

## AFTER 'FOUNTAIN' DEBACLE, STORM RUNNER SHOOTS FOR FLA. DERBY COLT HAS TRAINED UP A STORM IN FLORIDA, ALL FOR NAUGHT IN GR. 2 CONNECTIONS HAVE LOST NO FAITH IN BARGAIN PRIVATE PURCHASE



After a frustrating outing in the Grade 2 Fountain of Youth Stakes on March 3, Storm Runner will get another chance on the Triple Crown trail at Gulfstream Park in the \$1-million Florida Derby on March 31.

The chestnut colt will remain based at Gulfstream, where he has trained exceptionally well this winter and was honed to a fine edge for the Fountain of Youth, yet as the race was run and he was ridden, he never had a chance at odds of 9-to-1. The free-running colt found himself in a box along the backstretch, racing behind the winner and inside the runner-up. To make matters worse, his rider twice tried to come through inside where no room existed, causing the colt to bounce

off the rail and be grabbed approaching the turn. Out of his rhythm, he tailed off and was no threat to stablemate Promises Fulfilled, who scored a wire-to-wire upset at 18-to-1, with Grade 3 Swale winner Strike Power following in second the whole way around.

Matt Bernier of *Daily Racing Form* posited a key "what if" for Storm Runner and perhaps the outcome of the Fountain of Youth.

"If [Joel] Rosario can squeeze through with Storm Runner, the entire complexion of the pace and/or race may have changed," Bernier wrote on Twitter.

Trainer Dale Romans and Team Valor lost no faith in Storm Runner, who bounced out of the race in fine shape.

Team Valor CEO Barry Irwin said, "The worst aspect of the Fountain of Youth disaster was that Storm Runner trained up to the race in brilliant fashion. It is very difficult for any trainer to get a horse that razor sharp for a race. The big question going forward is whether Dale and Storm Runner can do it again. If they can, then we run in the Florida Derby. If not, then maybe we look for something easier and use it as a possible Preakness prep. In the best of all possible worlds, Storm Runner can bounce back. Let's face it: he did not have a taxing race. He only ran about 5 furlongs."

Leading up to the Fountain of Youth, Storm Runner won a Gulfstream dirt allowance on February 3, utilizing the kind of middle move that failed to materialize in the Fountain of Youth.

"I am all for it," Romans said of the Florida Derby. "Don't forget, Shackleford only ran fifth in the Fountain of Youth and came right back to just miss in the Florida Derby."