

VISIONAIRE IN POST POSITION 8 FOR SATURDAY'S 134TH KENTUCKY DERBY, FIRST VALOR RUNNER SINCE THE DEPUTY WAS THE SECOND FAVE IN 2000, TVI'S OTHER RUNNER CAPTAIN BODGIT LOST BY HEAD AS CHOICE IN 1997

Team Valor International and Vision Racing LLC's Visionaire was the first name drawn out of the box at 11 a. m. on Wednesday to earn his connections the first choice of post positions later that evening at the "draw." Barry Irwin immediately conferred with trainer Michael Matz and Vision's Brandon Perry to strategize about their pick for the best post position for the 134th Kentucky Derby on Saturday.

"Post 8 worked last time," said Matz, referring to Barbaro's draw when he won the Run for the Roses two seasons ago in one of the most masterful and unorthodox jobs ever performed by a horseman. Irwin and Perry concurred. At the draw Irwin chose post position number 8.

"We were due for some post position luck with this sucker," reminded Irwin, who said "Don't forget, in both of his last two races he was drawn outside. It didn't stop him in the Gotham at Aqueduct, but it killed any chance he had in the Blue Grass last time."



Visionaire comes into the first leg of the Triple Crown in perfect condition. "This will be his seventh start. He has won coming inside and outside. He has raced in large fields with the best runners of his crop. We have run him where we thought he would experience a wide variety of conditions and he has passed his test. We couldn't be happier with the way in which he approaches the race.

"Temperament will go a long way in determining the winner of the Kentucky Derby and this colt has the best. He won't mind being jostled in a big field and when he sets his sights on a target, he has the long, relentless move to reel him in. We feel very good about our chances. Matz told me last evening that the horse is acting as well as can be."



Visionaire, always a reluctant work horse in the morning, was supplied with a target on Monday by Michael Matz.

Monday morning, when the track was fluffed up after a mile overnight sprinkling of bluegrass dew that a Californian might refer to mischaracterize as measurable precipitation, Visionaire took to the main oval at Churchill Downs for his first work over the surface in his last timed exercise before the Run for the Roses 5 days hence.

Michael Matz decided to have a workmate break off about 5 or 6 lengths in front of Visionaire to make him pay attention because the chestnut is such an unwilling participant in the morning. The ploy worked to perfection, as unlike his previous work at Keeneland in which jockey Jose Lezcano had to tap him 3 times to complete the work alongside a workmate.

Lezcano kept Visionaire just close enough to the other Matz worker to keep his mind in the game. Although the work looked like nothing more than a light breeze for Visionaire, he once again stopped the clock faster than one would have thought. Final time for a half was :48 2/5, a move bettered by only 10 others going the distance on a 44-strong tab. "Looked like 50 and change to me," said Irwin. "He is very deceptive."

Lezcano threw the reins at Visionaire after he crossed under the wire to let him know to go out an extra furlong, which he accomplished in :12 4/5. He was caught going out five-eighths of a mile in 1:01 1/5, a move bettered by only 3 other breezers among 22 going that distance.



Barry Irwin spoke with Lezcano after the breeze and the rider confirmed that the colt "felt and moved much better on dirt than on the Polytrack at Keeneland."

Irwin asked the jockey if he thought the reason the colt was reluctant to commence his final kick in the Blue Grass Stakes because he was not comfortable on the Keeneland surface. "Yes, I do," Lezcano answered, "because in all of his other races, when I ask him, he goes. Not last time. I had to ask him three times. This morning he was very willing as you saw. Not like that last work when I had to remind him 3 times!"

To read a story about Irwin's impression of the breeze click [Breeze](#).

Headquartered an hour south of historic Churchill Downs in the town of Versailles, Kentucky, Team Valor has twice been represented by a runner in the Run for the Roses and both times the entrants were highly fancied.



Captain Bodgit was favored to win the 1997 Kentucky Derby over Pulpit, Silver Charm and Free House. The son of Saint Ballado came up a head short at the wire to finish second, after having won the Florida Derby and the Wood Memorial.

The Deputy was second choice to win the 2001 to Fusaichi Pegasus, who proved a prompt choice, while Team Valor's runner never showed a thing and finished down the field, in what would prove to be his last race.

