

## Gouverneur Morris .02 Seconds Off Track Record In 3-Year-Old Debut

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Gouverneur Morris wins his 3-year-old debut at Tampa Bay Downs

When Dudley Square stumbled at the start of Friday's sixth race at Tampa Bay Downs, unseating jockey Daniel Centeno, jockey John Velazquez aboard race favorite and fellow Todd Pletcher-trainee Gouverneur Morris turned to "Plan B."

Few jockeys are more proficient in making successful strategy changes during a race than Velazquez. Gouverneur Morris did his part, racing to a 1 ¼-length victory from Untitled in the allowance/optional claiming event in a time of 1:38.88 for the mile-and-40 yards on the main track, .02 seconds off Jackson's track record.

Centeno was taken off his mount in the seventh race as a precaution, but was reported to be fine afterward. Dudley Square completed the course and walked off under his own power.

The victory came in the first start for Gouverneur Morris since he finished second on Oct. 5 at Keeneland in the Grade I Claiborne Breeders' Futurity.

"I had to change my strategy (when Dudley Square lost his jockey), because I was expecting that horse to be on the lead," Velazquez said. "But it worked out anyway. He finished real nice. This was a real tough race to come off the bench, but you have to start somewhere."

Five horses were entered, all nominated to the Triple Crown. Letmeno finished third and Sounion was fourth.

Velazquez had ridden Gouverneur Morris when he broke his maiden on Sept. 2 at Saratoga by 9 lengths in a 5 ½-furlong race on a sloppy track.

Barry Irwin of co-owner Team Valor International, who bred and owned 2011 Kentucky Derby winner Animal Kingdom, said he was "relieved" after the race.

"Johnny told me that the plan was for (Dudley Square) to set the pace, but when that horse lost his jockey (Gouverneur Morris) had to go up and do the dirty work (keeping within range of Untitled) on the turn," Irwin said. Velazquez had to get after him a bit in the stretch, but Gouverneur Morris left no doubt of his advantage today.

"He's kind of a quirky horse. In the morning, he'll get halfway down the stretch and kind of lose interest or something, then he'll just refocus and take off," Irwin said. "That's kind of what he did today on the turn. It looked like he was floundering for a second, then when Johnny got after him he put (Untitled) away.

"Each of his last three workouts, he has improved so much," Irwin added.

Pletcher's plan for Gouverneur Morris was to have two races before the May 2 Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve, one "easy" and one stern. "If he runs first or second next time and we feel good, then we'll go to the Derby. If not, there are plenty of other races," Irwin said, addressing the fact Gouverneur Morris needs Kentucky Derby qualifying points to ensure a spot in the field.

Irwin, who owns the colt in partnership with WinStar Farm, said the Grade II, \$400,000 Lambholm South Tampa Bay Derby on March 7 is too soon for his next race.