

F. C. (Sonny) Dodd

Illinois Quarter Horse Association
Hall of Fame Member, 2012

Horses have been an important part of Sonny Dodd's life from the time he was born. But in 1957, when he ended his service with the U.S. military, he got a sharper focus on his horse interests, and it centered squarely on the American Quarter Horse.

Not long after he returned, he purchased a two-year old Quarter Horse stallion named Prince Illini. And as breed historians will guess, the horse was from the group of King Ranch Quarter Horses that had come to the University of Illinois some years earlier. His sire was the important herd sire at the U of I—Hired Hand.

Quarter Horse shows were few and far between at that time, so if you wanted to show horses during that period, most of your showing would be at open shows—many held in conjunction with the county fairs held throughout Illinois.

At 23 months of age Sonny showed Prince in his first show and went second his first time out because “he nickered”, according to the judge. He showed in the open 2-year old stallion class at the Champaign County Fair, and was later showed in game classes because he was a notch too hot for the pleasure competition of the day.

Soon after, Jean Davis and Sonny made a trip to Kansas. Prince Illini was sold to Guy Rutland in Kansas, and Sonny bought another horse intended to be his start in racing. He entered the horse in a half mile relay race at the Macon County Fair in Decatur, and that may have been when the Quarter Horse racing bug bit Sonny. And as it stands today, he got bit bad.

The new horse was Pursley's Sam, and he was Sonny's real serious start in racing. But as things unfolded, Sam's conformation wasn't right, and he just couldn't perform at the level Sonny was seeking.

About that time, Sonny was training a horse named Hannon Socks. He was the right type and a tough little horse whose track record at the Freeport, IL track still stands.

At the two-year-old futurity in Frankfort, IL , several top trainers with their top horses were there, and Socks won his heat and made it to the finals by beating the highly rated Bud's Bull by a half-length. But there was a problem. Sonny couldn't get a stall for the horse, so he stayed up with him and held him on a lead for entire time. Despite that, Socks won the finals by 1 ½ lengths.

In 1964, Sonny and a jockey he worked with started seriously training Quarter Horse Race horses, and that effort produced several state champions. Their racing program took them to several Midwest states and also to New Mexico and Ohio, and finally resulted in a move to Oklahoma where Sonny worked for five years.

On his return to Illinois, he bred and raised a horse named Tuffy Rocket by Jaguar Rocket. Tuffy qualified in several futurities and at a big meet in Oklahoma, he had the fastest time in three days of racing.

As they got ready for the finals, Sonny gave the jockey one key piece of advice: "Don't touch him with a whip". As the race unfolded, the jockey went for the whip, and as Sonny feared, things didn't go well. Tuffy finished ninth in a field of ten.

Shortly after, Sonny began a long-term run—either 17 or 18 years as he remembers—as president of the Illinois Quarter Horse Racing Association. Somewhere along the way, with the help of Governor Jim Edgar, support for a state racing program became a reality at a meeting in Springfield.

In 1993, Sonny found the right people in Springfield to get Quarter Horse racing restarted at both the Illinois State Fair and the DuQuoin State Fair. Earlier efforts had ended in 1983. That effort at those two fairs lasted through 1995, and then, the closing of the Quarter Horse racing track at Gibson City made it impossible to get the number of horses to maintain the program.

In 1993, Sonny was asked to serve as the outrider for the races at the Springfield and DuQuoin races. Though the Quarter Horse races ended, Sonny continued as outrider for 12 years.

Sonny recalls the early years as really tough because there just weren't a lot of individuals who were that interested in Quarter Horse Racing. Billy Fairfield served as vice-president for many years, and Richard Bingham was a good supporter. The addition of Gene Allen (current IQHA president) as director of

Marketing and Public Relations was a key move to enhance the success of Quarter Horse racing in Illinois. With Gene's leadership, the racing program benefited from constant lobbying that had been difficult to achieve in earlier years. And somewhere along the way a \$250,000 package of money gave the program a base for consistency that Sonny and the others had long hoped for.

When you learn about Sonny's involvement and support of Quarter Horse racing in Illinois, one word comes to mind: Tenacious. He just wouldn't quit, and that became the characteristic of those he worked with.

He may not say so, but Sonny knows where that characteristic came from. In discussions, Sonny admitted, "My grandpa told me years ago...don't quit on a horse when its not doin' right."

Sonny followed that advice when working with Quarter Horses...and he did the same with his efforts to sustain the racing association In Illinois.

Today, Quarter Horse racing is healthy and a proud part of the Illinois Quarter Horse industry. People like Billy Fairfield, Gene Allen and others have kept it going and growing as it continues today.

But it's important to remember that it survived for many years because F. C. (Sonny) Dodd basically followed the advice of his grandpa: "Don't quit on a horse when its not doin' right".

Sonny just never quit.