"I always thought we would win the Derby with Captain Bodgit," said Barry Irwin, who made the \$500,000 purchase his first acquisition for a revitalized Team Valor after it had taken a year and a half respite from syndicating horses when partner Jeff Siegel tired of the process.

“Anybody that saw the power The Captain had generated rounding the turn that afternoon realized he would be better suited to the Triple Crown than the Turf sport’s darling Pulpit. Captain Bodgit duly beat Pulpit in the \$1-million Florida Derby and made light of a muddy track to romp in the \$750,000 Wood Memorial.

“He made the winning move in the Derby,” recalled Irwin. “But our jockey Alex Solis was taken to school by Gary Stevens, who had anticipated The Captain’s late surge, moved over half lane to the right in deep stretch and forced Solis to steady and alter course in a maneuver that cost us a victory in the Run for the Roses.



Irwin said he could tell by the body language and posture of Captain Bodgit that he was primed for the Derby. He could tell by the same method that The Deputy had no chance, which he revealed to Jeff Siegel as they descended the escalator in the Churchill Downs clubhouse en route to their seats to watch the race. “This colt is fried,” Irwin said. “He’s gone. He’s toast.”

The Deputy had gradually melted away during the hot days preceding his race on the First Saturday in May. His race was over before it began and he never ran again, bowing a tendon in training. “He was probably already compromised,” surmises Irwin. “We just didn’t know it yet.”

Like Captain Bodgit, Visionaire was syndicated within hours when offered based on a figure of just over \$2 million in January, after he had generated an explosive turn of foot to win an allowance race at Gulfstream Park in eye-popping fashion.

Team Valor bought 51 percent from Vision Racing LLC and syndicated him among 7 partners. “We could have syndicated him three times,” Irwin said. “Unfortunately, a lot of our long-time racing partners were unable to participate because the syndication was done so fast. He is the most expensive racehorse we ever bought, so we anticipated a bit of resistance. But he went in the proverbial heartbeat. It surprised us and shocked more than a few of our would-be partners.

“In retrospect, I should have expected it, because our partners are sophisticated and know a good prospect when they see one. Same thing happened with Captain Bodgit. At the time \$500,000 was a considerable amount of money for a horse, especially one that had suffered a tendon injury before he had ever run.

“When I had offered him to our partners, it was the first horse we had syndicated in more than a year and a half, so I was worried. He sold out in hours. Getting shut out was a couple that had been one of our favorite clients over the years. They were out of town the day the colt was offered, so they missed out. They never forgave me and never bought another horse. I felt horrible.”

VISION NOMINATES THEIR HALF OF VISIONAIRE TO “RACE FOR EDUCATION”



The Stephens

Vision Racing LLC, which prospected and developed Visionaire prior to Team Valor International’s involvement earlier this year, has decided to enroll its half of the Grand Slam colt in the Race for Education, by committing to donate 1 percent of the runner’s earnings into the scholarship program.

Barry Irwin, Chairman of the Board of the RFE, said “This makes 100 percent of the colt enrolled in the program and we are very grateful to the connections for supporting our cause.”

The Race for Education provides scholarship funds for university and college to the offspring of farm and backstretch workers, as well as to youths interested in a career in Thoroughbred racing. Nearly \$2 million dollars has been invested in the youth of tomorrow in the initial 4 years of the program.

Vision Racing LLC is an entity owned by Brandon and Diannah Perry of Lexington, Kentucky and John and Jill Stephens of Ocala, Florida. The two couples began as a pinhooking operation, buying yearlings for resale as 2-year-olds. They expended to form a racing stable and two of their first colts to fly their colors, namely Visionaire and Keep Laughing, have become Graded stakes winners this season at 3 in the initial group to represent the stable.

Visionaire, who will contest the Kentucky Derby this week, won the Grade 3 Gotham Stakes. Keep Laughing, who is scheduled to make his next start in the Grade 2 Peter Pan at Belmont Park, won the Grade 3 Lafayette Stakes at Keeneland. The son of Distorted Humor is a candidate for the Preakness.



The Perrys