

June 7, 2008

RUSSIAN SAGE SNARES GRADE 1 DAILY NEWS 2000 IN TEAM VALOR DEBUT, DERBY HERO NOW IS CLEAR SECOND CHOICE FOR GRADE 1 DURBAN JULY, TEAM VALOR WINS GRADE 1 SECOND WEEKEND IN A ROW IN SOUTH AFRICA

Russian Sage made his Team Valor International debut a winning one when he mastered Galant Gagnant in the closing strides to capture the million-rand (\$130,000) Daily News 2000 by a head on Saturday at Greyville race course in Durban, South Africa.

In a month's time the grandson of Blushing Groom and ex-American Flamingo Stakes winner Badger Land will essay the \$400,000 Durban July, a Grade 1 one furlong farther than the 10-furlong Daily News 2000. Russian Sage's win propels him into a clear-cut second favorite for the Durban July, a race considered to most prestigious on the South African calendar.

Team Valor International, which took the previous weekend's Allan Robertson Fillies Championship with its yearling buy On Her Toes, was winning a So African Grade 1 for a second weekend in a row.



Russian Sage (right) overhauls Galant Gagnant (left) while finishing on the opposite rail under ride by Richard Fourie.

The stable had put together a partnership to buy and race Russian Sage from the Estate of John Newsome of Fieldspring Racing. Among those in the group that now owns Russian Sage is South African resident Larry Nestadt, in whose royal blue silks the 3-year-old son of Jallad won the Daily News 2000, a race considered as the best trial for 3-year-olds in advance of the Durban July.

Much had been made before the contest of the difference in quality between the 3-year-olds that were trained in Cape Town versus Johannesburg this year, with most people, including the National Horse Racing Authority's handicapper, siding with those on the Highveld.

The results showed that the Cape Town runners were up to snuff, with Cape of Good Hope Derby one-two finishers Russian Sage and Tan Can finishing one-three (dead heat for third) in the Grade 1 Daily News 2000.

Everybody knew that Piere Strydom was going to put Classic Oasis on the lead in the Daily News and try to steal the race. When the field turned into the short homestretch at Greyville, the pacesetter held a commanding double-digit lead that at one point in the contest was as many as 15 lengths.

It occurred to more than one seasoned racegoer at Durban-based Greyville, with its quarter-mile only stretch, that Strydom had lifted the prestigious Daily News.

The same thought, in fact, occurred to young Richard Fourie, the rider of 9 to 5 favorite Russian Sage. "The pace was always on," said The Cape's leading rider and regular partner of Team Valor's Classic winner Captain's Lover. "I was a bit worried that I was a bit too close. But when we came into the straight he started accelerating smartly and he won an exceptional race."



Classic Oasis folded up his tent once collared by Galant Gagnant, who went right by him and into what looked like a certain winning position.

Russian Sage got the split between rivals he was looking for once settle into the lane and he began advancing menacingly in the final 1 ½ furlongs. Mike de Kock-trained Galant Gagnant (French for gallant winner) stole a march on Russian Sage, but the big colt lengthened his stride in the final 70 yards to overhaul the new leader, assert himself and look for all outward appearances to be set to draw off if necessary over another furlong. He seemed to be just getting warmed up.

Since bucking his shins 7 races back when uncharacteristically unplaced in the Matchem Stakes in when he also lost a shoe and broke from a very wide post position, Russian Sage since then has been able to fashion a record of 5 wins and 2 seconds, his only losses coming over a mile, a distance that is just a tad short for him.

Russian Sage is a tribute to his young trainer Justin Snaith, who dominated in Cape Town this year in South Africa, where his breakthrough season including development of such starts as Team Valor's Captain's Lover, the best 3-year-old filly this season in South Africa, and Dancer's Daughter, the best older filly or mare in the Western Cape and perhaps all of South Africa.

Now a double Grade 1 winner, Russian Sage will make his final South African outing on July 5 for the Durban July. He did not pick up a penalty for the 3.5-million rand Durban July, in which he will tote only 112 pounds.

Russian Sage is among 6 horses to win or place in a Grade 1 races for Team Valor International this season and he joins Grade 1 winner On Her Toes, Grade 1 winner Captain's Lover, Grade 1 winner Stratos and Grade 2 winner and Grade 1 runner-up She's on Fire as a top-class performer in South Africa.

From *SAhorseracing.com* comes the following:

"THE MACHINE" STEALS THE HEADLINES IN DAILY NEWS 2000

Jockey Richard Fourie referred to him as a machine after the race and Russian Sage had certainly earned that tag after flying up late to land the Gr 1 Daily News 2000 in a pulsating finish at Greyville this afternoon.



