

An Elusive Sense of Humor

Freshman stars in a league of their own

by
Matt
O'Neil

Following the trend of the recent election season, the freshman sires' race remains too close to call with about six weeks left in 2002. Both Elusive Quality and Distorted Humor continue to rack up winners and even traded stakes winners over the first weekend in November. On Saturday, November 2, Crackup took the \$125,000 California Cup Juvenile Stakes for Distorted Humor. The very next day Elusive Quality countered with Chimichurri winning the \$100,000 Tempted Stakes (G3).

There was also action away from the track that added to the drama of the race. Due to a medication infraction, Elusive Quality's son Elusive City was stripped of two of his three wins in Europe this summer: his maiden score and his triumph in the Richmond Stakes (G2). While he will still retain his win in the Prix Morny (G1), the disqualifications have cost him and his sire, around \$70,000 in purse earnings. As of this writing, Distorted Humor held a \$103,000 lead over his rival.

But even if Elusive Quality does not earn the Freshman Sire title he has already made history of sorts. His six first-crop juvenile stakes winners have tied him with Red Ransom for the most ever (going back 25 years anyway) in that category.

In 1994, Bail Out Becky, Lucky Lauren, Upper Noosh, Sri Pekan, Petrouchka and Roujoleur all won stakes for Red Ransom. They were among his 63 first-crop two-year-olds and 12 first-crop juvenile winners. With over month left in 2002, Elusive Quality still has time to set a new standard.

Millionaire's Club

Elusive Quality will also likely become one of only 14 stallions whose first crop of juveniles has earned over \$1,000,000. Distorted Humor has already joined that club and 2002 will mark the third consecutive year where two or more Freshman sires have topped the million dollar milestone in the same year. In 2000, Honour and Glory and Storm Creek completed that exacta, and in 2001 Valid Expectations, Open Forum, and Smoke Glacken all saw their runners rack up a million or more.

2002 will also mark the fourth straight year where the progeny of the Leading Freshman Sire will have earned in excess of \$1,000,000. With that knowledge and the fact that eight (including Elusive Quality) of the 14 million-dollar juvenile sires have emerged in the past four seasons, it begs the question: Is this due to larger crop size or larger overall juvenile purses? Perhaps both? More on that later.

Whatever the reason for all the recent millionaires, no freshman stallion has yet to come close to the earnings mark set by Danzig's first crop "way back" in 1984. Led by inaugural Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1) winner Chief's Crown, Danzig's first crop juvenile earnings topped the \$2,000,000 mark – \$2,141,658 to be exact. While Chief's Crown contributed some \$900,000 to that total with his championship exploits, it also helped that Stephan's Odyssey won Hollywood Futurity (G1), a million dollar race at the time. Kudos are also due to Alydar, who is the only stallion

whose first crop juveniles earned over \$1,000,000 in the pre-Breeders' Cup era (\$1,137,869 in 1983).

Going back to the question begged earlier, it is interesting to note that Danzig's first crop numbered 29 and Alydar's numbered 35, roughly half the crop size of recent stars Honour and Glory, Valid Expectations, Open Forum, Smoke Glacken, Storm Creek, Distorted Humor, and Elusive Quality. Fappiano (1985) and Meadowlake (1990) are the others who have reached the million-dollar plateau in juvenile earnings with 30 or fewer foals.

Getting there

It's always been possible to post impressive progeny earnings with a "big horse" or two as evidenced by Danzig (\$1.5 million from two horses), Fappiano (BC Juvenile G1 winner Tasso), and Meadowlake (whose Meadow Star earned over \$900,000 in 1990). But with more foals out running for \$40,000 maiden pots it's also obviously become easier to "nickel and dime" the way up to the top. Valid Expectation's first crop of juveniles earned nearly \$1.4 million, third highest ever, with a top earner of only \$120,000. Open Forum the same year topped a million with a leading earner of only \$188,000. In future issues of *OBT* we will take a closer look at the overall state of juvenile racing in America, especially in regards to crop size and purse structure.

As further evidence of the strength of this year's freshman sires crop, Tale of the Cat has already earned his way onto the all-time list for numbers of juvenile winners by a freshman sire. In fact, he is one of only nine stallions who have ever sired 20 or more first-crop juvenile winners. While End Sweep's record of 32 winners in 1998 appears safe, two more winners would tie Tale of the Cat with Honour and Glory for fourth best of all time.

While the freshman sire race will likely be a photo finish, Storm Cat holds a commanding lead over Seattle Slew in the overall Juvenile Sires category. In fact, even without super filly Storm Flag Flying and her \$967,000 in earnings, Storm Cat would still be in front.

Both Storm Cat and Slew are the sires of the likely juvenile champions, the aforementioned filly Storm Flag Flying and the colt Vindication. Both are undefeated, both put on stirring displays in Chicago and they head very deep and talented casts of two-year-olds. What is even more exciting is the fact that those two and several that were left in their wake, do not appear to be early developing juveniles who have simply capitalized on early maturity.

In terms of pedigree, talent, and style of performance, these youngsters figure to handle added distances and leave the impression that there are several gears yet untried. That bodes well for exceptional spring racing in 2003. **MOB**

Matt O'Neil is a pedigree analyst and works at Taylor Made Farm's Stallion Division.

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