

# Back From *the* Brink

SWEET HOMECOMING CHOREOGRAPHED  
FOR BALLERINA BOOGIE

By KRISTEN KOVATCH BENTLEY



Ballerina Boogie (above) while she was racing and in the care of trainer Justin Jeansonne in 2019, and (below) in 2021, a week after she returned to his barn to be cared for by Jade Favre, who said the mare had the worst case of rain rot she had ever seen



Jade Favre had been in touch with the owner of Ballerina Boogie ever since the filly was claimed out of her fiancé Justin Jeansonne's barn in late 2019—the same way she tried to stay in touch with the connections of any horse that came through their program. The price he was asking for the mare, who had been turned out after a few races in early 2020, was out of Favre's budget, but she stayed in the mare's orbit.

A year later, after mentioning that the hired caretaker who was supposed to be feeding the mare in fact hadn't been taking care of her at all, the owner finally dropped the price, and with no further questions asked other than requesting a photo, Favre bought Ballerina Boogie back. She looked a little skinny in the photo, but nothing Favre wasn't confident she could rehabilitate. When a friend picked the mare up, however, she found a horse in much worse condition than she had imagined.

## 'OUR HORSES CAN COME HOME ANY TIME'

Within the Thoroughbred aftercare community, consisting not only of non-profit placement organizations but a wide network of direct market entities and individuals, Favre is a household name through her Jade Favre Sport Horses. Working as a one-woman show, she provides a critical service on the backside of Louisiana race-tracks where Jeansonne is based, connecting horses ready to retire with her network of more than 9,000 followers on Facebook—as well as sharing her daily behind-the-scenes look at how a racing stable is run to an expansive equestrian community. Her efforts illustrate well how direct market aftercare can work alongside non-profit organizations to serve a wider population of horses.

While Favre is always happy to list horses for any of the trainers she works with at various tracks in Louisiana, she spends a lot of time keeping tabs on horses who came through Jeansonne's barn, whether they were horses they owned directly or horses that ran for other owners. "I try to keep track of them all," she details. "Sometimes it's not always possible; you just lose them. But that's just claiming

horses, and that's what our barn is. Our horses can come home any time."

That was the case with Ballerina Boogie, who came to Jeansonne's program in her 3-year-old season as a new claim by her owners. "We had her for a whole summer," Favre recalls. "She was a really quick turf sprinter, but you never knew what she was going to do—she'd duck in or dive out. I remember the first day going to work, (Jeansonne) and I were walking to the track and here she comes running through the barns having dumped the gallop boy."

"Boogie" had certainly made her impression, but was claimed in late 2019. Favre went to work in her typical fashion, staying in touch with the new owner and making it clear that the mare could always come back and she would help find her a good home. When she finally got Boogie back in 2021 after a year of being turned out, she was in a very different condition than when she had left her barn.

"She had the worst rain rot I had ever seen," Favre details. "She wasn't just skinny—I think if she had been left in that pasture another couple of weeks, she wouldn't have made it."

## FINDING BOOGIE'S WAY

Favre rehabbed Boogie at the track, rather than send her to a farm. "I didn't trust anyone else to do it," she says. "I knew what I needed to do for her, and I wanted to keep my eye on her myself." On her own dime, Favre patiently treated the rain rot and put Boogie on a careful refeeding program. Having shared news of Boogie's rescue on her Facebook page, Favre put together a designated Facebook group for fans to follow the mare's recovery.

Notably, it did not take Boogie long to rebuild her weight and heal her rain rot, indicating just how little care had been taken of the mare in the prior year. She bloomed under Favre's care, to the level that she and Jeansonne ended up sending her to Kentucky to be bred to Spun to Run before heading to their farm. Unfortunately, Boogie slipped that foal late in the year in 2021.

Rather than try to breed her again,

Favre decided to pivot. "She was young enough, she was sound—she could go do something else," she describes. She connected Boogie with a young woman in Mississippi who began developing the mare as a barrel racer, but maintained the first right of refusal—which was how Boogie wound up with Favre yet again in early 2023. That was when Melissa Meitzen of Huntsville, Texas, jumped at the chance to own her.



**A very healthy "Boogie" and her new owner, Melissa Meitzen, were the highest-placed duo in the Former Broodmare division of the Barrel Racing discipline at the 2023 Retired Racehorse Project's Thoroughbred Makeover**

"I had followed Jade for awhile," Meitzen details. "She always posted stuff from the backside and the horses they had in the barn. There was just something about Boogie; I really liked her and she seemed to have a good attitude." Having followed Boogie's story from racehorse to rehabilitation, Meitzen reached out to Favre. "Who doesn't want to take home a horse they followed on the track? That's the dream."

Simultaneously, the Retired Racehorse Project had recently announced its pilot Former Broodmare division for the 2023 Thoroughbred Makeover, open to mares who had left the breeding industry with a reported foal or cover in the past two breeding seasons. While Boogie had lost her foal, she was eligible through the reported cover, and as a Makeover veteran looking for a new way to participate, Meitzen submitted her application. At the Makeover, Boogie and Meitzen were the highest-placed pair in the Former Broodmare division of the Barrel Racing discipline.

Boogie is likely a permanent addition to Meitzen's barn. She has goals this year to continue developing her as a barrel racer, but also recently re-certified as a mounted patrol horse for Meitzen's part-time employer Alpha & Omega Mounted Patrol. Meitzen typically works for the Houston division, patrolling the Woodlands Mall and surrounding area as well as the Pavilion, an outdoor coliseum. "You have to have a good horse," she details. "That's why I love the Thoroughbreds—they're exposed to so much at the track, so seeing large groups of people or fireworks, they just think, 'Oh, another day at the office.' It's also a lot of opportunity to share how racehorses go on to do other things."

## WORK TO DO

Favre still feels guilty about not being able to get Ballerina Boogie sooner. "I couldn't afford to buy her at that time at the price he was asking," she recalls. While Boogie's story has a happy ending, parts of her story are repeated over and over again with other horses moving through the industry. "Some trainers you can call every day," Favre shares. "And they still won't sell the horse back to you, even if the horse isn't running well or is turned out on the farm somewhere."

Despite those few horses that haunt her, Favre keeps working hard as a listing agent for the horses and horsemen of Louisiana's tracks. By her own estimate, she places an average of 150 horses a year, connecting Thoroughbreds exiting racing with professionals, amateurs, and juniors alike who develop them for their next chapters.

With direct sale accounting for more than 50% of horses registered for the Thoroughbred Makeover, listing agents such as Favre are providing a critical service, bringing the racing and equestrian industries closer together for the good of the horse. There's plenty of work to do to continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of aftercare, but there's a growing network of people working for the benefit of the horses ready to help. **BH**