

February 4, 2018

STORM RUNNER RISES INTO DERBY PICTURE WITH GULFSTREAM WIN GAME COLT NOW HAS TWO WINS AND A SECOND IN 3 DIRT OUTINGS HELD OFF HEAVY FAVORITE WHO WAS SCRATCHED AT 5-1 FROM GRADE 2

Storm Runner caught a break in November when his Churchill Downs maiden race was rained off the turf and onto the main track, and he responded with an easy victory by more than 4 lengths. Upon shipping down to Dale Romans' winter base at Gulfstream Park, the trainer noticed the colt seemed to relish the dirt surface there, even after he disappointed in a grass allowance last month.

Apparently the horse was trying to tell his connections something all along, as he jumped into a new dimension on the Gulfstream dirt on Sunday, recording an allowance victory in fast time and over a heavy favorite who had been 5-to-1 for the previous day's Grade 2 Holy Bull Stakes, before scratching when he drew the outside post position.

In notching a spiffy 6 on the Ragozin Sheets by completing 8 1/2 furlongs in 1:42 2/5, Storm Runner ran himself right into the Kentucky Derby picture. That

Ragozin figure is faster than any of Barry Irwin's previous Derby runners at this stage of the game, including Animal Kingdom, Captain Bodgit, Went the Day Well and The Deputy, who all scored major prep wins in March or April.

Storm Runner made such a big step forward that Romans and Irwin will have to keep a keen eye on how he recovers over the next few weeks. The Grade 2 Fountain of Youth Stakes on March 3 is the sensible next step as a chance to come back over the same track and distance as Sunday's race, but the connections will keep their options open in case he needs more time.

In Sunday's race, Storm Runner made a decisive middle move as leading jockey Luis Saez took the bull by the horns to strike the front turning for home with the short stretch and alternate wire for this distance at Gulfstream, getting the jump on 4-to-5 Mississippi, who came with his run but wound up a neck short under Julien Leparoux.

Storm Runner held on despite never switching leads in the lane, which can be a sign of greenness or a soundness issue. Romans has seen no reason to think there is anything amiss physically, and considering the colt has been professional in all his previous races, it would be a bit surprising for him to all the sudden be green at the end of a breakthrough performance. Interestingly, Saez also was on Grade 3 Swale Stakes hero Strike Power on Saturday when that colt won despite not switching leads, and his trainer Mark Hennig explained that the colt was running fast enough that Saez felt he did not need to "mess with him" in the lane.



Storm Runner held on gamely to win by a neck over Mississippi, and it was another 9 1/4 lengths back to the third-place finisher Cove Blue.

Strike Power is pointing for the Fountain of Youth, as is juvenile champion Good Magic and Grade 1 winner Free Drop Billy, who finished second in the Holy Bull for Romans and Saez.

From *Daily Racing Form* comes the following:

Romans May Have Another Derby Contender in Storm Runner



Trainer Dale Romans has run at least one horse in the Kentucky Derby in six of the last seven editions, finishing third twice and fourth with Shackleford, who came back to edge Animal Kingdom in the Preakness.

Less than 24 hours after finishing second and third, respectively, with Free Drop Billy and Tiz Mischief in the Grade 2 Holy Bull, trainer Dale Romans may have found himself another Kentucky Derby candidate after Storm Runner outlasted odds-on favorite Mississippi to capture Sunday's co-feature going 1 1/16 miles on the main track.

"I think he's kind of under the radar because of his purchase price [\$5,000] as a yearling," Romans said. "We bought him at Ellis after his [first] start. People might have to start paying attention to him, and I might have to start thinking of getting him to some of the bigger races."

Mississippi, who scratched out of the Holy Bull after drawing post position 11, ran well in defeat after being left with a bit too much to do trying to catch the winner with the short stretch run in races decided at 1 1/16 miles locally.

From Steve Haskin's Derby Dozen for the *Blood-Horse* comes the following:

There were three other races over the weekend worth mentioning. The Mark Casse-trained MISSISSIPPI, a \$700,000 2-year-old by Pioneerof the Nile who was a

close second to the highly regarded NOBLE INDY in an allowance, was scratched from the Holy Bull after drawing the outside post and ran instead in a 1 1/16-mile allowance race the following day. Sent off at 4-5, he saved ground most of the way and rallied along the inside, only to miss catching STORM RUNNER by a neck, while making up three lengths in the stretch and finishing 9 1/4 lengths ahead of the third-place finisher. The winner, with three grass races under him, despite a handy win and a strong second in his only two dirt races, moved up steadily along the rail, blew by the pacesetting COVE BLUE at the three-eighths pole and drifted a bit wide turning for home, as 8-5 second choice NAVISTAR ducked out to the middle of the track. He opened a clear lead in the stretch, but was carrying his head high and was stuck on his left lead, drifting in near the eighth pole. He held on to win by a neck in 1:42 2/5, which was only three-fifths slower than Audible ran in the Holy Bull. If he can get his act together and race more professionally, he could be an interesting horse to watch, as could Mississippi. It is worth noting that Storm Runner, purchased for a paltry \$5,000 as a yearling, has a very strong tail-female family with several Calumet Farm influences. His third dam is by Arts and Letters' classic-winning son Codex and is a half-sister to grade 1 winner Life's Hope, who won or placed in 22 stakes from ages 3 to 8. Storm Runner's fourth dam is by Calumet's Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner Tim Tam, and his fifth dam is the granddam of the great international star Trillion. He gives trainer Dale Romans yet another potential Derby horse.