while his career, or multiple careers rather, can keep him busy, his wife plays a vital role in his success. Conda said his wife is his partner in every decision and this is evident in person. At the end of the day, his success is not about him. He said he wouldn't be where he is without her.

"Looking back," Judy said. "It's one of those things that's like wow, you know God had a plan because something told us to take those leaps of faith and we did and here we are." 

"There was no doubt...he was different than most horses."



Hayley Magness

Hobbs, New Mexico