

BRUJO DE OLLEROS LEADS BREEDERS' CUP CHARGE FOR TEAM VALOR ONE OF 1ST TO JOIN METTEE, WIZARD HAS THRIVED IN 2ND U.S. SEASON BARN ACCOUNTS FOR 2 OF 3 BC HORSES BASED AT FAIR HILL TR. CENTER

From *This Is Horse Racing*, based a few furlongs from Fair Hill, comes the following:

Breeders' Cup: Team Valor Troops

Trainer Rick Mettee calls Brujo de Olleros aggressive, which figures given the horse's reputation as a former South American phenom, ballyhooed import and key player in Friday's Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile at Santa Anita.

But, maybe the chestnut colt isn't as big and bad as he seems.

"He would like to train very aggressively," exercise rider Danielle Hodsdon said. "He's a big, strong colt but really sensitive. He likes you to be really quiet. If you don't overreact to the fact that he's going to pick it up through his entire gallop, you're fine. If you were to stand up and check him he'd probably panic, wash out and lose it."



Brujo de Olleros, pictured this week at Santa Anita, gets along well with exercise rider Danielle Hodsdon, one of the first hires for Rick Mettee's staff at Fair Hill Training Center.

Brujo de Olleros and Hodsdon, a steeplechase jockey and recent addition to the Team Valor International/Mettee team at Fair Hill, make a good combination. The 5-year-old Wild Event horse exits a second to Graydar in the Grade 2 Kelso at Aqueduct in late September, a race that always plays a role in the \$1 million Dirt Mile. The Brazilian bred is 8-1 on the morning line and will break from post four in a field of 12 for jockey Alan Garcia.

Mettee took the Team Valor job in April and inherited Brujo de Olleros. In Uruguay, he was dominant – winning four of five including victories by 10, 8 and 14 lengths through Jan. 2012. His two American starts last year, for trainer Graham Motion, were losses in stakes at Monmouth Park in June and Belmont in September. Shelved for the rest of the year, Brujo de Olleros didn't re-emerge until this summer. He finished second, beaten a neck, in the Donald LeVine Memorial at Parx in June, won the Carl Hanford Memorial at Delaware Park and then hit the big time in the Kelso.

"The plan was to point for the Kelso and that would dictate what we did with him over the rest of the fall and winter," said Mettee. "He stepped up there and ran very well. Graydar is pretty tough. Brujo has progressively done a little better all year and we just think the race is coming up just at the right time for him. He worked real good here (Friday)."



Mexikoma breezed a couple times without blinkers and showed another dimension with the equipment on last week. Kathee Rengert photo

In his final serious move before the Breeders' Cup, Brujo de Olleros breezed 7 furlongs in 1:26.60. The next morning he was on a plane with stablemate Mexikoma (Juvenile) to California.

Mettee pointed to Hodsdon as a key to the horse's progression this year, and she balances the horse's speed, strength and attitude. The former rider of Informed Decision, Forever Together, Mixed Up and other stars of flat and jump for Sheppard got on Brujo de Olleros her first day on the job and they've been a team ever since.

"He gives you a powerful feel, he's so genuine, and blessed with some talent as well," she said. "He's got loads of personality. Really good horses are like that. He likes it, he's one of those horses who absolutely loves his job. I just got lucky and he got to be my big horse."

Like many trainers, Mettee lets his horse stand in on the racetrack before training. Brujo de Olleros would hang by the rail and watch all day long if Hodsdon let him. He likes having a track to himself and even wants the dirt to clear when he's training on the Tapeta surface inside the other.

"Time of day is important to him, how busy it is," Hodsdon said. "Rick will send me out early on the Tapeta; if it's busy on the dirt he thinks about it. There are days I'll go out there and stand on the track for 10 minutes waiting for it to get quiet."

The waiting game has worked, as Brujo de Olleros (co-owned by Richard Santulli) has fired nothing but quality starts this year. He gets one more chance Friday in a solid group that also includes Grade 1 winners Verrazano Goldencents, Alpha and Golden Ticket plus Hymn Book (third in the Kelso) and California speedster Fed Biz.

Hodsdon likes her mount's chances.

“There are very few that stand out like he does,” she said. “I have not ridden that many dirt horses, fast dirt horses, and the first time I gave him a real breeze, got to let him finish up, I felt like ‘this is probably the fastest, nicest work horse I’ve ever ridden. He gives you a powerful feel.”

- Brujo de Olleros was accompanied on the Breeders’ Cup trip by recent Team Valor purchase Mexikoma, who runs in the \$2 million Juvenile Saturday. The son of Birdstone exits a lopsided maiden win for trainer Michael Dilger at Delaware Park in September. Bought by Team Valor after that nearly 15-length score, the Florida-bred is 12-1 in the field of 14.

Mettee has been impressed with his new charge, and said the Juvenile became a target in part because talented New York-based 2-year-old Honor Code opted for the Remsen at Aqueduct Nov. 30.

“We know he’s really going to have to step up but we think maybe it’s a good time to roll the dice a bit,” said the trainer. “He’s gone two turns, so he’s got that going for him and he worked real good (7 furlongs in 1:27 2/5) here the other day. He’s a neat little horse, pretty straightforward for the most part and kind to train. We kept him on the dirt here most of the time and hopefully he gets over the dirt track out there as well as he does this one.”

Garcia takes the ride on Mexikoma, who breaks from post 3 at 12-1. As Mettee said, the Juvenile is wide open and headed by Champagne winner Havana at 5-2.



Street Sailing blowing off some steam this week with trainer Rick Mettee, left.

- Another recent Team Valor purchase, Street Sailing, jumped on the plane in Kentucky and will compete in the Juvenile Fillies Turf Friday.

Late last week, Mettee had yet to see the Pennsylvania-bred daughter of Street Boss, who exited a powerhouse allowance score on the turf at Keeneland for trainer Bill Helmbrecht Oct. 9. Garcia rides the 15-1 shot, who is co-owned by Janet Grube) in a field loaded with European invaders plus favorite and two-time stakes winner My Conquestadory.

Regardless of how they run, Mettee is pleased with his stable’s participation on racing’s biggest day. He’s in charge of 31 horses at Fair Hill, and making big plans sure beats watching from the rail. The former North American assistant to Godolphin trainer Saeed bin Suroor has long had a limited number of starts under his own name, and has won seven races for Team Valor this year.

“If any one of them won it would be nice, but Brujo would be really nice because it’s a race we pointed for and he was here when I got here,” Mettee said. “He looks like he’s just sitting on a good race. A signature win like that would put an exclamation point on the first year here.”