

September 2, 2011

STATE OF PLAY STRIKES AT SARATOGA FOR FREE BREEDERS' CUP PASS PRIVATE PURCHASE UNLEASHES TALENT IN GRADE 2 WITH ANTICIPATION VERSATILE WAR FRONT COLT STRETCHES OUT WITH GRIT AND STYLE

Stepping up from a debut win at 5 ½ furlongs, State of Play stretched out and led virtually every step of the Grade 2 With Anticipation Stakes on Thursday at Saratoga Race Course. The key element may have been the stride or two in the stretch when he lost lead.



State of Play was the third graded stakes winner in three weeks for Team Valor and trainer Graham Motion.

In a sustained rally to chase down State of Play, Optimizer appeared to stick his nose in front near the eighth pole, but State of Play responded immediately to Ramon Dominguez' left hand urging and dug back in for a gallant win that, by its nature, evoked a wave of excitement and anticipation for the future.

The With Anticipation was part of the Breeders' Cup's "Win and You're In" program. For the first time this year, the incentive truly matches the description, as State of Play not only receives an automatic berth in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf, but also free entry (the fees would have been \$30,000) and a \$10,000 stipend for his travel to Churchill.

The Juvenile Turf also has been bumped up to Grade 1 status for 2011.

All being well in two months' time, Team Valor will be right back at Churchill Downs for the same race that Pluck, a home-bred, took down last year with an indescribable rally. Barry Irwin has said for weeks that State of Play could develop into a "Pluck Redux," and the War Front colt backed up the projection with an electrifying display of talent in the 1 1/16-mile With Anticipation.

Dominguez gave State of Play a winning education from off the pace in the July 27 debut, but the colt was sharp enough stretching out to assume command heading into the first turn on Thursday when he was bet down to 3 to 1 favoritism from 5 to 1 on the morning line.

State of Play also was so manageable that Dominguez was able to nurse an opening half-mile in :49.78 and six furlongs in 1:14.64, which put them in position to answer the challenge in the stretch.

The chart comments echo the confidence that Dominguez exuded on the versatile colt:

"State of Play brushed with a rival and went to the lead, was well rated while setting the pace, responded well when asked at the top of the stretch, was challenged on the outside by Optimizer, came under the whip near the eighth pole and held gamely under pretty confident handling."

"He's got a great mind to him, and he just gives you a lot of confidence, the way he's handled everything," Graham Motion said. "I wasn't surprised, to be quite honest with you."

State of Play enhanced a superb two-week stretch for Motion and Team Valor, who teamed to win the Grade 1 Del Mar Oaks with Summer Soiree on August 20, the Grade 2 Ballston Spa Stakes with Daveron on August 27. Team Valor finished the Saratoga meet with five wins from 11 starters.

The With Anticipation triumph boosted Team Valor into a tie for first place among North American owners with four graded stakes winners and seven graded stakes wins in 2011.

Irwin mined all fronts to get there—Summer Soiree and State of Play, both by War Front, were purchased privately within a few days of each other in March. Daveron was an auction purchase as a yearling in Germany and hails from the same family that produced the stable's home-bred Kentucky Derby hero Animal Kingdom.

With the Breeders' Cup berth in the bag, Irwin and Motion will have the luxury of choosing between a prep for State of Play—probably either in the Grade 3 Pilgrim Stakes on October 2 at Belmont Park or the Grade 3 Bourbon Stakes on October 9 at Keeneland—or even heading straight to the big day.

From *Daily Racing Form* comes the following:

Team Valor International won last year's Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf with Pluck, and the ownership syndicate appears to have a major player for this year's edition of the Juvenile Turf in State of Play.

State of Play earned an automatic berth into the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf by recording a front-running, half-length victory over Optimizer in Thursday's Grade 2, \$150,000 With Anticipation Stakes at Saratoga. The With Anticipation is a Win and You're In race, meaning the Breeders' Cup will pay all entry fees for State of Play as well as provide his connections a \$10,000 travel stipend.

Under Ramon Dominguez, State of Play made the lead relatively easy, set fractions of 24.24 seconds for the quarter, 49.78 for the half, and 1:14.64 for six furlongs. In upper stretch, Optimizer, under Robby Albarado, made a run at State of Play, but State of Play responded to five cracks of Dominguez's left-handed stick to earn the victory. State of Play ran 1 1/16 miles in 1:43.97 and returned \$8 to win.

Dominguez expressed surprise at how well State of Play relaxed early on as he was coming off a 5 1/2-furlong maiden race in which he stalked hot early fractions.

“As quick as we went last time, I couldn't imagine second race for him to be that settled, and from the get-go he had his ears forward and was very relaxed,” Dominguez said. “When the horse came to him, he was so off the bridle I felt like for a second it seemed like the other horse was going to get a jump on him. Any time I tapped on him he wasn't going to let him go by.”

Trainer Graham Motion said he thought his horse won despite racing a bit greenly early on. “I think he was kind of playing down the backside, ducking and spooking from the fence,” Motion said. “I didn't expect him to be on the lead. It was just a matter of him looking around and running a little greenly.”



State of Play was purchased in March, around the same time Team Valor bought War Front's daughter Summer Soiree.