

Futurity First

From draw No. 1, Lil Joe Cash wins the Futurity Open Championship with Andrea Fappani, the first professional in history to claim Futurity first and second.

Russell Giles was guilt-ridden when she looked down at the ominous, black No. 1 glaring up from her palm. She had drawn the first spot in the 2011 National Reining Horse Association Futurity Level 4 Open finals working order for her horse, Lil Joe Cash, and his rider, Andrea Fappani. It's a spot most reiners don't want to ride, especially on Futurity finals night, the biggest night of the year.

But maybe it was an omen. "First" fit the occasion. It was Giles' first futurity horse. Fappani, it seemed, was drawn to number ones. When he won his first Futurity Level 4 Open Championship in 2001 on RR Star (Like A Diamond [PT] x RL Miss Kitty x Nu Cash), owned by Lundin Farms, it was the first time a Paint horse won the Championship, the first time a European claimed the title and the first time it was won in a runoff. That year, Fappani was an assistant trainer for **Equi-Stat Elite** \$1 Million Reining and \$1 Million Reined Cow Horse Rider Todd Bergen, and Fappani's boss won his first National Reined Cow Horse Association Snaffle Bit Futurity Open Championship on Boonlight Dancer a few months before the NRHA Futurity. In October 2011,

Bergen achieved the same distinction on Shiners Dun Juan.

Was it all a sign? What's more likely is it simply didn't matter where Fappani and Lil Joe Cash (Nu Chex To Cash x RS Lilly Starlight x Grays Starlight) landed in the draw. They were destined to win that Dec. 3 night in Oklahoma City. The time was right for the dedicated horseman, whose greatest passion is training and showing futurity horses. The time was right for the first-time Futurity owner, an "average Joe" herself, who believed in what she had. And the time was right for Lil Joe Cash to be the best horse in Oklahoma City and capture the 2011 NRHA Futurity Level 4 Open Championship with a 227.5.

True to form, Fappani, an **Equi-Stat Elite** \$2 Million Rider operating out of Rancho Oso Rio, Scottsdale, Ariz., had to make the win momentous. With a 225.5, he also captured the Reserve Co-Championship on Arcese Quarter Horses' Spook Off Sparks (Smart Spook x Setting Off Sparks x Shining Spark), the first mare he had ever shown in the Futurity Open, making himself the first person to win both first and second in the NRHA Futurity. His assistant trainer, Arno Honstetter, also tied for second place, making it a near



2011 NRHA Futurity Level 4 Open Champions Lil Joe Cash and Andrea Fappani (Below) "Everything he does, he makes it look effortless because he's a very well-balanced horse," Fappani said of Lil Joe Cash.



half-million-dollar payday for the barn. But it all came down to Lil Joe Cash, who set the pace from the first draw.

All you need

Fappani came into the 2011 Futurity with all he needed to win: the right horse, a new game plan, bolstered confidence and the

right attitude. His horse was physically at the top of his game, and Fappani, who is supported by his teammate, business partner and wife of 10 years, Tish, was mentally in the best place he could be.

"The last two or three years, I almost tried too hard when I got the Futurity," Fappani said. "This year, I told my wife, 'I'm going to

back off. Instead of getting 100 percent, I think I can win it with getting 80 percent out of these horses.’”

Fappani wanted to be safer, smarter, more precise. Not because he was tentative, but because he was more confident than ever.

“It’s been a strong year for me, and it gave me the confidence to believe in myself and my work a little bit more than I’ve done in the past, and just to trust my work and trust my horses,” he said. And Fappani did have a great year. Coming into the Futurity, he had already won \$293,689, three pre-futurity Championships and \$61,970 on 3-year-olds.

The Italian native, an American citizen since 2006, had good reason to trust Lil Joe Cash. The pair won the composite score in the Futurity go-rounds, marking a 223 both times for a total of 446. Then came that dreaded No. 1 draw. But Fappani had the right attitude and a focused objective.

“At first, I was kind of disappointed about it, and then I just turned it into something to push me again,” he said. “It’s very easy when you’re there at the Futurity to get your mind on things that are not important. If you draw first, there’s no point in getting mad for two days because you’re first on your best horse. All I tried to concentrate on is, I’ve got great talent [in the horse], all I’ve got to do is focus on being really correct and everybody else will chase it.”

And that’s just what Fappani and Lil Joe Cash did.

“We were very precise in what we did. I didn’t have to worry about pushing him too much, because he offers it by himself. I knew he had the quality of maneuvers to be at the top, so I just tried to stay mistake-free,” Fappani said. Lil Joe Cash’s natural talent was able to shine through.

