

April 2, 2009

HULL ROMPS TO DAYLIGHT WIN BY WIDENING 7 ¾ LENGTHS AT TURFWAY, COLT NEVER ALLOWED TO RUN AND COMES WITHIN 4/5 OF TRACK RECORD, RECENT TEAM VALOR ACQUISITION ON TRACK FOR G2 LEXINGTON STAKES



Hull stamped himself as much more than a "one-hit-wonder" and as a bona-fide contender nationally in the sophomore ranks on Thursday at Turfway Park when he parlayed his debut romp at Fair Grounds in February with an encore performance saturated with brilliance. The recent Team Valor acquisition pipped in by 7 ¾ lengths in his first start against winners and despite being held in the proverbial "death-grip" by jockey Miguel Mena for the entire 1:16 1/5 of the race, the blue-sky prospect stopped the clock just four-fifths of a second shy of the track record on the Polytrack.

"I have never been so nervous running a horse on a Thursday at Turfway Park," admitted conditioner Dale Romans before the race. "When you're 1 to 20 and you've made plans to breeze the colt past the wire another quarter, the pressure is really on and you only allow the things that could go wrong to enter your mind.

"Watching him coast home a pole in front of the competition was more of a relief than anything," Romans continued. "It's what we expected him to do and he delivered. Everything went perfect. He even got to relax a bit off another horse today, which was a good education for him, he took to the Poly and we got the appropriate amount of fitness into him to be ready to stretch out in 16 days. I'm elated."

Hull broke cleanly from the outside box in the field of five. Mena (left, in paddock with trainer Romans) was loaded with horse from the word go and was content to allow the rival to his inside, Go Getem, to make the running. Hull sat comfortably about three-quarters of a length off the pacesetter, who carved out an opening quarter in a brisk :22 4/5. From the half mile pole to the quarter pole, Mena was getting a tremendous biceps workout and was pulling so hard to reserve the colt that Mena's head was bobbing up and down like a bobblehead. Hull, meanwhile, was exerting very little energy.



This is what a 1 to 20 shot looks like arriving in the paddock.

At the quarter pole, although Mena still had yet to let out even a notch in the reins, Hull coasted up alongside the leader. The result was inevitable. The only question that remained was how far Mena was going to let Hull win by? Hull ticked off the half mile in :45 3/5, loped past the three-quarters in 1:10 and coasted home the final sixteenth in :6 1/5.

"This is an awesome horse," Mena smiled after posing for photos. "I knew he was special the first time I worked him in New Orleans and I absolutely love him. I never let him run today. He's incredible. The gallop-out was strong. The more I let him do, the happier he was. This is a good horse."



Hull will most likely wheel back in 16 days in the Grade 2 \$300,000 Coolmore Lexington Stakes at Keeneland on April 18, a race which could propel him either to the Kentucky Derby or the Preakness Stakes.



The colt is owned in partnership by Team Valor International, Heiligbrodt Racing Stable and Gary Barber. Bill and Corrine Heiligbrodt and Team Valor have raced several top horses in partnership, including the Grade 1 Santa Anita Oaks heroine Golden Ballet and Grade 1 Spinaway winner Cashier's Dream. Gary Barber also was in the Golden Ballet partnership, and has raced several Grade 1 winners in partnership with Team Valor, including Santa Anita Derby winner The Deputy and Woodbine Mile winner Becrux in North America, and French Group 1 winner and English Champion Sweet Stream abroad.



Robbie Albarado was supposed to have ridden Hull yesterday, but he was booked late on a mount for the Arkansas Derby, which required him to depart for Hot Springs. Romans will try to sign him for the Coolmore Lexington at Keeneland.

The victory by Hull was number 19 from 71 starts for a Team Valor International runner this season for a winning strike rate of nearly 27 percent. The stable is 8 wins ahead of last season's pace when it shattered the TVI record for 67 wins.

(All photographs save the first were shot by Team Valor's Megan Jones.)