

## MEXIKOMA MAKES HIS MARK IN SUNSHINE MILLIONS CLASSIC HITS BULLS' EYE ON TARGET THAT CONNECTIONS SET IN SEPTEMBER LONG-WINDED 5YO NOTCHES 106 BEYER, VALIDATING POTENTIAL AT LAST

After more than two years of teases, Mexikoma at last began to fulfill his potential on January 16 in a breakthrough triumph in the \$250,000 Sunshine Millions Classic for Florida-breds at Gulfstream Park. Bet down from 9-to-2 on the morning line to the favorite's role at 6-to-5, the 5-year-old horse delivered a sustained rally under jockey John Velazquez to run down Mr. Jordan in the stretch and draw off to a convincing first stakes triumph by 1 1/2 lengths, with a long gap of 12 lengths back to Catholic Cowboy in third.



*Mexikoma jumped to a 106 Beyer, the nation's best on dirt thus far in the early New Year, in registering his first stakes win.*

Mexikoma jumped to a career-best 106 Beyer, the nation's best figure at any distance on dirt in the early New Year. He will point for major races at 9 furlongs and beyond, which Team Valor always saw as his sweet spot, yet the Sunshine Millions marked just his second chance to go that far, as his career had been sidetracked several times just when he appeared poised for something big.

After illness and an ankle injury derailed Mexikoma's 3-year-old season, he returned with a sharp allowance win at Belmont Park in June and followed with an emphatic score there in September. Both races were around one turn and at a mile and a sixteenth, which only whetted the appetites of Team Valor CEO Barry Irwin and trainer Michael Dilger to see what he

could do with more distance, and they opted at that point to look ahead to the Sunshine Millions as his breakout chance. As means to that end, he finished third over a mile in another Belmont allowance and rallied from far back to check in fifth in Gulfstream's Harlan's Holiday Stakes at a mile and a sixteenth. With wide trips in both races, he added to a remarkably consistent form line of four 0 speed figures on the Thoro-Graph Sheets over his five starts as a 4-year-old, which painted him as a Graded stakes horse even though he was still crying out for more ground.

Irwin's and Dilger's patient plan came together with the addition of Hall of Fame jockey John Velazquez for the 9-furlong Sunshine Millions. The consensus pick of the paddock in addition to emphatic support at the windows (he opened at 4 to 5), Mexikoma was so sharp he broke on top before relaxing for Velazquez, only to have to take up twice in traffic in the first turn. Velazquez, the consummate pro, took it in stride and kept Mexikoma in the clear with a bulls' eye on the speedy Mr. Jordan, who tried to put the race away opening up in the far turn, but Mexikoma was locked on and began to reel him in, pulling even going past the eighth pole and rolling right by to stop the clock in a 1:48.17. It was the third fastest Classic in 14 editions, behind the times of Grade 1 winners Southern Image and Mucho Macho Man.

Irwin said "That was certainly what we hoped to see. He was as sharp as he has ever been for us, and it made a difference in him not getting so far back like he has in the past at Gulfstream."

Dilger said "He's got a lot of try and even when he doesn't win, it's not because he didn't try. He's a horse that's a two-turn horse. He's always going to be running best at the end of the races. We're delighted. This has been the target for him for quite a while, and thankfully it worked."

Mexikoma is the 141st stakes winner from 541 starters (26 percent) for a public partnership that Irwin has managed dating back to 1987.

[\*HD Video Replay\*](#)