“If anybody that didn’t know my style of riding were to ask me to pick a horse to show the way I want my horses to look like, it’s that type of horse,” Fappani said. “[Lil Joe Cash] has a lot of style; he has a lot of presence in the pen. He’s very elegant. When he moves,



NRHA Futurity Open judges: (left to right) Don Flohr, Pete McAlister, Eugenio Latorre, Chris Kozlowski and Dennis Schulz —Photo by Pat Feuerstein



Futurity Champion Andrea Fappani receives a celebratory hug from his biggest fan: his and wife, Tish’s, son Luca. The couple also have another son, Jeremy.

—Photo by Katie Tims



From the first draw of the finals, Lil Joe Cash and Andrea Fappani laid down a 227.5 score that could not be beat. —Photo by Katie Tims

he’s so underneath himself. And that’s not me – from the first day I got on him, that horse could lay on a dime. He’s natural. Everything he does, he makes it look effortless because he’s a very well-balanced horse. Some horses do things very hard, and to me, they’re not as correct to look at – there are legs flying everywhere and things look a little out of control. This horse never looks like that.”

Lil Joe Cash’s and Fappani’s first-draw, 227.5 score was challenged by many, but surpassed by none. They won the NRHA Futurity Level 4 Open Championship, a finals paycheck of \$150,000 and a total of \$163,197 with sire incentive and go-round money.

reining, and she asked her trainer at the time what he thought. “He said, ‘I don’t think he’d be a very good horse to buy.’”

But when the horse came into the sale ring, Giles couldn’t shake the feeling that she should have him. The bidding began at \$7,000.

“I said, ‘Well I can afford that.’ I raised up my hand, and I bought him for \$7,700,” Giles recalled. “I’ve had the horse since he was 18 months old. I bought him on my own against everybody’s advice.”

Giles changed the horse’s name to Lil Joe Cash. Several things factored into the selection. Giles noticed his blaze made the shape of a “J.” She had bought another horse at the sale, a very large colt, and the pair went together as “Big Moe” and “Lil Joe,” and Lil Joe just stuck.

It turned out purchasing Lil Joe Cash and settling on a name were the easy parts.

“I had some difficulty starting him out with different trainers,” Giles said, “so I got him to Brent Loseke, who is primarily the main man responsible for his career.”

Loseke, 49, has a solid reputation for raising, training, marketing and managing many remarkable reining horses. The performance horse industry has long recognized his outstanding ability to start and train young prospects that go on to shine in the show pen. That list is long, but a few standouts include Shining Spark; Chic Please, who won the 1998 NRHA Futurity with Todd Bergen riding; and Senor Tejano Whiz, a 2006 NRHA Futurity Open finalist ridden by Shawn Florida.

“Brent got him ready and really broke,” Giles said of Lil Joe Cash. “Brent is a man of integrity and honor, and rather than deceiving me and not letting me know what my horse was and how talented he was, he explained to me the gravity of the situation and the ability and potential that the horse had. He also explained to me the value that the horse had.”

When Giles brought Lil Joe Cash to Loseke Colt Company in Aubrey, the summer of the horse’s 2-year-old year, it didn’t

Champion horse: ‘Lil Joe’ is born

The 2008 stud colt Lil Joe Cash came into the world as RS Nu Money, and he was bred by Dr. Kurt Harris, DVM, Whitesboro, Texas. Harris also nominated the foal to the NRHA North American Nomination Program and for that, received a check for 5 percent of the horse’s 2011 Futurity earnings – \$8,160.

Giles, who was shopping for her first futurity colt, laid eyes on the horse at the 2009 Legacy Reining Breeders Sale in Aubrey, Texas.

“I really liked the bloodlines and how he was bred, and I looked at him in the stall and I really liked him,” Giles said. She was new to

take Loseke long to realize that the “total package” had just been delivered to his doorstep.

“Mainly it was his mind and his physical ability,” Loseke said. “You ask him to give his head, he gave his head. You ask him to stop, he stopped, and not only stop but – some horses slide to a stop, but then they’re looking to get their weight back on to their front end; this one, once he figured it out, he had the natural balance to get his butt way under him but stay totally feather light on his front end. He’s really just the dream horse. The things he does naturally, we spend hours and hours and lots of frustration trying to get other horses to do.

“I have had the great joy of getting to work with a lot of horses that are now pretty famous in our business, and not to take anything away from them, they’re great ones, but this one, he’s just at another level from my point of view.”

