

July 5, 2010

FANTASTICO ROBERTO WIRES FIELD AT MONMOUTH IN CHOICE STAKES, ITALIAN IMPORT RECORDS HIS FIRST STAKES WIN FOR TODD PLETCHER, TEAM VALOR'S 7 STAKES WINS TOP U. S. PARTNERSHIPS STABLES IN 2010

Fantastico Roberto justified 2 to 1 favoritism this afternoon when led every step of the way to win the \$100,000 Choice Stakes under a heady ride by jockey Johnny Velazquez for trainer Todd Pletcher.

Team Valor International owner Barry Irwin rarely provides trainers or jockeys with suggestions about how a horse should be ridden, but before the 9-furlong Monmouth Park fixture today, Irwin did ask Pletcher to stress to Velazquez that he thought the rider needed to make sure to ride him with a more aggressive attitude.



Fantastico Roberto cruises to 3 ¼-length victory in Monmouth's Choice.

When the gates sprung open, Fantastico Roberto inherited the lead and Velazquez allowed him to establish command for the first time in the 3-year-old colt's career. The lean, racy chestnut went out quickly enough in :23 2/5 to take his field onto the backstretch, where Velazquez did a masterful job in back up the pace for the initial half to nearly :48 4/5.

Before the field had neared the three-eighths pole, jockey Pablo Fragoso aboard the 93 to 1 shot, The Peloton, put his longshot into a full drive. Velazquez, however, sat chilly, kept his hands high up on his colt's neck and gave him all of the confidence he needed by not moving a muscle on him.

The Peloton dropped back on the turn, but his position as pace presser was at once assumed by Jimmy Jerken's lightly raced Devon Rock, who had been the favorite in the betting until the last 2 minutes. This 5 to 2 shot loomed up right outside of Fantastico Roberto curving for home, had dead aim and looked like a winner entering the homestretch.

When the real running began, however, the twice-raced Rock Hard Ten colt Devon Rock jinked at the same moment that Fantastico Roberto was let run for the first time. Fantastico Roberto was a length in front at the furlong marker after a mile in 1:35.77. The Team Valor colorbearer let loose with a flashy :11 2/5 final furlong to stretch his field and win by 3 ¼ lengths, stopping the teletimer in a fast 1:47.23 in his first try beyond 8 ½ furlongs. Fantastico Roberto, an Irish-bred imported from Italy by Team Valor after 2 wins from as many starts at age 2, improved his career record in 7 starts to 3-2-1.

They Call Me Giant, a locally trained colt, was second, a neck ahead of Devon Rock, with second choice Thunder Brew, who had beaten Fantastico Roberto into second place in the Lamplighter Stakes at the end of may, a non-competitive 8 lengths behind the winner this time.

Team Valor was winning its second stakes at the current Monmouth stand and its seventh of the year in which the second-best mark for a stable of public partnership runners is only 3.