

HOWE GREAT MAKES THE GRADE IN GULFSTREAM'S PALM BEACH STAKES HOME-BRED SON OF HAT TRICK STRIKES FOR 4TH IN A ROW IN GRADE 3 TEAM VALOR COLLECTS SIXTH STAKES WIN IN TENTH WEEK OF SEASON

Howe Great completed a perfect winter at Gulfstream Park on Sunday and solidified his spot among the top 3-year-olds on turf in the United States. In connecting as the heavy favorite in the Grade 3 Palm Beach Stakes for his fourth consecutive win, Team Valor International's home-bred colt cleared a path to a high-profile opportunity on another surface this spring.

The black son of first crop sire Hat Track is bound for the Grade 1 Blue Grass Stakes on April 14 at Keeneland after he and jockey John Velazquez pounced at the top of the lane and surged to a 1-length win over Grade 1 winner Dullahan in the 1 1/8-mile Palm Beach.



Howe Great finished with a final eighth in :11.74 in stretching out to 9 furlongs for the first time.

as a lone speed threat from the inside post, the same scenario that played out over the Gulfstream grass in an allowance win on December 15 and in the Kitten's Joy on January 21.

But Team Valor CEO Barry Irwin and trainer Graham Motion anticipated that someone might try to engage Velazquez and Howe Great in a speed duel in the Palm Beach and, in that situation, they hoped Velazquez would be able to get the colt off the rail to a position where he could rate to the outside of the pacesetter.

Velazquez never had the chance. Scorcher, the longest price in the race at 37 to 1, gunned to the front for the first time in his career from post 2, and he maintained the outside position with Howe Great on the inside in second and Csaba to the outside in third, effectively boxing the favorite along the rail.

Howe Great did not fall for the trap—he rated kindly for Velazquez along the backstretch, tracking at Scorcher's flank until they turned for home. As Scorcher began to fade, Howe Great cut the corner

Howe Great registered Team Valor's sixth stakes win over the first ten weeks of 2012. He is the first horse to appear twice on that list, as he also skipped home by 2 ½ lengths in the Kitten's Joy Stakes at Gulfstream over his TVI stablemate, Lucky Chappy, who is a candidate for the \$2-million United Arab Emirates Derby on March 31.

Dullahan carried a prominent profile into his 3-year-old debut in the Palm Beach after winning the Grade 1 Breeders' Futurity at Keeneland and finishing a troubled fourth in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile last fall, but Howe Great was the overwhelming choice on Sunday, pounded down to 3 to 5 in a field of 6.

Howe Great had the recency edge and appeared to have a distinct tactical advantage

precisely and quickly opened up a 2-length lead over Dullahan, who could not match his turn of foot at the top of the lane.

Howe Great cruised home with mild encouragement from Velazquez to win by 1 length with a final eighth in :11.74 and a swift final time of 1:46.56.

“He was on the inside but didn’t seem to mind,” Velazquez said. “Around the half-mile pole I squeezed him just a little and he popped right back onto the bridle and from there I made sure to save something for the stretch. When I asked him in the stretch, he responded right away. It’s fun to ride the kind of horses that run as soon as you ask them.”

The Palm Beach commanded the attention of a Triple Crown prep, as Dullahan came in with the #11 spot in *Daily Racing Form’s* Kentucky Derby rankings. The road to the Triple Crown also was blown wide open to all surfaces after Animal Kingdom conquered America’s signature race last year in his first start on dirt.

Accordingly, in the first few minutes after Howe Great’s victory, his name went “viral”—he ranked atop the Twitter “trends” list in the United States, which charts how many times an entity or phrase is mentioned on the social media site.

The colt may have thrust his name onto the Derby radar, but his connections are now focused squarely on the Blue Grass, which will likely present a rematch between Howe Great and Dullahan.

They will follow a familiar path—Animal Kingdom finished second in a Gulfstream turf allowance race before he won the Spiral Stakes at Turfway Park on Polytrack, the same surface that is in place at Keeneland. Even more directly, Paddy O’Prado won the 2009 Palm Beach and then finished second in the Blue Grass to Stately Victor, who came out of a Gulfstream turf allowance race. And last year Brilliant Speed led home a sweep of the top 7 spots in the Blue Grass, all occupied by horses who had raced on the Gulfstream grass that winter.



Howe Great is the product of a Japanese-bred sire imported to Kentucky by Barry Irwin and matched with his South Africa-bred broodmare Ginger Sea.

“We talked about it before the race and decided the logical spot for Howe Great, if he did well today, would be to go to the Blue Grass and see where we go from there,” Graham Motion said. “He hasn’t done too much wrong in his life. He’s a very classy, straightforward horse. The more he races, the more relaxed he has become. He’s been in front in some of his races, but as you saw today he’s very tractable and relaxed, and doesn’t need the lead.”

Barry Irwin bought Hat Trick as a stallion prospect from Japan and sold him to Walmac Farm in Kentucky. Hat Trick, a son of Sunday Silence, also is the sire of European champion 2-year-old and French Horse of the Year Dabirsim. Howe Great is the second foal out of Irwin’s South Africa-bred broodmare Ginger Sea, by Western Winter. Her first foal, Badleroibrown, also won on the Gulfstream grass on February 18.