Loseke, also an accomplished showman, is not one to consider sending horses elsewhere on a whim. But he and Giles brought up the discussion of sending their superstar pupil elsewhere for his best chance at NRHA Futurity greatness. Loseke had a world of elite trainers and showman to choose from, many of them his close friends, but the seasoned horseman had a hunch that Fappani would be a good match for Lil Joe Cash.

“There’s a reason Andrea Fappani wins what he does,” Loseke said. “Those guys that are always knocking on the door, there’s a reason they’re knocking on the door. They just have the program. They know how to finish them. They know how to get the most out of them.”

Fappani, who is right on the edge of becoming an **Equi-Stat Elite** \$3 Million Rider, had won \$1,015,492 at the NRHA Futurity prior 2011. He had won the big event once, placed Reserve twice and been an Open finalist many times. Fappani is known for personally putting a solid foundation on his futurity prospects, and that



The winning team of (left to right) Brent Loseke, Russell Giles and Andrea Fappani —Photo by Katie Tims



The 2011 NRHA Futurity Champion Sire, Nu Chex To Cash —Photo by Waltenberry

begins with starting them and riding them consistently as 2-year-olds. It’s part of what’s made his program such an outrageous success. For that reason, he doesn’t usually ride horses who haven’t been in his program as 2-year-olds, but he made an exception when Loseke called and said he might just have the best horse he’d ever ridden.

“I knew right away when I got on him that he was pretty special,” Fappani said. “The only thing was, I put so much work on my horses and so many buttons, that I just wasn’t sure if I was going to get him where I wanted by the Futurity.”

Even after winning \$12,185

in pre-futurity earnings at the NRHA Cowtown Classic in August and Scottsdale Classic Futurity in September, Lil Joe Cash hadn’t locked down a secure spot in Fappani’s top three. But that changed.

“Brent called me three weeks before I was ready to leave home [for the Futurity], and I said, ‘I don’t know. All the sudden it feels like he’s all there,’” Fappani said. “Most of the times, the ones that get to the top right are the end are the ones that are ready to win it.”

Lil Joe Cash truly had it all when he earned his spot on Fappani’s trailer, and the rest is history.

Champion Owner: Just like you

All champions need someone to believe in them, and for Lil Joe Cash, that first person was Russell Giles.

The 48-year-old understands the concept of hard work. She was an accomplished high school athlete – twice a Texas state champion in golf – and she put herself through school at Baylor University by buying and selling cars. Giles eventually built that skill into a successful business, and she now owns three car dealerships in Waco, Texas.

Giles had a picture-perfect life. She was healthy, had a successful business, was part of a loving family and owned a nice home. But in 2006, things changed.

“I had a terrible thing happen to me. I was in ICU for 30 days. I ruptured my abdomen. I nearly died,” Giles said. The experience changed her perspective on life, and when she got better, she decided it was time to do some things for herself, some things she’d always wanted to do. One of those was returning to a life with horses, something she had enjoyed as a child showing Western pleasure.

“I looked at the different disciplines and decided reining would be it. It would be a fairly safe sport that would be fun,” Giles said. She did the research before buying her first reiners: a Grays Starlight gelding and Hollywood Jac 86 mare. She began showing sparingly as a non-pro, as much as her lingering injuries would allow, but that was all it took to get hooked. Before long, Giles decided she’d like to invest in a futurity colt.

And that colt took her on the ride of a lifetime – a ride that no amount of money could buy, not that people didn’t try. Giles placed Lil Joe Cash on the market for some time during his 2-year-old and 3-year-old years, and at one point, she received a handsome, six-figure offer that brought her to a decision point.

“I told Brent, ‘I can’t pass up the opportunity to be part of something really great,’” Giles said. She wanted to ride the ride,

and it took her all the way to the 2011 NRHA Futurity finals. Giles' mother and brother joined her in OKC.

"We were laughing about the names [in the finals program], saying, 'What name doesn't belong with the other names – the long-time horse breeders, the reining greats? There it is! No. 1. What's my name doing there in the finals?'" Giles said, laughing. "It just really gave me hope in my heart that other people could see that it could happen to you.

"The only horse my daddy ever bought me was a \$30 horse. I pull about an \$8,000 trailer, and I'm just like everybody else. You don't have to have the big bucks. Somebody like me who goes to Tractor Supply and buys their stuff and mucks their own stalls and drags their horse to the vet and goes to weekend stuff, it can happen. But if you don't shoot to try to do it, it won't ever happen. So try it. Shoot for the very best. Don't hold back. It can happen for a small fry. Believe in what you're doing and do it with all your heart."

