

**OLEKSANDRA BECOMES GRADED WINNER NUMBER 100 FOR BARRY IRWIN
AUSSIE-BRED MARE COMES WITHIN TICK OF KEENELAND COURSE RECORD
ANIMAL KINGDOM MARE IMPROVES U.S. RECORD TO 6 WINS IN 10 OUTINGS**



On what must go down as one of the best days of racing experienced by Barry Irwin's syndications since 1987, Oleksandra rose to the occasion with a truly magnificent victory Friday at Keeneland to not only become a Graded stakes winner but to reach a milestone as the 100th such winner for the stable.

Racing over a Keeneland course enlivened by a rare drenching of rain earlier in the week during this particularly dry spate of weather in Kentucky this autumn, Oleksandra relished the springy grass and came within a fifth of a second of the course record for 5½ furlongs with a clocking of 1:01 3/5. Running fast sprint time is nothing new for the tall bay mare, which ran three-quarters of a mile earlier this season at Belmont Park in a scintillating 1:07-flat and 5 ½ furlongs at Saratoga in a stunning 1:00 2/5 in becoming an American stakes winner.

Yesterday's race was notable for a couple of reasons. It highlighted the special relationship between jockey Joel Rosario and Oleksandra, and it provided the stable with its milestone accomplishment.

In 5 outings in which Oleksandra was piloted by Joel Rosario, the combo has scored 4 times, the lone loss coming on a brick-hard, dried-out course at Kentucky Downs in which few if any horses were able to make up ground and the dust and debris kicked up by the runners made the race look like it was run during the Great Depression at a bush track in the Oklahoma dust bowl. She was lucky to get up for third that day in a Grade 3.

“I cannot think of a closer or more effective relationship between horse and jockey than the bond that has been formed between Oleksandra and Rosario. She responds to him with such generosity.

Friday it was a completely different story than Kentucky Downs. Breaking from the 2 hole, the mare was allowed to place herself, which she did toward the back of affairs. She was about 9 lengths back going into the far turn as 12 for 23 multiple stakes winner Girls Know Best opened up a clear lead over the Kentucky Downs victress Morticia through blazing splits of :21 3/5 and :44-flat.

Girls Know Best sets a swift pace.



The pacesetter was not done yet with her exhibition of sheer speed, as she passed the furlong marker still clear by a length and a half and threw in a sub-12-second furlong to reach the five-eighths in a swift :55 4/5. Morticia tracked her every step of the way and began to engage brilliant speedster.



Meanwhile, back in the chase pack, Rosario kept Oleksandra along the rail around the turn and into the lane. He was 8 lengths back with 2 furlongs remaining as the race seemed set to be settled between Girls Know Best and Morticia—the dominant speedsters on the Kentucky circuit.

But Oleksandra had not even begun to run. Given “the office” by Rosario in midstretch, the extra tall mare built up a tremendous amount of acceleration. Although still 4 lengths back deep in the stretch, it was obvious to onlookers that if she was not impeded in her run to the wire, Oleksandra had the race at her mercy.

[VIDEO](#)

Groom Cesar Alvarez and long-time Neil Drysdale assistant John O’Donohue beam after Grade 3.

“It was like watching a monster getting ready to gobble up its prey” Irwin said. “She was flying.”

The lone tense moment occurred deep in the lane when Rosario came off the fence to split the leaders. But the Dominican rider knew he had room and went for it with gusto. Oleksandra never hesitated as she ran through the opening, put the race to bed in a matter of a few strides, opened up a daylight advantage and won in hand by a couple of lengths.

“The ease with which she won was very reminiscent of her win in the Listed race at Saratoga,” Jessica Berry said. “But this time she was running down proper horses. It was breathtaking and exciting to behold.”

Oleksandra, which placed without winning in 3 Australian outings, exited the triumph with a career record in 13 starts of 6 wins, 2 second and 3 thirds and her \$90,000 share of the purse increased her earnings of nearly \$360,000.

“We might run her once more this season in the Grade 3 Ken Maddy at Santa Anita,” Irwin said, “but I would be inclined to put her away until next winter for grass sprints at Santa Anita. I am all in favor of ending campaigns on a high note without overtaxing horses, especially females. She has to feel very good about herself right about now and I just as soon not mess with her mood.”

As for the milestone “100th individual Graded stakes winner” accomplishment, it does not really require repeating that no other syndicator in the history of the sport has come close to matching the record of Barry Irwin. His two partnerships, Clover Racing Stable and Team Valor International, have consistently developed top horses, both at home and abroad.

The very first horse syndicated by Irwin, Political Ambition, not so coincidentally was trained by the aforementioned Neil Drysdale. He won the Grade 1 Hollywood Derby in 1987 to get the ball rolling. Since then, of the 100 stakes winners, 28 have won a total of 38 Grade 1 races. The 100 individual Graded stakes winners have finished first in a remarkable 175 Graded stakes wins.

Irwin’s next milestone is reaching the 200 plateau for Graded stakes horses (winning and/or placing in a Graded race) and the stable is just 3 shy of that mark.

STABLE’S LIFETIME TALLEY OF STAKES WINNERS.

