

# Meet the World-Famous Horsemen Who **Oppose Decoupling**: Florida's McKathan Brothers Gave Triple Crown Winner American Pharoah His Earliest Schooling

Right: Kevin McKathan at his 200-acre Citra, Florida Training Center (Halifax Photo)

Any legislative effort to “decouple” live horse racing days in Florida will meet opposition from the Florida owners of McKathan Brothers Training Center, the 200-acre Citra-based horse racing training “school” where this year’s historic Triple Crown winner American Pharoah got his earliest lessons.

Known worldwide after their “student,” American Pharoah, became the first horse to capture Thoroughbred racing’s coveted Triple Crown after 37 years, the McKathan Brothers stepped forward to oppose “decoupling,” which they described as a misguided proposal that would devastate Florida’s successful horse racing industry if enacted into law.

“If we allow decoupling to happen, it will start a slow erosion toward the ruin of horse racing in Florida,” explained J.B. McKathan, who took a break between working with clients’ Thoroughbreds this week to give his perspective. “There will be no money and no reason for our clients to stay and race their horses here. Owners are already leaving for states like New York and Pennsylvania, where there’s a focus on creating a positive business climate for the horse racing industry.”

The McKathan Brothers--native Floridians whose father, Luke, also earned great success with American Quarter Horse racing in the Sunshine State--have earned a global reputation for training racetrack champions since they opened their farm in 1989. Today, they are sought out by wealthy racehorse owners worldwide to provide their expensive young hopefuls with the invaluable first lessons needed to compete successfully.

Even though they’re practically a household name after American Pharoah’s Triple Crown win, the McKathans are nevertheless greatly concerned about the future of their business in Florida if “decoupling” becomes a reality.



Since horse racing has always been a part of Florida’s landscape, they worry the Legislature is taking them and their business for granted.

“What elected officials may not realize is part of the economic good of a racehorse is really how expensive they are to maintain,” McKathan noted. “Even though owning a racehorse is a complete luxury, no one is going to make that investment if they don’t know they have at least a reasonable shot at recouping it, so they ultimately do business where they can actually accomplish that.”

“The whole idea of slot machines was to help Florida horse racing stay competitive with other states,” McKathan recalled. “But that was during a time when our racetracks were owned by individuals who cared about racing. Now, they’re owned by giant public and profit-driven corporations that are accountable to no one but Wall Street. Of course they want to keep the revenue that would otherwise have gone to building Florida horse racing businesses like ours.” McKathan Brothers Training Center houses 158 stalls and employs a full-time staff of 30 to train clients’ horses and manage the property.

It’s no small coincidence that a Florida upbringing also hallmarked the most recent Triple Crown winner, Affirmed, who reigned for 37 years before American Pharoah accomplished the feat on June 6, 2015. The 1978 Triple Crown winner got his early schooling from Melvin James in Reddick, Florida.

McKathan agreed that, with the last two Triple Crown winners inextricably tied to Florida, the area’s reputation as a top racehorse breeding and training center could grow even stronger, but only with the help of constructive legislation designed to grow the industry--not undermine it for the sole benefit of casinos.

“Decoupling is an extremely slippery slope. It’s scary,” he said.



Above: JB and Kevin McKathan

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