

Freshmen Come Into Focus

While Storm Cat's flag still flies high

by
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Back in April, the 2002 crop of freshman sires looked to have several stallions that could make a big impact in the American stallion ranks in the years to come. Heading into the last quarter of the year, the crop, on the whole, is indeed fulfilling that great promise. Many stallions have met high expectations, and there have been some pleasant surprises to add even more depth to the crop.

Early season "surprises" like Elusive Quality and Distorted Humor are continuing to thrive. The former now has six stakes winners from 71 foals, a gaudy 8 percent stakes winners from foals that many proven stallions would have trouble matching. Like Elusive Quality, it looks like Distorted Humor is anything but a flash in the pan. He now has 10 individual winners and has sired a trio of stakes winners.

Stallions like Grand Slam and Tale of the Cat are meeting expectations so far, siring a good mix of precocity and quality. They each have double digit individual winners and at least one stakes winner. Tale of the Cat is tied with Elusive Quality with 16 winners and has sired a pair of minor stakes winners.

Late season moves

Stormy Atlantic didn't get much notice outside of Florida until a daughter of his sold for \$1.9 million at Barretts this spring. But it is safe to say he is living up to those adjusted expectations now that that filly, named Atlantic Ocean, as well as two others have won stakes races.

The Deputy Minister sons Awesome Again and Touch Gold did not necessarily figure to be "win early" sires and consequently, they have been buried on the Freshman Sire rankings throughout the year. They did, however, figure to reproduce their quality in time, and they are now showing signs of fulfilling that promise.

Awesome Again's Toccet, wore down Del Mar Futurity (G1) winner Icecoldbeeratreds to take the Belmont Futurity (G1) on October 4. Toccet is one of only 14 starters and four winners for the Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) winner so far. Interestingly, Belmont Stakes (G1) winner Touch Gold has the exact same profile: 14 starters, 4 winners and one graded stakes winner (Oak Leaf G2 winner Composure) heading to the Breeders' Cup.

Coronado's Quest may be a victim of misplaced expectations. As fleet a juvenile as he was, many seem to have jumped off the bandwagon when he did not have a slew of juvenile winners or a big horse by late summer. His stud fee has even been reduced from \$75,000 to \$35,000. Fast forward to late October and Coronado now has seen eight of his 52 foals find the winners circle. One of those winners, Al Jadeed won the Royal Lodge Stakes (G2) at Ascot.

Stallions like Cape Town, Swain, Deputy Commander, and Arch have all gotten off to predictably slow starts. It would be no surprise, however, to find them in the upper echelon of the First Crop Sire rankings in the coming months. Fortunately for American breeders, it's crowded at the top.

Juvenile stars

Going into the Breeders' Cup, the overall crop of American two-year-olds holds immense promise as well. Sky Mesa validated his Saratoga form with a romp in the Lane's End Breeders Futurity (G2) at Keeneland. He'll meet multiple graded stakes winner Whywhywhy and Vindication in Chicago. It will be interesting to see if these American juveniles are indeed a top notch group, or will once again be vulnerable to a European invasion.

While those colts all possess high quality and will likely put on a super show at Arlington, the best juvenile in the land is the filly Storm Flag Flying. The daughter of Storm Cat will try to become emulate her mother My Flag (1995 BC Juvenile Fillies) and grandmother Personal Ensign (1988 BC Distaff) by winning a Breeders' Cup race. With a high cruising speed and a marvelous turn of foot, she made easy work of the field in the Matron (G1) and of the top class Santa Catarina in the Frizette (G1). She is prone to bad behavior, but it's a rare treat to encounter an animal with so much physical talent and untapped potential.

Broodmare sires of juveniles

Keeping with the theme of this month's issue of *OBI*, we'll finish up by looking at the juvenile proficiency of the current top 10 broodmare sires. Looking at the percentage of broodmare sire stakes winners that were juvenile stakes winners, we can get an idea of the likelihood of daughters of these stallions throwing quality two-year-olds.

With 40 percent juvenile stakes winners (JSW) from stakes winners (SW), Valid Appeal ranks a clear Number One of the broodmare sires surveyed. That's not really a surprise; Valid Appeal has long been a source of quality speed. It also doesn't hurt that he has gained preeminence in Florida, a state whose racing program is decidedly geared toward two-year-old racing much of the year.

Halo and Cox's Ridge, with 24 percent JSW from SW, tie for second behind Valid Appeal, with Deputy Minister following closely at 23 percent. Daughters of Private Account throw 21 percent JSW from SW.

There were a few surprises as well. Mr. Prospector, arguably the best broodmare sire ever (at least 237 stakes winners) and a well-known source of precocity, ranks sixth with 19 percent JSW from SWs. But perhaps the biggest shock was finding that daughters of Danzig throw only 11 percent juvenile stakes winners. Like Mr. Prospector, Danzig sires over 20 percent two-year-old winners.

Perhaps by looking at these numbers we ultimately gain a greater insight into the types of stallions these mares are being bred to. In the case of Mr. Prospector and Danzig, it suggests that their (usually precocious) daughters are being mated more often and having more success with stallions who sire a low percentage of juvenile stakes winners themselves. *OBI*