

January 18, 2011

STING OPERATION STAYS UNBEATEN IN SWALLOW STAKES IN SO AFRICA, TEAM VALOR AND MARKUS JOOSTE WIN WITH NATIONAL YEARLING BUY, TRAINER CHARLES LAIRD SADDLES STABLE'S FIRST 2011 STAKES WINNER, STAKES WINNER NUMBER 3 FROM 8 YEARLINGS IN CROP BOUGHT BY IRWIN

Sting Operation remained unbeaten from 2 starts at 3 with an easy-as-pie victory in the Swallow Stakes, a black-type event this evening at Turffontein race course in Johannesburg. In the process, she became the first stakes winner from the very first horse owned in partnership by Team Valor and leading South African owner Markus Jooste and the first stakes winner from the first runner trained for Team Valor by Charles Laird.

Laird thought long and hard about whether to run the hugely muscled Captain Al filly in the sprint because rains in the Gauteng province had been so prevalent of late that he was unable to breeze the big filly on the grass and she had not in 88 days since receiving a 3-month suspension after she had bled from the nostrils when taking her debut in solid fashion in Durban.



Sting Operation was lonely and being eased as she approached the finishing post of the Listed Swallow Stakes sprinting about 6 furlongs this evening at Turffontein race course in Johannesburg. The unbeaten 3-year-old filly could be Classic bound and might provide Team Valor International with its second Fillies Guineas win of 2011 in the Gauteng version of the fillies mile event run later in the spring on the Highveld.

After much consideration, Laird sent the filly postward for the Listed stakes, even though he became even more concerned about the filly's level of fitness after more rain fell during the morning and afternoon hours on race day. "She will not be at her best, but she should run well," he said.

Breaking from the center of a large field that had been reduced to 15 runners after 2 late scratches, Sting Operation raced in fifth, then fourth, as the field was spread out across the course in a race run on a straightaway over the "about" 6 furlongs (40 yards short to be exact).

Anton Marcus, the most accomplished jockey in South Africa and under retainer by Jooste to ride first call for him, sat chilly on Sting Operation and did not move until inside the final quarter, when he gave the filly the signal to quicken.



Sting Operation was generous and gradually pulled away to reach the wire while being eased in the closing stages to score by 2 ½ lengths. Morning line favorite Pimpinella finished 4 ¾ back in fifth, three-quarters of a length ahead of race-time favorite Waywest Goddess, a Graded stakes winner who was second last season in the Grade 1 Allan Robertson Fillies Championship.

“I don’t know what we will do with her next,” Laird said.

Anton Marcus accepts trophy from the Racing Association representative Larry Wainstein.

Sting Operation is the first foal out of Jooste’s Grade 1-winning mare Roxanne, who took the Thekwini over a mile at 2. If Laird was thinking Fillies Guineas at Turffontein later in the spring, no one would blame him based on the consummate ease with which she won the Swallow under testing conditions while obviously in need of both the experience and the exercise.

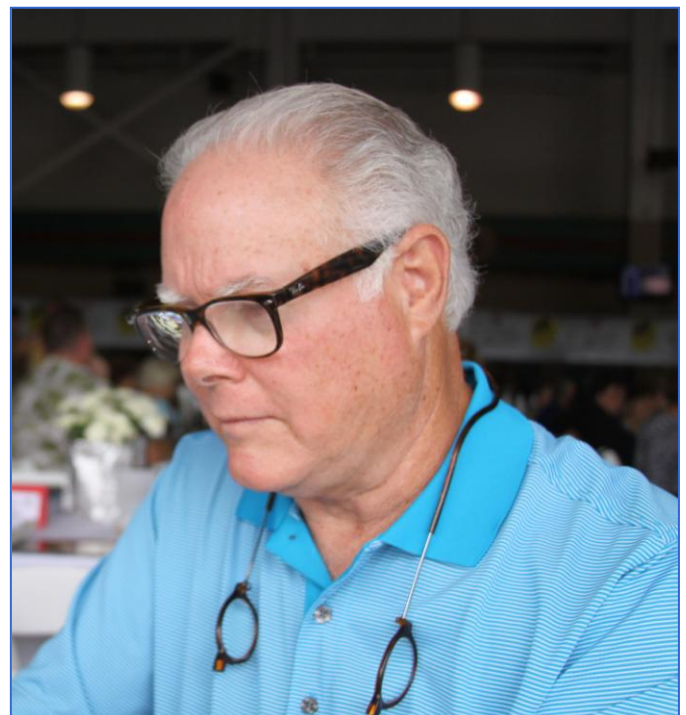
Barry Irwin and Markus Jooste had hooked up in a protracted bidding duel a year earlier when Irwin made the winning bid of 1.8-million rand, about 3 times more than he had wanted to spend on another Captain Al filly at the National Yearling Sale.

When Irwin returned the next year, he sought out Jooste and proposed that if they landed on another yearling filly they liked, that they should team up and buy it together. Irwin landed on Sting Operation, Jooste also loved her and so Charles Laird bid on the filly with Irwin and Jooste seated next to him, to let any rival bidders know that they were loaded for bear to buy the filly.

Sting Operation’s racing career was delayed when she chipped a bone that required surgery at 2 and she bled badly after winning her debut at 3. “Charles Laird has done a super, super job with a filly that although talented, definitely has had her issues,” said Irwin. “Now that she is set and moving forward, maybe she can put a career together for us.”

The filly is stakes winner number 113 campaigned by a racing partnership formed by Barry Irwin (right), who bought 8 yearling fillies in South Africa 2 years ago and now has seen 3 of them win stakes already.

The group is led by Ebony Flyer, the once-beaten Grade 1 Classic winner of the Cape Fillies Guineas. The other stakes winner from the group is the 3yo filly Success Counts, who won the Grade 3 Starling Stakes and came back last week to win an allowance race at The Vaal by 5 lengths.



Sting Operation is by Captain Al, sire for Team Valor of Captain’s Lover, the Champion filly at 3.