ILL Currin is feeling a lot of brotherly love these days. Currin, a veteran owner and breeder and former trainer, is still tingling with emotion over a victory by My Best Brother in the $300,000 Del Mar Derby (G2) in September.

“He’s actually named after two best brothers,” explained Currin of the double entendre. “It’s a sad story. My brother, Charles, died a couple years ago of inoperable brain cancer, and shortly thereafter my Stormello died of colic.

“We had this unnamed colt, a full brother to Stormello,” continued Currin. “I asked my wife Betty for a name to honor both. She suggested My Best Brother.”

Memories of both brothers lie close to Currin’s heart. Stormello, a homebred he trained, co-owned and co-bred, gave him his first Grade 1 victory in the 2006 Hollywood Futurity (G1) and was in the early stages of a stud career at Vinery in Kentucky when he died at seven of colic in April, 2011, devastating Currin. Stormello earned $700,100 during an abbreviated career that also included a victory in the Norfolk Stakes (G2).

“Charles was the biggest fan of Stormello,” said Currin. “He lived in Florida and went to see Stormello run at Gulfstream (second in the Fountain of Youth Stakes-G2) and in the Kentucky Derby (G1, in which he finished 19th in 2007). We were very close.”

My Best Brother, a Kentucky-bred colt by Stormy Atlantic out of the Carson City mare Wilshewed, is carrying on in the best tradition for equine and human families.

My Best Brother scored his fourth victory in his last five starts and first in graded stakes company at Del Mar, leading all the way under Martin Garcia and holding off favored Howe Great by three-quarters of a length in 1:46.83 for 1 1/8 miles on firm turf.

Currin saw similarities between Stormello and My Best Brother. “Stormello was a chestnut, and My Best Brother is a bay, like Stormy Atlantic,” said Currin. “But he acts and reacts to me and his riders the same way. He is a gentleman, no stall vices, no problems. Like Stormello, he likes to get in front and do things solo. My instructions to Garcia were ‘gate to wire. Just get out in front and stay out of trouble.’”

Currin and trainer Julio Canani, who scored a record fifth victory in the Del Mar Derby, are weighing a return at Santa Anita Park in either the Twilight Derby (G2) November 2 or Breeders’ Cup Mile (G1) November 3 as leading options for the talented colt.

Currin, 76, celebrated in the winner’s circle with co-owner and co-breeder Al Eisman of San Diego, long-time partner in many of his horses.

Both have dealt with major health issues. Currin stopped training three years ago and reduced his stable following a minor stroke.
They’re trying to get another 25 years out of me. I have the same doctor as Al, who they call Lazarus. When I see Bob Baffert here in the morning, I tell him I lead him in stents, four to two.”

Baffert underwent heart surgery in Dubai in March.

Currin, who trained a barn of about 25 horses he owned or co-owned at Hollywood Park, is happy with a smaller stable and his reduced role in it. “I don’t have that many and don’t want that many,” he said. “I just want a select few.”

Currin visited three horses he has in training with Canani at 7 a.m. daily during the Del Mar meet and sees another three babies he owns regularly at nearby Rancho Paseana under Cliff Sise.

“I have known Julio for many years and know he’s a good horse trainer,” said Currin of the decision to send his horses to the Peruvian-born veteran. “That’s one of the good things about working in the stable area on this circuit for so many years. I have good backside knowledge.”

Currin joked that between him and the 73-year-old Canani, they have a “150-year-old trainer” in the barn. But he quickly pointed out that his presence is solely as a spectator and all the credit for My Best Brother belongs to Canani and his crew.

In addition to My Best Brother, Currin also

Eisman, 84, required a walker to make his way to the ceremony.

Currin and Eisman go back a half century when they sold swimming pools together in Los Angeles before Currin shifted into a successful career in land development and custom-house building. “We’re like Lum and Abner,” said Currin of the characters in an old radio show.

The pair could also be called the contemporary version of The Sunshine Boys, the senior citizens played by George Burns and Walter Matthau in the film of that name. Their personalities are so diametrically opposed – Currin perennially upbeat and Eisman the chronic doom-and-gloomer – that Currin named their first Del Mar stakes winner, Griefnaggervation in a division of the 1988 Osunitas Handicap, after his partner’s outlook on life.

“She was named because Al is a grieving businessman,” explained Currin after the Osunitas. “Everything is ‘Oh, my God, everything is grief and aggravation.’ I told him one day I was going to name a horse after him.”

From the Del Mar winner’s circle, Currin could see his condominium in Solana Beach on a hill across the street a few hundred yards away. Currin had spent many years in an estate in West Hollywood where Clark Gable once lived, but after the health crisis moved permanently to his one-time summer home with his wife.

