

March 23, 2013

CROP REPORT BLOSSOMS AS BELMONT S. PROSPECT IN RUSHAWAY TEAM VALOR UNLEASHES ANOTHER CLASSIC COLT AT TURFWAY PARK SPONSORSHIP PAYS OFF AS BIG COLT GAINS STAKES WIN IN 2ND U.S. START

For the third straight year, a colt stormed into the Triple Crown picture at Turfway Park for Team Valor International. This time, the race was especially close to home for Barry Irwin's partnership, which used Turfway's Spiral Stakes as a springboard to the Kentucky Derby for Animal Kingdom in 2011 and Went the Day Well in 2012.



Crop Report is the fourth straight stakes winner for Team Valor and Graham Motion at Turfway Park, joining Animal Kingdom (2011 Spiral), State of Play (2012 Battaglia) and Went the Day Well (2012 Spiral).

Crop Report was the latest colt to rise to the occasion on the Turfway Polytrack, rallying from 10 lengths back early for an impressive win in Saturday's \$75,000 Rushaway Stakes, which happened to be sponsored by Team Valor for the first time.

Financially strapped Turfway canceled the Rushaway this winter until Irwin asked track management to reconsider with the offer of a sponsorship. The association was natural, given the success of Animal Kingdom and Went the Day Well coming out of the Spiral on the same card. Irwin also saw the Rushaway as an important fixture on the calendar for a 3-year-old who might be late developing or lacking the necessary earnings to crack the Spiral field.

That ended up fitting Crop Report to a tee. With just \$11,574 in earnings, the English import was excluded from the full Spiral field and was still very much a work in progress after his U.S. debut in a Gulfstream Park turf allowance, in which he lost all chance when he hit the gate at the start and was very reserved early before igniting with an eye-catching burst to finish third.

After trainer Graham Motion fitted Crop Report with blinkers for the Rushaway, the big son of Medaglia d'Oro broke better but still a tad slow as the 3 to 5 favorite in a field of 5. A stride or two out of the gate, he was bumped hard by the horse to the inside, throwing him off stride. The somewhat tardy break and the bump conspired to cost Crop Report plenty of ground and momentum.

Barry Irwin instructed Joel Rosario before the race not to try to change the horse's style to fit the occasion, but to allow the strapping youngster plenty of time to gather himself before he made any use of him.

“Joel did exactly that,” Irwin said afterward. “He took a long hold of Crop Report, settled him beautifully and did not begin to let him creep toward the leaders until he was more than halfway down the backstretch.”

Crop Report was 11 or 12 lengths back early, but he managed to cut the margin in half nearing the quarter pole. Rosario took him wide on a track that was biased against closers, squared him up at the top of the lane, then pointed him in the right direction. The green, immature May 31 foal did not change leads in the stretch but Rosario never touched him with the stick and steered him to an easy victory along the outside.

Although he appeared to be just loping with his ears pricked in the final sixteenth of a mile, Crop Report cruised home in a fast :06 1/5 to catch the pacesetter Divine Ambition and get up by 1 3/4 lengths.



Crop Report will be pointed to the Grade 2 Peter Pan Stakes on May 11 at Belmont Park as a prep for the Belmont Stakes.

"He proved today that he can run, but I was kind of worried when we passed the three-eighths pole," Rosario said. "I was concerned coming around the far turn because it took a while for him to get going. But when he started running, he just went. At the top of the stretch he was moving a lot better than the horse on the inside. After that I just let him get it together."

Entertaining a throng of reporters outside the winner's circle, Irwin cited Crop Report's immaturity in ruling him out of the Kentucky Derby, but he said the colt would be a nice prospect for the final leg of the Triple Crown, the Belmont Stakes at 12 furlongs.

"We've never had a horse like this," said Irwin. "By prepping him once more and maybe running him in the Derby, we could ruin him. He is, on the other hand, a candidate for the Belmont Stakes, with his cruising style and considerable stamina. We will wait awhile before running him again, find a suitable prep and aim him for the third leg of the Triple Crown."

That prep could come at Belmont Park in the Grade 2 Peter Pan Stakes over 9 furlongs on May 11.

Crop Report's form was underscored an hour later when Black Onyx, the winner from his troubled trip at Gulfstream, scored in the Spiral, following the turf-to-Polytrack path that Team Valor charted with Animal Kingdom.

That cold day in 2011 marked the start of an unusual run for Team Valor and Motion on the Polytrack at Turfway. With 5 starters, they have combined for 4 stakes wins—Crop Report, Animal Kingdom

and Went the Day Well in the Spiral, and State of Play in the 2012 John Battaglia Memorial Stakes—along with a second-place finish by Crimson China in 2011 Rushaway.

Like Crimson China and Went the Day Well, Irwin uncovered Crop Report in England, where he scored in a one-mile maiden race by 5 lengths at Newmarket in October. The colt joined Motion's roster in South Florida in early December.

From *Thoroughbred Daily News* comes the following:

TEAM VALOR RUSHAWAY S., \$75,000, TPX, 3-23, 3yo, 1 1/16m (AWT), 1:45 3/5, ft. 1--#CROP REPORT, 118, c, 3, by Medaglia d'Oro

Crop Report failed to make it into the oversubscribed GIII Spiral S. two races later on this card, and the connections of runners in that field probably let out a collective sigh of relief after the heavy favorite's impressive performance here.



The dark bay kicked off his career in Britain for owner M. J. Tuckey and conditioner William Haggas, earning his diploma by a five-length margin second out at Newmarket in October. Privately purchased by Team Valor International--which happened to be the sponsors of this race--the dark bay waltzed out of the gate in a turfy Gulfstream allowance Feb. 23, but flew home late as he wove between horses to finish a close-up third behind Spiral upsetter Black Onyx (Rock Hard Ten). He entered with plenty of buzz and, after several scratches, came down significantly from a 4-1 morning line.

Away in no particular hurry again here despite the addition of blinkers, Crop Report trailed the field early as Divine Ambition posted splits of :23.76, :47.97 and 1:13.14. The hulking favorite began to come alive late on the turn as Divine Ambition built some daylight, and he gobbled up ground in the lane despite failing to switch leads to power to the front for an auspicious first Stateside success.

"I was a little concerned," admitted assistant trainer David Rock of the winner's slow start. "We hoped he would show a little more speed, but we knew he would finish up. The horse gave himself a lot to do. He's European and a big horse, so maybe the gate's a little small to him. Owners are talking about running him in the [GI] Blue Grass S. [at Keeneland Apr. 13]. The further [nine-furlong distance certainly will help."

On presenting the winning trophy to himself, Team Valor's Barry Irwin said, "It's pretty weird! I didn't even realize I was doing it, but I guess I was. It's the first time I ever sponsored a race, and it was fun. I think we'll do it again."