

THE MASTER

and his Apprentices

EVERYTHING CHANGED FOR MARK NEWNHAM AS A JOCKEY WHEN A YOUNG HUGH BOWMAN, ARMED WITH A 3KG CLAIM AND AROUND 100 WINNERS IN THE COUNTRY TO HIS NAME, CAME ONTO THE SCENE IN THE LATE 90S

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Little did Mark Newnham know it then but Hugh Bowman, who now has 100 Group 1 winners behind him, would shape how Newnham moulds apprentice jockeys as a trainer.

And it's a formula that works – just ask Robbie Dolan, with two apprentice titles to his name, reigning champion apprentice Tom Sherry and young gun Tyler Schiller.

Each rider is different, have their own strengths, but are undoubtedly on the right track.

Trainers don't have to be mentors of young jockeys but it's interesting that Newnham is following in the footsteps of his former master Ron Quinton, who himself produced Bowman, Sam

Clipperton and Andrew Adkins among others, in developing the next generation of riders.

"It's not something I really set out to do it just sort of happened," Newnham said.

"The industry has been good to me. I've worked very hard since I was 15 but it's been very good to me and it's a great opportunity for kids to go very well as long as they work hard.

"I can remember when I was the leading jockey at Kembla Grange and Hugh Bowman came to Ron Quinton and he'd ridden about 100 winners in the bush.

"When he first came to Sydney he was going to Kembla on a Saturday and claiming three. I was going from riding a couple



(L-R): Tyler Schiller, Zac Wadick, Mark Newnham, Robbie Dolan & Tom Sherry
Picture by Bradley Photographers



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of winners every meeting to running second to this kid.

"That sort of thing is still in my memory."

So Newnham decided when he took on Robbie Dolan as an apprentice, not long after becoming a trainer following almost 20 years working with Gai Waterhouse as a jockey and later foreman, that jockeys must go through the grades like horses.

You start at the bottom.

Dolan certainly had to because Newnham didn't have enough horses at the time to give him many rides.

"He's naturally talented and naturally light, that's always going to help him," he said.

"The disadvantage he had was that I was only starting training and I couldn't support him a lot. I remember sitting Tom (Sherry) down and saying 'you've got it a lot easier than what Robbie had it'.

"He was driving all over the

state to get rides, we were sending him to Narromine and Dubbo to get him going because I didn't have horses for him to ride. He had to do a lot of the hard yards."

When Dolan was eventually allowed to progress to the metropolitan grade he'd lost his country claim and wasn't far off losing his provincial allowance, was an experienced rider with a swag of winners and able to wield a 3kg claim in town.

Then Newnham used the same plan when fellow Irishman Sherry arrived and ditto when Tyler Schiller joined the fold.

Newnham's latest apprentice, 19-year-old Zac Wadick, is currently doing the rounds in the country under the first year of the master's blueprint.

"Tyler had ridden more than 100 winners before he came to me," he said.

"If they've ridden that many winners and you still give them 3kg

at the provincial level, by the time they are coming to town they are a bit more polished and have got rid of most of the little mistakes.

"And they are ready to ride against James McDonald and High Bowman and the like. When they do start riding in town, whether it be after they've ridden 10 or 20 or 100 winners, they will be judged quickly.

"They're really good value at 3kg because they're not making a lot of those little mistakes and if they are the 3kg covers it up."

In the Newnham school there's no easy ride. He worked in his late teenage years as a travelling foreman for Bart Cummings and became the first mature age apprentice at age 21 when he applied to the Australian Jockey Club and joined the Grahame Begg stable.

He spent two years there then his final two years with Ron Quinton when Quinton made the transition to trainer from jockey.

Whether it's a reflection of how he learned, or just his personal view on taking on the responsibility that comes with riding valuable thoroughbreds, if you take on the job with Mark Newnham be prepared to put in the hard yards.

"There's no magic formula bar a lot of hard work and to follow what's been successful as far as using your claim to its full advantage and getting the best advice you can," he said.

"You find your level in racing

if you work hard. Generally, everyone who works hard and is committed in racing will get rewarded at some stage of their career.

"You're dealing with young men so they are going to make mistakes. You have to be prepared for that. Life's a bit of a rollercoaster whether you're a jockey or not."

Newnham is quite "old school" when it comes to the work ethic of his apprentices and ensures they not just ride trackwork but are actively working in the stable.

"As much as they dislike it, it's doing them a favour because it teaches them to work hard," he said.

"You learn a lot about horses being on the ground and in the stable. Your horse skills improve by doing it.

"They're not all going to be the champion apprentice. But if they turn out to be the best jockey they can be, with my help, that's all they can do. You'll get rewarded if you work hard.

"Zac was keen to come on board and start right from the start. He's a good kid and he's working hard. It's good that he sees the other boys doing the same.

"There's a lot of money on offer. One thing these kids have got going for them – go and talk to an apprentice carpenter or electrician.

"There's no way they are finishing their apprenticeship with the money that these boys are, and they are working just as hard. If they complain to me it's too hard, I'll set them pretty straight on it."

Commitment and hard work are demanded but the last thing Newnham wants is to see any of his apprentices go through being exposed to everything that comes with riding in Sydney – the pressure, the higher stakes, the public scrutiny – before he is sure they are ready. It can be discouraging and can set a young rider's progression back months or years, Newnham says he's seen it many times. Part of the curriculum is, interestingly,



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making sure an emerging jockey does his form but not just horse form – learning how to read other riders. It can be the difference between winning and losing.

"I'd tell them that in doing the form for the race you can do as much form on the jockeys as you can on the horses," he said.

"Once you know how different jockeys react in different circumstances, they'll pretty much ride to that pattern all the time.

"If you see Tim Clark crossing from a wide gate you know he's going to lead. I tell them if Tim's leading stick with Tim, he'll get the pace right. If you're there, you'll get your chance to win.

"Jockeys that go early will go early. If you're sitting behind Hughie you're going to have to go because if you're waiting for him to go it'll be too late.

"His timing will be, he'll be winning the race in the last few strides so if you're behind him you're going to run out of time."

Ultimately Newnham just wants to see the young men and women he invests his time in realise their potential. And he revels in seeing them win races – even almost winning races. Tom Sherry's close call

in the \$7.5 million Golden Eagle on Icebath in 2020 was immensely satisfying while Dolan claimed his first Group 1 last October on Profondo in the Spring Champion Stakes.

"When Tom rode Icebath in the Golden Eagle, my wife and I were cheering as loud as if it was our horse," he said.

"We wanted to see him succeed in a big race, he nearly did. I get a big kick out of them doing well.

"It's not just about them winning but if I can help them along the way that's all I'm after."

Newnham didn't start out to be a production line for champion apprentices, but after the success of Dolan and Sherry plus Schiller's emergence this season, it's fast becoming an aim.

If Schiller or Sherry, both 23, take the Theo Green Medal in 2021/22 it'll mean Newnham has the remarkable distinction of preparing four straight champion apprentices.

Sherry gained a three-month extension to his apprenticeship and is looking to achieve successive titles, just as Dolan did, though he's given his 'stablemate' Schiller a decent head start following injuries and suspension early in the season.

"It'll be interesting to see what happens this year with the two boys. It creates a healthy competition amongst the two. It improves them both," he said.

"I remember speaking to Darren Beadman about it and he always thought when he was with Theo (Green) having a couple there at a time creates a competitive environment.

"You want to be the best in your own stable.

"Whether they are champion apprentice or just turn out to be good jockeys at whatever level, if I see commitment from them, I will be committed to them."

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