

Dream Role

How a girl from icy Norway rose to one of the hottest jobs in American racing in just four years

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Sabine Langvad was an accomplished rider back in Norway before she arrived on the big stage in the US. Photo: Roger Svalsrød



FOUR YEARS AGO, former amateur rider Sabine Langvad ran away from the harsh winter in her native Norway. She packed her bags and crossed The Pond.

Destination: Gulfstream Park, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. “I travelled with my best friend, Fanny Olsson,” she recalls. “We were looking for a working vacation in the sun.”

Langvad is still Stateside. This August she was offered a dream job — as assistant to Chad Brown, the world’s #1 trainer on TRC Global Rankings. How did she get to this position from a tiny, icy racing nation? It sure didn’t happen overnight.

“It’s been a long, varied and educational journey with nothing but crazy hard work,” Langvad says. “But it has been wonderful. I love working with horses and would not swap it for anything. I’m very pleased with the direction my career is taking these days.”

And so she should be. The Norwegian rider, who partnered four winners from 60 rides at Øvrevoll Galopp racecourse outside Oslo, where the quality of racing is a far cry from Saratoga and Belmont Park, is today working with star Thoroughbreds like Domestic Spending, Search Results and Raging Bull.

“This is a completely different world to what I grew up with,” Langvad says. “Chad’s operation is big. He trains more horses than there are in total in Norway, and his program is very impressive — almost military style, yet flexible — and run in a way that makes the horses feel comfortable.”

Langvad’s background is not exactly standard for a top trainer’s assistant. Normally, people who get that kind of job have been involved in top-class racing from a young age and have worked for various other trainers previously. Certainly Langvad was born into a racing life as both father

Tollef and mother Trine were amateur riders. Tollef, now retired, still trains four horses “to keep busy” in Norway.

Young Sabine received a foundation similar to UK-based rider William Buick, who was also brought up in Norway and then moved to Britain as a teenager. Both were already accomplished riders when they arrived on a bigger stage.

“Trainers over here [in the US] find it hard to get good staff, quality work riders, and work morale isn’t always good,” she reflects. “So, if one is serious and reliable, then there are opportunities. When Fanny and I came to Gulfstream Park, we soon found some work.”

As soon as trainers based at Florida’s main racing venue noticed that these energetic girls could ride, they began using them for morning work. Langvad decided she would like to make a permanent move to the US. “I was hooked, I guess,” she says. “And I knew that a career in horseracing would be more likely in the States than back home, so I began the process of obtaining a work permit. It was easier than I had anticipated, though it did require professional help. It was a drawn-out process and it cost me a lot of money.”

“I contacted a company called Champion Sports Management (<https://www.championssportsmanagement.com/>) as they specialise in helping sports people in these matters. You have to apply as a person with special skills, and I applied as a rider.

“The whole process of getting a permanent visa and work permit took three to four months and it cost me \$6,600. I was back in Norway during this period, and I had to go for an interview at the US Embassy in Oslo before being given the green light.”



As soon as that light changed from amber to green, Langvad was booking her next flight from Norway to Florida. This one was one-way only. She was working for Luis Duco, a smaller trainer mainly with claiming horses to begin with, then she was offered a job for world top 30 trainer Mike Maker.

"Initially, I was working only as a work rider for Maker," she says. "This was during the 2018 season, and, after a while, Mike asked me if I would like to be in charge of his Florida division as he headed out to other tracks in the summer. It was an offer I could not resist, but it was a big responsibility."

"Looking back, I have to admit that I knew little about what I had said yes to. It was a big change from just jumping on horses in the mornings. I had about 25 horses at the time and I got the taste of saddling a stakes winner."

After this short spell with Maker, Langvad went back to freelance riding, but it did not take long before another job offer came along. "Saffie Joseph, who I had ridden a lot of work for, approached me in August 2018," she says. "He had just been sent an additional 16 horses virtually overnight, all owned by Frank Calabrese, and Saffie needed a new rider. I accepted and rode full-time at Gulfstream for Saffie to begin with. I later became involved in other tasks, including laser treatments, using Magnawave."

Langvad had worked as a veterinarian's assistant at Bjerke Dyrehospital in Norway, so she had experience with laser treatments.

Joseph clearly realised she had more talents than as a work rider. "He suggested that I should become an assistant," she says. "His number of horses was steadily climbing. He went up from around 40 to 200 horses fairly quickly. It was such an expansion, and Saffie was beginning to get noticed."

"His breakthrough as a stakes trainer came with the colt Math Wizard. Saffie claimed him for just \$25,000 — very cheap — and turned him into a high-class runner. He became Saffie's first Grade 1 winner, and he meant a lot to me as well as I was riding him every day and travelled with him when he won the Pennsylvania Derby. He was also fifth in the Breeders' Cup Classic at Santa Anita, where he was the best 3-year-old in the field."