Justin Snaith (l) and Larry Nestadt (r) led him in.

Fourie had the favourite well placed on the rails in fourth in the early stages but a long way off the pace as Classic Oasis, ridden along from the start, went out into a 15-length lead from outsiders The Big Ask and Extrapolator. Russian Sage was tracked by Causation and Galant Gagnant who also had a rails run with Lubricator, Kingdom Come and Lion's Blood next best. Tan Can was further back ahead of Just Like Al, who appeared to come under pressure very early while Kilcoy Castle, Thandolwami and Profit Report brought up the rear.

Classic Oasis still appeared to be going ominously well turning for home and there would have been more than a few observers wondering whether the other jockeys in the race had been caught napping. However, the tank emptied abruptly 300m out and it was Galant Gagnant who came forward and quickened smartly into the lead, with Russian Sage hot on his heels towards the outside and Lubricator staying on between the two of them.

Galant Gagnant looked as if he had stolen it but Russian Sage doesn't know how to give up and he stretched out late to get the verdict by a nose with Tan Can running on late for third to deny Lubricator who ran a much improved race.

Russian Sage had been the subject of much attention following a change of ownership in the run-up to the race and he now races in the colours of Larry Nestadt who owns him in partnership with Greg Barber and Barry Irwin's Team Valor. He continues to impress with his toughness and consistency and this run confirmed him as a serious contender for the forthcoming Vodacom Durban July.

"The pace was always on, I was a bit worried I might have been a bit too close, but when I came into the straight he started accelerating well and he won an exceptional race. He is a machine," said Richard Fourie in the post race analysis.

"He's done so well in Durban, he is loving it here in the winter. Thank you to all the owners including the new owners Gary Barber, Larry Nestadt and Team Valor," said Justin Snaith.

Galant Gagnant has been improving at a rate of knots and this run left his previous form behind by some distance. He was not stopping at the end and he was only denied by a super effort from the winner. The race also conclusively banished the stamina doubts that had been hanging over him beforehand.

Tan Can showed that his narrow second in the Cape Derby was no fluke and he is also shaping up into a very decent racehorse over this sort of trip. A tilt at the KZN Derby at the end of the season looks a very attractive prospect.

Lubricator is far from straightforward and has disappointed his supporters on more than one occasion, but this was a much more encouraging performance and his connections will hope that he is now finally getting his act together.

From *Tabonline.co.za* comes the following:

Russian Sage Wins Grade 1 Daily News 2000

by Nicci Garner

Russian Sage justified his position as joint second favourite for this year's Vodacom Durban July when running on strongly to win the R1-million Daily News 2000 (Grade 1) at Greyville.

In beating 18-1 shot Galant Gagnant by a long head, the classy Jallad colt justified 18-10 favouritism with third-placed Lubricator (14-1) 2.25 lengths further back. Second favourite Lion's Blood was never in the hunt.

Jockey Piere Strydom utilised the same tactics as in last month's SA Derby on Classic Oasis, who went immediately to the lead. The Big Ask and Extrapolator were next, split by Causation with Lubricator racing wide just off them. Galant Gagnant raced alongside Russian Sage with Kingdom Come and Tan Can in mid division with Lion's Blood outpaced alongside Thandolwami with the other runners completely outpaced.



Trainer Justin Snaith.

The order remained much the same as Classic Oasis was hustled well into the clear with The Big Ask and Extrapolator chasing, ahead of Russian Sage and Galant Gagnant.

Richard Fourie pressed the button on Russian Sage as Classic Oasis toed the field into the home stretch, looking for a split between The Big Ask on the rail and Extrapolator. They followed Extrapolator towards the outside rail, while Galant Gagnant kept a straight course down the middle of the track.



Supremely confident Barry Irwin said "I knew he would win. I knew he would win this race before we bought him. In fact, truth be told, I knew he would win before he was even born."

Classic Oasis was still well clear at the 200m marker, but was tiring and Galant Gagnant and Russian Sage were closing fast. They tagged him 100m from the line and it was a head-bobbing duel for the remainder of the race, with the favourite getting the verdict by a long head. Lubricator and Can Tan also kept on strongly to take the minor money.

Said Fourie: "The pace was always on. I was a bit worried that I was a bit too close, but when we came into the straight he started accelerating smartly and he won an exceptional race."

Winning trainer Justin Snaith was thrilled with the win: "He's done so well at home. He looks magnificent. He's really enjoying his Durban holiday."

Before the race, Russian Sage was quoted at 8-1 with Dancer's Daughter behind 3-1 favourite Pocket Power for next months' July.