

March 8, 2009

WINNING POINT BECOMES A STAKES WINNER GOING A MILE IN NEW YORK, OFT-GRADED-PLACED MARE COMES GOOD FOR TRAINER K. MCLAUGHLIN, INDIVIDUAL STAKES WINNER NUMBER 99 FOR A BARRY IRWIN SYNDICATE



Winning Point rewarded the patience of her connections by scoring a 4 ½-length victory at Aqueduct on Sunday in the \$65,000-added Am Capable Stakes and became individual stakes winner number 99 for a partnership formed and managed by Barry Irwin, owner of Team Valor International.

The 5-year-old mare, raced in partnership with Morris Bailey of New York, had been Graded placed several times at 3, but was forced to the sidelines twice with a soundness issue.

Given plenty of time to regroup after her first respite had failed, the Point Given mare was rehabbed at the Kentucky Equine Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Center near Team Valor's downtown office in Versailles, Kentucky.

The Am Capable was the mare's first start at 5. She was sent postward as the 3 to 2 betting choice and never gave her backers a moment's worry, as she tracked in fourth early, moved up around the far turn, took command inside the lane and cruised to an easy victory. The powerful chestnut had to withstand an inquiry for slightly crossing over on the runner-up in the lane, but she was well clear.

A model of consistency, Winning Point was finishing first or second for the ninth time in 10 outings. The winning purse of \$40,470 increased her career earnings to \$323,610. As one of the top 3-year-olds of her crop, she ran second in the Grade 2 Delaware Oaks, the Grade 2 Black-Eyed Susan Stakes and the Grade 2 Comely Stakes. Her lone unplaced effort came last year when she was eased in a sloppy track race at Saratoga, where she exited a bit the worse for wear.

"When they are off as long as she was and had only a couple of starts the previous year, you don't know for sure if they are ready to win," said trainer Kiaran McLaughlin. "She trained so much better this time around, though, that we were pretty confident in a good performance. Normally, I would not consider running a mare like this back in just 3 weeks, but she was not tired at all afterward and I think we keep an eye on her over the next two weeks and strongly consider bringing her back in the Grade 3 Next Move over 9 furlongs. She might be pretty salty in a race like that."

Winning Point won her first three races, then turned into a hard luck filly at 3, running second 4 times in a row. She was her own worst enemy, as she snaked through the lane and did not concentrate at critical times in the homestretch. Morris Bailey, from whom Team Valor bought a half interest after she broke her maiden in Maryland, was discouraged and wanted to retire the mare and sell her at public auction last year. Barry Irwin, the owner of Team Valor, convinced him that the physical ailment that had bothered the mare could be overcome. Now the partners are back in action with a 5-year-old mare that has been rejuvenated and has what appears to be an excellent campaign ahead of her.