Champion Sire and Dam: A winning combo

Lil Joe Cash's sire, the 1990 palomino stallion Nu Chex To Cash, owned by Hilldale Farm, Brashears, Texas, is no stranger to the circle of NRHA Futurity Champion sires. He is the father of Wimpys Little Step (out of Leolita Step x Forty Seven), the stallion Shawn Florida rode to win the 2002 NRHA Futurity Level 4 Open Championship with a 233 score. He is also the sire of Big Chex To Cash (out of Snip O Gun x One Gun), the stallion Fappani rode to the 2005 NRHA Futurity Level 4 Open Reserve Championship.

Nu Chex To Cash (Nu Cash x Amarilla Chex x Bueno Chex) is an **Equi-Stat Elite** \$2 Million Sire and is a member of the NRHA Hall of Fame. With Jessica Keller-Torpey aboard in 2002, he won NRHA World Championship titles in the Intermediate Open and Limited Open divisions and Reserve World Champion titles in the Non-Pro



RS Lilly Starlight, shown here with Don Murphy, was the 2006 AQHA Superhorse, and she's the dam of 2011 NRHA Futurity Open Lil Joe Cash. —Photo by KC Montgomery

and Intermediate Non-Pro divisions.

He has \$65,654 in earnings, according to **Equi-Stat**, and also was shown successfully by Todd Crawford, Steve Metcalf and Charlie Hutton. In AQHA competition, he earned Superiors in Reining and Working Cow Horse, numerous high-point titles in the two classes and a Performance Register of Merit. He has 295 Reining points and 84 Working Cow Horse points.

"I thought he was the best horse that I'd ever thrown a leg over," Charlie Hutton told **Quarter Horse News**. "All of the maneuvers that a good horse considers to be difficult, he thought were easy. Stopping, turning, rolling back and carrying himself in the right frame – all of those things were natural for him. It was just so easy for him to stop that he had no dread or anticipation at all. I'd never ridden a horse where when you said, 'Whoa,' that his backend absolutely felt like it fell out from underneath you."

"One of the best things about 'Nu Chex' is that he is so good-minded," Tammye Hutton of Hilldale Farm said to **QHN**. "I think that is why his performance career had such longevity."

They're traits the blaze-faced palomino consistently passed on to his 218 performing offspring that earned \$2,119,852 before the 2011 NRHA Futurity. Nu Chex To Cash's leading offspring are: Big Chex To Cash (\$219,265), Wimpys Little Step (\$203,865), Hot Smokin Chex (\$184,296; out of Snip O Gun), Lil Joe Cash (\$175,382) and NMSU Truckin Chex (\$170,119; out of NMSU Doc Truckle CJ).

"Tammye Hutton is a very good friend of mine, and we've talked very extensively about standing Lil Joe at Hilldale," Giles added. "But the first priority is to get him shown. There's only been one other horse that has won the [NRHA] Triple Crown, and that being a mare [Nu Chex To Cash's grand-get, Wimpys Little Chic]. So the first order of business is to try and win the Triple Crown and

see if we can make some NRHA History."

Giles may not have been involved in reining for long, but the savvy businesswoman and horse lover knows it takes more than just a good sire to make a good horse, and it wasn't just the Nu Chex To Cash on Lil Joe Cash's pedigree that caught her eye. His dam, RS Lilly Starlight, had a lot to do with it.

RS Lilly Starlight (out of Play Zanna Express x Zan Parr Express) was bred and is still owned by Kurt Harris, DVM. The mare won the Intermediate Open at the 2002 Kansas Reining Horse Association Futurity with Casey Hinton, and then diversified her portfolio by competing in cow horse, reining and roping with riders that included Don Murphy, J.D. Yates and Todd Crawford. RS Lilly Starlight was the 2006 American Quarter Horse Association World Show Superhorse and was an AQHA World Champion in Senior Heeling. The mare also had a PRCA career in calf roping.

"I think the biggest thing about her is that she's always been a very trainable horse," Harris said. "She certainly had a big heart, and she'll give you everything she has. She's always had a huge stop. That's one thing that comes out on all her babies; it doesn't matter what you breed her to. They all have eye appeal in the show pen because she's a very attractive mare. She's a very versatile, unique individual."

RS Lilly Starlight has three other money-earners: RS Peppier Starlight (\$3,418; by Peppier Gray), RS Lean Upon A Star (\$1,609; by Lean With Me) and Romancing The Chics (\$12,983; by Chic Please). As for what's in the pipeline for the mare, she has two 2-year-olds, a colt by Einsteins Revolution and a filly by Lena Spark, a yearling Lena Spark colt and a Shiner Named Sioux and Cat T Masterson foal on the way.

Her top money-earning foal is the 2011 NRHA Futurity Level 4 Open Champion Lil Joe Cash.

—EH