

## UNRIVALED ROMPS IN TEAM VALOR DEBUT, IS BLUE GRASS BOUND COMES FROM WAY, WAY BACK TO SCORE BY 5 IN 1ST START AT 3 ONE CHANCE TO CRACK KENTUCKY DERBY FIELD FOR LONG-STRIDING 3YO

Unrivaled toyed with his opponents and his new Team Valor partners on Sunday when he spotted the early leaders about 12 lengths in a Parx allowance race, only to fly home to an easy victory that put him in line for a major Kentucky Derby prep.

The 3-year-old colt scored by 5 lengths as the 4-to-5 favorite just 8 days after Barry Irwin first presented him to Team Valor clients. He was syndicated quickly and pointed for a return trip to Parx, where he had romped by 15 lengths in a maiden race on December 23 in his most recent start, employing the same late-running kick.

Irwin thought Unrivaled's performance in that race, combined with his pedigree and background, stamped him as a potential Derby horse.



*Unrivaled cruises after circling the field in his 5-length win on Sunday.*

Unrivaled will now get the chance to punch his ticket in Keeneland's Grade 1 Blue Grass Stakes on April 4 after acing his 3-year-old debut for trainer Marya Montoya.

Even with fair warning that Unrivaled is a deep, deep closer, the race was not without a few anxious breaths for those within the TVI camp who watched the Parx broadcast. Unrivaled was "off the screen," as they say, for what seemed like a *long* time as he and jockey Frankie Pennington waited to pounce.

Unrivaled did not "reappear" until the middle of the far turn, but by then he was rolling. He reached third place at the top of the lane and cruised past the top two before gearing down in the final sixteenth with the victory in hand.

Pennington used the whip twice, but only to keep him going straight.

"He has a tendency to want to duck in when he is about to challenge another horse," the rider said. "I only went to the whip to guide him so he wouldn't cut anyone off."

Based on Unrivaled's winter regimen, which included a few days of missed training when he spiked a temperature, Montoya expects him to move forward quite a bit with the race under his belt. He will remain at Fair Hill Training Center to prepare for the Blue Grass, and Irwin sees no reason to switch to another trainer at this point. Montoya is not well known beyond her home track Parx, but Team Valor has been down that road many times through the years, including with Captain Bodgit, who

finished second by a head in the Kentucky Derby and a close third in the Preakness in 1997 for trainer Gary Capuano.

"I like Marya so far," Irwin said. "Everything she has said so far has come to pass. Usually a trainer will say something and then kind of backtrack to cover themselves, but she hasn't done that, and what she has said has come to pass."



*Unrivald and trainer Marya Montoya at Fair Hill a week before his 3yo debut.*

fairly well on Sunday.

Irwin said "This horse has some quirks but he is bred to run all day and his last two races indicate that he can do just that."

#### Team Valor Purchase Unrivald Confirms Talent

Unrivald took a successful first step for his new owner, Team Valor International, winning a first-level allowance at Parx Racing on Sunday by five lengths. The victory came on the heels of a 15-length Parx maiden score.

We will learn more about Unrivald in his next race, which is likely to come April 4 in either the Blue Grass at Keeneland or the Wood Memorial at Aqueduct.

"I think we're leaning to the Blue Grass," said Barry Irwin, the founder and chief executive of Team Valor. "The trainer told me the horse wants to run on a tight track. We're not going to cross out the Wood, but that track can get cuppy. I think Santa Anita and Keeneland are the type of tracks he wants."

Unrivald will get a change in jockeys, with veteran Robby Albarado already accepting the mount for the Blue Grass. Pennington has never ridden at Keeneland or Churchill Downs. Albarado finished second in last year's Blue Grass on Medal Count.

The Blue Grass returns to conventional dirt this year for the first time since 2006 and offers 100-40-20-10 in Derby qualifying points for the top 4 finishers. In the two years since Churchill Downs switched to a points system to determine the Derby's field of 20, the cutoff was 10 points in 2013 and 20 points last year.

The likely Blue Grass favorite is Tampa Bay Derby winner Carpe Diem, whose co-owner, WinStar Farm, bred and initially raced Unrivald until he was claimed for \$30,000 out of a second-place finish by a nose at Keeneland last fall.

He missed the break and spotted his rivals a huge lead in that race but recovered and actually took the lead in the stretch before finishing second by a nose.

Since then, Montoya and her husband, who works on the Parx gate crew, have done a lot of work with Unrivald in and around the starting gate. He broke

Although Unrivaled's victory Sunday was for all practical purposes assured at the sixteenth pole, there were some anxious moments. After breaking fine in the 1 1/16-mile race, Unrivaled dropped back to last. He fell out of the simulcast video early on the backstretch and did not reappear until the leaders were nearing the stretch.

"I didn't see the race in person," Irwin said. "I sent somebody up and watched the replay. I have to say I was pretty nervous when he was not on the screen on the far turn, and then when he reappeared at the five-sixteenths pole, it just looked like there was no way that he could get there."

Unrivaled was about six lengths back entering the stretch. Once he leveled off, he closed that gap quickly, taking the lead leaving the sixteenth pole and finishing in a gallop for jockey Frankie Pennington.

"He has a very, very long stride, but he's still a little green," Irwin said. "He wants to duck in a little bit."

The purchase of Unrivaled from Waldorf Racing Stables was completed last week, and Irwin had said he would wait until after the Parx race before deciding who will train the horse going forward. He has decided to leave Unrivaled with trainer Marya Montoya, who is based at the Fair Hill Training Center and races primarily at Parx.

Montoya claimed the son of Super Saver and the Unbridled mare Safely for \$30,000 out of a maiden race at Keeneland in October.

"Everything she has told me so far has come true," Irwin said. "This horse has some idiosyncracies, and she and her husband, who works on the gate crew at Parx, have put a lot of work into him and know him. We're going to leave him where he is, at least through the next race."

Although Unrivaled was visually impressive Sunday, his effort is difficult to gauge because the track at Parx was listed as "good," and times were dull throughout the card. He was given an 82 Beyer Speed Figure, markedly lower than the 92 he received for his maiden win.

His race went in 1:46.69, with a final 2 1/2 furlongs in 33.98 seconds. According to the Equibase chart, Unrivaled made up eight lengths in that span. He covered his final sixteenth in just under 6.58 seconds, which is not too shabby.

We'll find out more about Unrivaled's future shortly. He likely would have to finish first or second in the Blue Grass or Wood Memorial to earn enough qualifying points to make the Kentucky Derby field.

Team Valor won the 2011 Derby with Animal Kingdom, who was largely unknown before he won the Spiral Stakes at Turfway Park in his start prior to the Kentucky Derby.

From Steve Haskin's Derby Dozen for the *Blood-Horse* comes the following in the "Knocking on the Door" section:

At Parx Racing, the well-bred **UNRIVALED**, a son of Super Saver, out of an Unbridled mare, followed up his 15-length maiden romp with a five-length score in a 1 1/16-mile allowance race. He will now move up to the big-time in Blue Grass Stakes. Unrivaled has flourished at Parx since being claimed from WinStar Farm for \$30,000 at Keeneland last October and then sold privately to Team Valor.