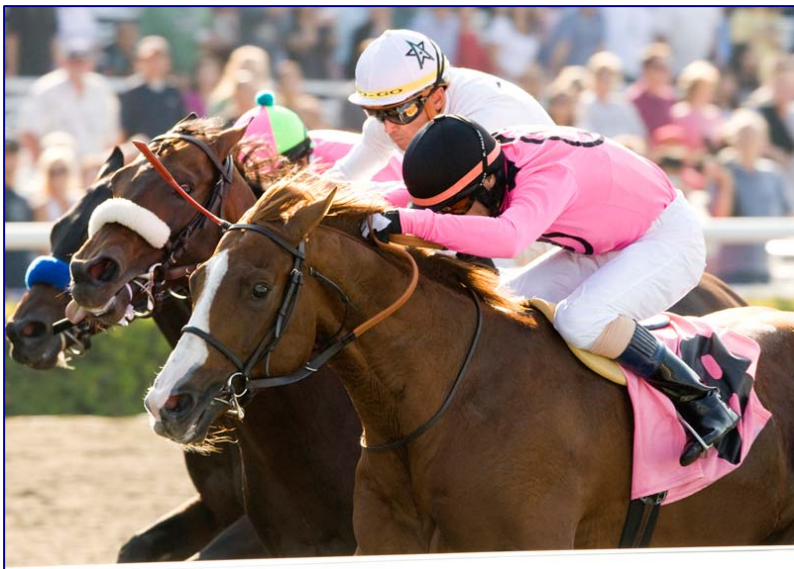


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GITANO HERNANDO STUNS GRADE 1 GOODWOOD STAKES AT SANTA ANITA, “WIN AND YOU’RE IN” COULD MEAN NEXT START BREEDERS’ CUP CLASSIC, THREE-YEAR-OLD COLT BEATS LEGIT BAND OF OLDER GRADE 1 WINNERS, ENGLISH RAIDER PEGS BACK COLONEL JOHN BY NECK IN STIRRING FINISH

Team Valor International and Gary Barber’s 3-year-old English import Gitano Hernando, making his first start in the United States, fought off a protracted challenge from favored Colonel John to score a well-deserved victory in the Grade 1 Goodwood Stakes this afternoon at Santa Anita.

Dismissed by bettors at odds of 18 to 1, the Hernando colt was making his first start since winning a conditions race at lowly Wolverhampton race course in England. Kieren Fallon rode him in that race on Polytrack and was impressed enough by the colt’s track-record-breaking effort to suggest that “he is at the very least a Grade 2 horse.”



Gitano Hernando staves off bid from The Colonel in G1 Goodwood.

Barry Irwin, owner of Team Valor International, decided to have trainer Marco Botti plan to run the hulking chestnut “off the plane” in the Goodwood, based on a notion that he was a superior athlete on a synthetic surface.

“On the turf, he is probably a Group 3 horse, or perhaps a Group 2 horse,” Irwin said. “But, on the man-made stuff, I thought he had a chance to be top class. I told everybody beforehand that we knew we were putting the cart before the horse, but I felt good enough about it to go ahead and do it. I asked Marco to see if Kieren was game to come over and ride him. When Fallon gave the project the green light, I felt confident.”



Matinee idol horse trainer Marco Botti.

Fallon stalked in fourth or fifth position much of the way, but at the one of two critical junctures, he put the colt in position to kick going into the far turn. Coming off the final bend, Kieren sealed the deal with a patented move to split horses when room seemed not to exist and he drove the colt towards the leaders.

Colonel John was right outside of Gitano Hernando from the top of the lane to the wire and actually poked his head in front of the English invader inside the furlong grounds. Under an energetic ride from the 6-time Champion British jockey, Gitano Hernando forged to the front about 150 yards out and held off a determined challenge from Pro Ride specialist Colonel John to prevail by a neck. It was a further three-quarters of a length back to Grade 1 Pacific Classic hero Richard’s Kid in third.

Gitano Hernando closed with a final furlong of less than 12 seconds, after a previous quarter-mile in :23 and change to stop the teletimer at the wire in 1:48.39. Under the weight-for-age conditions of the race he received 3 pounds from his older competitors under a load of 121 pounds.

Among the Grade 1 winners finishing down the track were the Kentucky Derby winner Mine That Bird and last season's Goodwood Stakes winner Tiago.

Gitano Hernando, bought last year at 2 after he broke his maiden third time out at Wolverhampton, improved his career record to 7-4-2-0. After finishing sixth in his debut, he has been first or second in all of his starts, including a nose loss in the Group 3 Dee Stakes, from which he exited with a jarred ankle that cost him a chance to run in the Grade 1 Belmont Stakes. The colt is 3 for 3 on synthetics.



Prize money of \$165,000 from the Goodwood more than tripled the colt's previous earnings of about \$56,000 in his English races.

Aron Wellman, who represented Team Valor at the Oak Tree meeting today, said "I told Barry this morning that we will have no excuses today, as everything has gone perfectly. We did a lot of planning and it has all come to fruition. Marco Botti has been brilliant. Kieren got a good ride over the track yesterday on (Team Valor and Barber's) Becrux. Everything has happened just as we wanted it to. This colt is ready for the race of his life."

Team Valor will spend a few days before it decides what to do next with the statuesque grandson of Nijinsky. Since the victory came in a Breeders' Cup "Win and You're In" race, naturally racing folk will want to know if the owners will nominate the colt to the BC program and ready him for the \$5-million Classic. "One thing we are convinced of is that Gitano Hernando can run a mile and a half if need be," said Irwin. "What has been particularly heartening is to see how much handier he is on a synthetic track. We never thought until this month that he would be able to run against the very best horses at less than 12 furlongs. For him to be effective at 8.5 and 9 furlongs is a revelation."

Irwin says he once owned the fourth dam of the winner. "Her name was Hanina and she was the dam of Mrs. McArdy, winner in England of the One Thousand Guineas. Hanina was a tremendous stamp of a horse, with a long hip and a lot of presence, just like Gitano Hernando. Although the sire is all stamina, there are some serious milers in the family of his dam."

At dinner following the race, Kieren Fallon told Aron Wellman that "I have never been on a horse that did what this one did today. He was plenty tired at the eighth pole, but he swelled up, dug in and he simply would not let that other horse get by him. He is a better horse than Dylan Thomas."

Gitano Hernando provided Team Valor International with seasonal stakes victory number 18, twice as many this year as West Point Thoroughbreds, the closest 2009 rival to Team Valor among stables that syndicate horses in the public arena.

Barry Irwin has been sending out syndicated runners since 1987 and Gitano Hernando is stakes winner number 104, Graded stakes winner number 66, Grade 1 stakes winner number 22 and Grade1 stakes horse number 58.