As a result of the success of Math Wizard another star arrived at the stable — the colt NY Traffic, who was in the same ownership. "NY Traffic took me on a journey to the top level," Langvad reflects. "I was travelling with him to the big races, and he kept on improving, from running second in the Risen Star Stakes and Louisiana Derby to losing by just a nose to the champion Authentic in the Haskell Stakes at Monmouth Park, one of the top Grade 1 events in America. I rode him in all his works and he became very special to me."

Langvad was given an even bigger job in 2021 as she was in full charge of Joseph's team of horses based in New York. She saddled the top sprinter Mischevious Alex to win the prestigious Carter Handicap, a G1 at Aqueduct in the spring, and also handled Drain The Clock, one of the best 3-year-old sprinters around and winner of the G1 Woody Stephens Stakes on Belmont Stakes day.

So, what does it take to hack it in a job like Langvad's? Words like stamina, dedication and fitness spring to mind.

"When I was offered the job as New York assistant, I drove all the way from Fort Lauderdale on my own," she says. "It was two long days behind the wheel, but I'm used to long hours. Running the NY branch meant that I had to be in the stable at

Above left — Giving unraced 2-year-old filly Dreams Unwind a work-out at Saratoga for Chad Brown. Photo: Katie Okerstrom

Above right — With the 3-year-old filly Technical Analysis and jockey Jose Ortiz after their victory in the G2 Lake Placid Stakes at Saratoga for Chad Brown. Photo: Bob Coglianesi Photos

Above left — Working the high-level performer NY Traffic, a 4-year-old colt, for trainer Saffie Joseph

Above right — Leading Dunbar Road in the parade ring at Saratoga before the G1 Personal Ensign Stakes at Saratoga. The mare finished fourth. Photo: Katie Okerstrom

four in the morning, check all the horses, get them ready for the day, then prepare for the races on racedays. I was riding 12 to 13 horses daily, using two saddles, so I could switch quickly from horse to horse — just give the one I had just worked to the groom and jump onto the next one.

"The track opens for work at 05.30 and closes at 10.30. It's pretty relentless. After that, there were entries to be made, possible claims to plan, and administration work. Really, really hard work, but great fun — not least since the horses were running so well. At the end of the meet, our runners had achieved a 35 percent win rate and 75 percent top-three rate. It was incredible, and I learnt so much during this 3-month period."

After such a successful campaign at Belmont Park, Langvad's next port of call was Saratoga Springs for the top-quality Saratoga meet, stretching from mid-July to early September.

It was hard to follow up on the success at Belmont. "Saratoga is so, so tough," she says. "Winning there is about as hard as it gets."

Well into the Saratoga meet, another job offer came up. Chad Brown had noticed Langvad's work. "He kept on mentioning that he had a job for me if I was interested," she says. "After giving it some thought, I decided it would be a good move. It was time to move on."

Jumping seamlessly into her new role, Langvad was soon seen assisting Brown in the paddock at Saratoga. Any time is a good time to join the team if you land a job with Brown, but Langvad could hardly have found a better time to do so. His runners had gone close on several occasions but, during the week she joined, his team turned a corner and the winners kept on coming.

"The filly Technical Analysis, one of the first I helped Chad with on a raceday, won the Lake

George Stakes," she says. "Chad's team became very hot. We were winning races all the time and soon he was back on top of the trainers' standings [for the Saratoga meet]."

This was pure luck for Langvad, of course, but not for Brown. For him, winning races is never by chance. "The way he works and the extremely well-bred horses he has in his care make a phenomenal combination," Langvad says. "He is a seriously good horseman, and I'm impressed by how well he keeps up with every horse on such a big team."

"He is also a first-rate person, down to earth and helpful. When I had such success at Belmont, he often stopped by my barn to congratulate, and also told me to ask him if I needed any advice. To me, that was a great inspiration."

Langvad will now be back at Belmont Park. Then it's on to Gulfstream for the winter. "Hopefully I will also get to the Breeders' Cup in California," she says. "I have never been there before." It's long odds-on she will be there this year with Brown's powerful team.

Langvad's riding career got off to a flying start as she won on her first mount, partnering the filly Priceless at Øvrevoll back in 2014. "It was good fun," she says. "But my race-riding career wasn't great, to be honest, though I did win three more races."

Great it may not have been, but it was the first vital step on the ladder leading to a life working with world-class racehorses.

Does she see herself as a future trainer?

"At first, I always said no," she says. "But lately, well, I have changed my mind. So many things have to fall into place, though most of all you have to have the right backing from owners, but, yes, today I feel that I would — one day — like to be a trainer." 🐾