Trainer Jerry Fanning sat in his mezzanine box overlooking the finish line at Santa Anita Park earlier this year and reviewed a career that has spanned more than a half century.

Fanning, a youthful 76, has been known for a wit as sharp as his eye for horses. A summa cum laude graduate of the old school of training, Fanning does not talk much but says a lot.

“It used to be one guy owned 10 or 15 horses; now 10 or 15 guys own one horse,” said Fanning. “That’s the biggest change I’ve seen. Guys used to just train for one stable.”

Fanning, who currently trains 18 horses at Santa Anita, was asked about the ideal size of a stable. “I’ve always had enough horses,” he replied. “One is enough if you’ve got the right horse.”

Asked about his formula for training success, Fanning said, “You’ve got to have a little horse sense. There are some people who have never been around a horse who would be okay.”

Fanning has observed the vicissitudes of the sport during a lifetime in it. “I’ve seen the good days, and I’ve seen the bad days, and it’s hard for me to see where we're going.”

The good days have outnumbered the bad for Fanning, who has saddled winners on the Southern California circuit every year since he began training on it regularly in 1967.

“From 1970 to 1995, I had a real good run,” understated Fanning of a period when he averaged seven figures in purses earned each year and five times went over the $2 million mark as a perennial power.

Stakes victories have not come as frequently during the past decade, but Fanning proved he can still be dangerous when he sent out Booyah to an upset in the $125,000 Ralph Hinds Invitational Handicap at Fairplex Park in September, almost 50 years to the day he saddled his first winner.

Booyah, who paid $39.60 for a $2 win ticket, showed speed from the start under Joseph Talamo and battled back gamely to win by a head after being headed by Freesgood.

Fanning won the race, previously called the Pomona Handicap, for the seventh time but first in 23 years. He dominated during a decade when he won with Our First Delight in 1976, Mr. Dan in 1977, Stiff Diamond in 1981, Drouilly in 1982 and 1983 and Artichoke in 1985. Second in career wins at the track, he was inducted into the Fairplex Park Hall of Fame in 2007.

Booyah, a 5-year-old horse, is owned by automobile dealer Lathrop Hoffman, a client for more than a decade. Hoffman is a relative short-timer among Fanning’s owners, who tend to stick.
Fanning and [John] Harrison campaigned several homebred stakes winners, but none more memorable than Little Reb, who left Triple Crown winner Affirmed in his wake ... offer to manage a ranch in Riverside Fanning of a stint from 1959-67 at the Modglin before it was purchased and who owned a nearby ranch and feed became lifelong friends, as well as owners homebred stakes winners, but none more Crown winner Affirmed in his wake en route Malibu Stakes. “I thought he was a cinch,” winner.

Reb’s sire, Reb’s Policy. “I thought he was 1970’s,” said Fanning of the California-
“I don’t know why he was so long,” continued Fanning. “(Fred) Hooper’s horse, Copelan, was out here that winter, and I knew we could outrun him. Croeso had more speed.”

Fanning never found out how Croeso would have fared in the Kentucky Derby. “I sent him to Turfway Park and he chipped a knee training there,” said Fanning of an injury that would sideline him until that autumn. Desert Wine continued to flow as smoothly as his name, adding a second-place finish in the Preakness to his resume. Fanning thought he might have done even better. “He had a hitch in his hind leg the whole time and busted an abscess out of that foot two days after the Preakness,” said Fanning.

Desert Wine, co-owned by Dan Agnew and Cardiff, returned in 1984 and won the Strub, Californian, and Hollywood Gold Cup before retiring with $1,618,043, the most of any Fanning trainee.

Fanning would go on to train three more millionaires: the mare Top Corsage, who won the Grade 1 Spinster Stakes at Keeneland in 1986; Present Value, who won seven stakes in 1989 while criss-crossing the nation from Portland Meadows to Chicago to Detroit to Minnesota to Santa Anita; and Pleasant Variety, an $80,000 claim who won the Grade 1 San Luis Rey Stakes in 1991.

Fanning produced plenty of other highlights. Who could forget A Kiss For Luck, the California-bred mare who won the Grade 1 Vanity Handicap in 1983? Or Akinemod, the Jack Klugman-owned filly who won the 1990 El Encino Stakes by 18 lengths? Or Star Recruit, the 59-to-1 longshot who missed winning the 1995 Santa Anita Handicap by a nose to Sir Beaufort?

Greatness was predicted for Bag when he broke his maiden at second asking in 1991 by 16 lengths in a six-furlong race for 2-year-olds at Del Mar. “Bag might have been as good a horse as I’ve had, but I couldn’t keep him sound,” said Fanning.

Fanning said that Hyperborean, winner of the 1983 Swaps Stakes, might have accomplished more had he been gelded and hurt himself, said Fanning of a career-ending injury the following year.

Fanning-trained Kings Island led all the way and upset 2-to-5 favorite Greinton by a head in the 1985 Sunset Handicap, costing the runner-up a $1 million bonus. “He looked like a quarter horse, but could run a mile and five-eighths,” said Fanning of the English import.

Fanning also provided a fountain of knowledge to former assistants Jerry Hollendorfer and Jack Carava. Hollendorfer, who went on to become the fourth trainer in North America to win 5,000 career races, credited Fanning for much of his success.

“Jerry Fanning was a guy who never said much, but I learned a lot from him by observing,” said Hollendorfer. “He was really good at seeing potential problems before they came up in horses and taking preventative measures.”

Carava, who assisted Fanning eight years before going on his own in 1992 to become a solid fixture on the circuit, also learned greatly from his former boss.

“He took care of each horse as an individual,” said Carava. “Pleasant Variety was a claiming horse who had been lugging out, and he got him out of that bad habit. He placed Present Value in the right spots and won stakes around the country with him. Akinemod was brilliant, and he tried to ration her speed so she could go long.”

Fanning the flames of optimism for another productive year, the septuagenarian trainer has also learned how to ration his speed and go long.