

Win puts Corinthian in elite class

PEDIGREE HANDICAPPING



LAUREN STICH

LAS VEGAS – When will they take Corinthian seriously? It was hardly a surprise that he won the Metropolitan Handicap, but it was a surprise (actually, a delightful surprise to those who bet him) that he paid \$21.60. Corinthian is simply among the best older runners in the country.

Corinthian showed his quality crossing the finish line first in last year's Fountain of Youth Stakes, but his immaturity and erratic behavior cost him the victory as he was disqualified to third. Training for the Triple Crown, he developed a hairline fracture that required time off but not surgery. When he returned at Saratoga in late July, he had a persistent skin rash and finished a lackluster third.

Trainer Jimmy Jerkens decided to give him plenty of time off, and when he returned to the races this past February at Gulfstream, he was simply dazzling, winning an optional claiming

allowance by 9 1/2 lengths, leaving last year's Belmont Stakes winner, Jazil, in his wake. To see Corinthian ontrack warming up for that victory, it was clear this was a new and imposing version of the jittery 3-year-old seen the year before.

Corinthian garnered his first added-money event in winning the Gulfstream Park Handicap over the hard-knocking Hesanoltsalt, but lost all chance in his next start, the Excelsior Handicap, when he reared straight up in the air as the gates opened. Drawing a line through that non-effort, Corinthian was certainly worthy of attention in the Met Mile, and had been training as well as ever for the race.

Corinthian has now won 5 of 9 starts, with one second and a third. The Met is his most important victory. As good as he was in winning the Met, he may be better at middle distances, and prestigious Grade 1 races such as the nine-furlong Whitney and Woodward handicaps loom as he heads for his ultimate goal, the Breeders' Cup Classic.

Corinthian's strong family tree

In my column last week, I wrote that a victory in the Met Mile by Corinthian – more than any of his opponents – would immediately stamp him as an attractive stallion. By the

very popular and versatile Pulpit (one of A.P. Indy's most successful sons at stud), he is out of the unraced Easy Goer mare Multiply and is a half-brother to stakes winner Desert Hero (Sea Hero) and the promising 3-year-old Vitruvius (E Dubai), who is undefeated in two starts. In addition to the Pulpit-A.P. Indy-Seattle Slew sire line on top, Corinthian's first four dams are by Easy Goer, Spectacular Bid, Nijinsky II, and Forli. He also descends in direct tail-female line (dam, dam's dam, dam's granddam, etc.) from Rough Shod II, one of racing's blue hens and one of the most important foundation mares of the last century. She produced Moccasin, an undefeated champion at 2 and the only filly ever to be voted co-Horse of the Year (in 1965, along with Roman Brother). In addition, males descending from Rough Shod II became prominent stallions and include Nureyev, Sadler's Wells, Apalachee, Thatch, Stormy Atlantic, King Pellinore, Lt. Stevens, Ridan, Jade Robbery, and Numerous.

Political Force joins top ranks, too

Running a big race in the Met at 24-1 to be second to Corinthian was Political Force, a well-bred 4-year-old son of Unbridled's Song out of multiple stakes winner Glitter Woman (Glitterman), a half-sister to stakes winner Unbridled Elaine (Unbridled's Song), whose

biggest win came in the 2001 Breeders' Cup Distaff. Political Force showed potential at 2, finishing second in the Nashua Stakes behind Bluegrass Cat, but was on the shelf for nine months after that race, and his four races at 3 were disappointing considering his juvenile form.

Like Corinthian, Political Force has blossomed as an older runner. He won his first two starts this year, was third in the Skip Away Handicap when he was just one length behind A.P. Arrow and Rehoboth, and finished second in the Westchester Handicap, one length behind the highly regarded Utopia, but was disqualified to third for lugging in. With a strong rally in the Met, his best effort to date, Political Force joins an impressive roster of older runners, topped by last year's Horse of the Year Invasor.

In addition to Invasor, the older division includes Corinthian, Discreet Cat, Lava Man, Lawyer Ron, Master Command, Magna Graduate, Sweetnorthernst, and Utopia. All (except for Lava Man, who will only race in California) could eventually clash with this year's best 3-year-olds – Street Sense, Curlin, and Hard Spun – in what would be a memorable Breeders' Cup Classic at Monmouth Park on Oct. 27.

Glimpse of how good Bob and John can be

By MARY RAMPPELLINI

GRAND PRAIRIE, Texas – Bob and John indicated his intent to make an impact on the handicap ranks this year with a gritty neck win over Sweetnorthernst in the Grade 3, \$400,000 Lone Star Park Handicap on Monday.

