

**AQUEDUCT**

# Vitruvius bears watching

**By DAVID GRENING**

OZONE PARK, N.Y. – It is unlikely he will have an impact on this year's Triple Crown, but a 3-year-old worth keeping an eye on is Vitruvius, who won a first-level allowance race by 3 3/4 lengths here on Wednesday.

**Aqueduct Notes**

After winning his debut in gate-to-wire fashion at Gulfstream, Vitruvius, a half-brother to graded stakes winner Corinthian by E Dubai, demonstrated the ability to come from off the pace in his allowance win. After breaking slowly under Kent Desormeaux, Vitruvius raced in the second flight behind three speed horses, made a dramatic move toward the leaders leaving the half-mile pole, and struck the front turning for home.

Though he drifted out some in deep stretch, Vitruvius covered the mile in 1:35.36 and earned a Beyer Speed Figure of 102.

"He rated nice," said Jimmy Jerkens, trainer of Vitruvius. "[Desormeaux] said he almost rated too good. He said he got [off] the bridle and he got a little concerned. That's why he gunned him when he did; he wanted to get him into the race. He had only one start and he was in front all the way. It's a whole

different thing being behind horses. He did good. He's got nice acceleration, that's for sure."

Jerkens said he would prefer to take his time with Vitruvius and not rush him back into something like the Grade 3 Withers, a one-turn mile here on April 28. Some options for his next start may include the Barbaro Stakes (formerly the Sir Barton) at Pimlico on May 19, the Peter Pan at Belmont on May 20, or a second-level allowance race.

"There isn't much to him," Jerkens said.

Dr. Steve Carr, the racing manager for Centennial Farms, the owner of Vitruvius, said he would like to point to a summer campaign that includes the Dwyer at Belmont and the Jim Dandy at Saratoga, both in July.

**Desire to Excel fitter now**

Desire to Excel returns to where it all began when she runs in Saturday's Grade 2, \$150,000 Comely Stakes here.

It was 360 days ago when Desire to Excel won her career debut by a neck in a 4 1/2-furlong maiden race over the main track. She was the 6-5 favorite that day. She followed that win with a 24-1 upset victory in the Astoria Stakes at Belmont, beating the highly regarded Octave.

Desire to Excel injured a knee

when stumbling at the start of the Grade 3 Schuylerville – a race in which she managed to get second – and underwent minor surgery. She was off the remainder of the year.

Desire to Excel made her 3-year-old debut on March 17 in the Florida Oaks, finishing fifth in her first start around two turns.

"I know she was a short horse running up at Tampa," said Kelly Breen, the trainer of Desire to Excel. "I think the Comely is an excellent race for us. I think a one-turn mile is going to hit her in the head."

**What next for Magna Graduate?**

With the Pimlico Special scrapped for this year, trainer Todd Pletcher is in a quandary when it comes to where next to run Excelsior Breeders' Cup winner Magna Graduate.

Pletcher said the Metropolitan Handicap on May 28 is a possibility, though a one-turn mile may not be the best conditions for Magna Graduate. Also, Pletcher is planning to run Oaklawn Handicap winner Lawyer Ron in the Met Mile.

"Everything around is kind of \$100,000," Pletcher said. "I'm not going to rule out the Met, though he's probably a little better at a mile and an eighth. We might wait for the Stephen Foster."

The Stephen Foster is on June 16 at Churchill Downs.

# Scenery change may help Boca Grande

**By DAVID GRENING**

OZONE PARK, N.Y. – Trainer Shug McGaughey hopes a return to New York results in a return to form for his graded stakes-winning filly Boca Grande. Trainer Todd Pletcher hopes his filly Perfect Forest didn't leave her best races in south Florida.

Boca Grande and Perfect Forest look like the main threats among the nine 3-year-old fillies entered in Saturday's Grade 2, \$150,000 Comely Stakes going one mile at Aqueduct.

Boca Grande, a daughter of A.P. Indy, won 2 of 3 starts as a 2-year-old, including the Grade 2 Demoiselle Stakes over Aqueduct's main track last November. She wintered at Gulfstream Park, but McGaughey didn't feel that Boca Grande was handling the track in her training. In her only race of the winter, Boca Grande finished sixth of seven in the Grade 2 Forward Gal.

"I think she was fighting that track," said McGaughey, who noted that Boca Grande needed a shoe repair in the paddock prior to the Forward Gal.

McGaughey believes that Boca Grande has trained like "a different horse" upon returning to New York. Boca Grande will break from post 4 under Mike Smith and 122 pounds.

Perfect Forest went winless in

two starts as a 2-year-old. But she appeared to thrive in Florida, winning a maiden race by 9 3/4 lengths and a first-level allowance by four lengths without ever feeling a jockey's whip.

"She's a filly who showed some talent in the morning," Pletcher said. "She ran okay [at 2], not quite as well as we expected her too. She never left the barn, we gave her some time, and she filled out a bit, grew up a bit, and came up with two better performances."

Perfect Forest, who breaks from post 3 under Ramon Dominguez, may have a tactical advantage in a race without much speed.

Fee Fi Fo Fum is an intriguing participant. After winning her debut going nine furlongs on turf, she ran third in the Grade 2 Bonnie Miss going nine furlongs on dirt. Jockey Joe Bravo had to take a hold of her a couple of times down the backside and told trainer Jimmy Jerkens that may have cost her the race.

"She ran terrific; I thought she was gaining at the end," Jerkens said.

Desire to Excel, a stakes winner at 2, figures to improve off her fifth-place finish in the 1 1/16-mile Florida Oaks on March 17. That was her first start in nine months and first around two turns. She won her career debut over this track 360 days ago.

# Card canceled after jocks refuse to ride

**By DAVID GRENING**

OZONE PARK, N.Y. – Racing was canceled at Aqueduct after the second race on Thursday after the jockeys refused to ride, citing unsafe track conditions.

Heavy rains turned the track into a sea of slop prior to Thursday's opener. After riding the first race over a sealed sloppy track, the jockeys met as a group and decided to ride the second. It was after the second race that several riders said the track was uneven and had washed out in several spots. They informed management they would not ride the remainder of the card.

"Just very inconsistent, a lot of wash-out spots that you couldn't even get close to the rail," said Mike Smith, who finished last aboard Four Saratoga in the second. "The riders who rode the first thought it was okay in the first and didn't really like it in the second. You could get a horse or two that's going to handle it, as you saw, and then you're going to get five or six that are eased; that's just not horse racing. The horse I rode didn't handle it at all. She was

having a lot of trouble with it, hitting some spots that I didn't care to have to go through again. We chose the safer route."

Jockey Norberto Arroyo Jr. rode both races and said the track condition worsened from the first to the second.

"There was a lot more water in the second race," he said. "It wasn't as firm as it was in the first."

Arroyo said the track was "very uneven on the backside."

John Passero, the director of racing surfaces for the New York Racing Association, said he walked the track at 12:30 – 30 minutes prior to the opener – and felt confident the track was in good condition.

The cancellation further accentuated problems with the main track that first surfaced last fall. During last fall's meet, two full cards were canceled due to wet tracks and three more cards were transferred to the inner track.

Racing was scheduled to resume Friday and the main-track meeting is scheduled to continue through April 29.

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