“I was going to Hollywood Park to train one morning and couldn’t get my boots on,” recalled Currin of the 2009 scare. “I was taken to Cedars Sinai and found I had two small strokes. They didn’t do any damage. I had no heart attack but had a weakening of the heart, and three months later had four stents put in.

“That’s why I moved here, to be closer to Scripps (Clinic in nearby La Jolla),” said Currin. “They’re trying to get another 25 years out of me. I have the same doctor as Al, who they call Lazarus. When I see Bob Baffert here in the morning, I tell him I lead him in stents, four to two.” Baffert underwent heart surgery in Dubai in March.

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In addition to My Best Brother, Currin also
has two Stormello two-year-olds nearing their
debut with Canani: the colt Rose In Gold and
the filly Foxy Forever, the latter a half-sister to
graded stakes winner Memorette.

Ten days after the Del Mar Derby, Currin
enjoyed another rich payday with a valuable
half-brother to Stormello and My Best Brother
that he bred and owned. Currin sent the
handsome Bernardini colt to the Keeneland
yearling sale where he sold for the highest
price of the day on September 12. Hip
number 469, he went under the gavel for a
whopping $1.55-million to the Coolmore
Stud trio of John Magnier, Derrick Smith, and
Michael Tabor.

Currin also lodges three broodmares at
Valkyre Stud in Georgetown, Ky. including
Wilshewed. “She had a Giant’s Causeway
weanling filly and has a Giant’s Causeway colt
in the oven,” said Currin of the productive
mare.

“I go back more than 30 years at Valkyre
with Cathie Parke,” said Currin. “She had
Fondre, the first stakes winner that I owned in
partnership with W.R. Hawn during the
1970s.”

Currin grew up in North Carolina and was
introduced to horses at a young age via the
show-horse route. The erstwhile acting
student moved to California and spent time in
Pleasanton in his budding development
business that covered the Golden State from
San Francisco to San Diego and included the
building of Rancho Mirage near Palm Springs.

His meeting with Hawn and partnership in
Fondre enabled him “to get a seat on the
board of directors at Golden Gate Fields” and
a broader understanding and closer look at
the sport.

Currin, who took out his trainer’s license in
1972, maintained a low profile in his early
years when he also began Oak Tree Farm in
Pleasanton.

“I’m involved in $200-million worth of real
estate on 500 acres there,” said Currin in 1988
of an upscale area on the East Bay that
occupied most of his time. “And here I am
training horses. It’s my golf game.”

Currin and wife Betty, the parents of two
grown children, later moved to Los Angeles,
where he upgraded his Oak Tree Farm stable
during the 1990s. In addition to Stormello
and My Best Brother, he and Eisman also
campaigned Outta Here, who won the 2002
Delta Downs Jackpot Stakes, finished seventh
in the 2003 Kentucky Derby and took him to
Japan and Dubai. In addition, Currin and
Eisman won the 2007 Vernon Underwood
Stakes (G3) at Hollywood Park with
Bushwacker.

Currin also campaigned Memorette, a
grand-daughter of Fondre and a Christmas
present for Betty, who highlighted her career
with a victory in the 2006 Beverly Hills
Handicap (G2) on the Hollywood Park turf.
He also bred Haimish Hy, winner of the 2010
Hollywood Derby (G1).

“It’s been a good ride,” concluded
Currin. “I’m happy and anxious for the next
race.”

Stormello defeats Liquidity to win the 2006 Hollywood Futurity at Hollywood Park to
give Bill Currin his first Grade 1 success

In a sport desperate for visibility and success,
Breeders’ Cup’s policies apparently are received
now simply as “right,” even when they aren’t.
No host track, no regulator, no entity at all, is in
a position now to object or even to debate their
merits. This is perhaps the most startling
reflection of the true state of the sport
worldwide, but particularly in America. With
Great Britain and France finally waking up with
their own spectacular alternatives to Breeders’
Cup, serious threats are appearing.
Where this will all lead is anyone’s guess, but
ultimately the top of the pyramid can only be as
solid as its foundation. Given technological
advances in global electronic distribution, as
well as inflation, there can be little doubt that,
for now, total wagering on Breeders’ Cup races
will continue to grow. How real this growth is
should be subject to scrutiny, as should the
marketing and pricing of the entire Breeders’
Cup experience, on television and especially at
host tracks.

Should competition among ideas in
management and marketing disappear from
American racing at its highest level, along with
true innovation and realistic appraisals of
public interest, can we have any doubt of the
result?