"We're hopeful to have one of the better handicap horses in the country this year," said John Adger, bloodstock and racing manager for Stonerside Stable, which owns Bob and John.

The Lone Star was Bob and John's second start of the year following a close second-place finish in the Grade 3 Texas Mile here April 28. The Texas Mile was his first start since September.

Lone Star Notes

"That race, it really woke him up," Bob Baffert, who trains Bob and John, said of the Texas Mile. "When he came back to California, you could see the big difference in him. It really tightened him up.

"We gave him the winter off and let him develop. Hopefully he'll have a great summer and a good fall and be a big force in the Breeders' Cup Classic."

Bob and John stalked the pace in second early in the Lone Star Handicap, tracking Jonesboro, who led the field through fractions of 24.42 seconds for the opening quarter and 48.53 for the half-mile mark. Bob and John (\$4.80) moved to the lead approaching the quarter pole, and was game to the wire, covering 1 1/16 miles over a track rated sloppy in 1:45.02.

Sweetnorthernst, the 3-5 favorite, stalked the pace in third, and put in his bid through the stretch under Mario Pino. He finished 6 3/4 lengths in front of third-place finisher Jonesboro.

Bob and John, who won the Grade 1 Wood Memorial last year, was scheduled to fly back to Southern California on Tuesday. He will be considered for the Grade 1, \$750,000 Hollywood Gold Cup at Hollywood Park on June 30, said Baffert. Bob and John gave Baffert his 13th stakes win at Lone Star, and his second in the Lone Star Park Handicap following the



LONE STAR PARK

Bob and John (right) beats Sweetnorthernst by a neck in the Lone Star Park Handicap.

Stonerside-owned Congaree in 2002. Baffert, who was inducted into Lone Star's Hall of Fame earlier in the meet, intended to be here Monday but said his 2 1/2-year-old son, Bode, came down with a virus last Friday. Bode landed in the emergency room for three hours on Monday, and was released just prior to the Lone Star.

"He's okay," said Baffert. "They were doing these tests on him. I got home just in time to see the last half-mile, which was the best part. Once Bob and John crossed the finish line, we all felt so much better."

Bob and John was ridden by Garrett Gomez, who won three graded stakes on the Lone Star Million card. Gomez also won the Grade 3, \$200,000 Ouija Board Distaff with Lady of

Venice and the Grade 3, \$200,000 Dallas Turf Cup with Embossed.

Gomez had one other mount on the card, finishing fourth in the \$100,000 Pin Oak Stud USA Stakes with Western Prize. All told, his mounts here Monday earned \$486,000.

The field for the Lone Star Handicap was reduced to four starters with the defection of Silent Pleasure. He was scratched because of swelling in his hind ankle, believed to be the result of a spider bite, said his co-owner and trainer, Howard Scarberry. In his last start, Silent Pleasure won the Texas Mile over Bob and John.

Wrenice out until fall

Wrenice, a multiple stakes winner who was being pointed for a start in the \$100,000

Stonerside for 3-year-old fillies here Monday, has had a minor physical setback and will resume racing in the fall, said her trainer, Randy Mayfield.

"She pulled a little minor check ligament," he said. "Very minor. She came up sore after a gallop. It's nothing that time won't heal. She'll get a little R and R for 30 days."

Wrenice, who was injured last Tuesday, has been walking the shed row at Lone Star. She has been treated with a counter-irritant solution on the injury site, which is behind her right knee.

"I just put a light blister on her, and I think that helps with the healing process a lot quicker," said Mayfield. "It gets the blood flowing. I do that on a lot of my horses, and it tightens them up, too."

Wrenice was the champion Texas-bred 2-year-old filly of 2006, and has won 7 of 11 starts and \$359,346.

Fillies sprint in feature

Nicely Done, Petit Jean Creek, and Tear Jerker are among the top contenders in the featured eighth race Thursday night, a six-furlong, second-level allowance for fillies and mares. All three come out of a May 11 allowance won by Moroccan Rose, who one race later finished second in the \$100,000 Valid Expectations Stakes on Monday.

Nicely Done was second to Moroccan Rose, while Petit Jean Creek finished third, and Tear Jerker fourth. The field also includes impressive maiden winner Most Beautiful.

☐ Ramsey Zimmerman, the leading rider here, has been suspended seven calendar days, beginning Thursday, for a riding infraction. Zimmerman's mount, Imahonkytonkgirl, won a May 24 trial race for the Texas Thoroughbred Association Sales Futurity, but was disqualified for interference in the stretch and placed second in the five-furlong race for 2-year-olds.

☐ Kelsi Purcell won the first race of her riding career with Expect an Echo (\$10.20) in Monday's second race, a 5 1/2-furlong maiden claimer.