

The Sky's the Limit

Saratoga unveils Hopeful winner Sky Mesa

by
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Saratoga is known for many things: after race drinks at Siro's, mineral springs, and historic upsets of some of Thoroughbred racing's greatest horses. Saratoga is also synonymous with superior juvenile racing. Highlighted by the first two juvenile grade ones of the year, the 2002 season proved to be typically strong in that regard. In fact both Sky Mesa and Awesome Humor used the wins in the Hopeful (G1) and Spinaway (G1) to vault into division leadership heading into the fall distance races.

Sky Mesa looked every bit a star during his seven length maiden score on August 4. Four weeks later he proved to be just that, winning the Hopeful Stakes (G1), in only his second start, over heavily favored Zavata. That win also provided a much needed boost to Sky Mesa's sire, Pulpit, who many had touted as the top sire of the 2001 freshman sire crop. Prior to Sky Mesa, Pulpit had sired only two stakes winners, Bema and Essence of Dubai. His runner Stroll was a nice winner of a juvenile maiden grass event, perhaps signaling that this is indeed his sires' breakthrough crop.

Awesome Humor took the more traditional path to her win in the Spinaway Stakes (G1). She had already won the Debutante (G3) at Churchill and then, after being purchased privately by WinStar Farm (who stands her sire Distorted Humor), scored in the Adirondack (G2) in mid-August. She showed uncommon determination in that victory and although not necessary bred to handle a distance of ground, it will take a good one to get by her.

Stars in the making

While the six juvenile stakes at Saratoga showcase the stars of today, it is the maiden races that often contain the stars of tomorrow. This writer remembers being on hand for a maiden race in which the winner was eventual Super Derby (G1) winner Wallenda, the second place finisher was future stakes winner All Gone and checking in fourth was a little colt named Sea Hero.

This year there were several impressive maiden victors. Roaring Fever, full brother to grade one winner Raging Fever and grade three winner and Kentucky stallion Stormin Fever, won at first asking on August 9. He subsequently ran fifth in the Hopeful (G1), but nevertheless figures to be a player in the division in the coming months.

Congrats, a son of A.P. Indy, looks to have a bright future as well for Shug McGaughey. He hails from a great Rokeby Stable family, his dam being sister to Eastern Echo among others, herself a daughter of Glowing Tribute.

Aside from Awesome Humor, there were also some exceptional juvenile fillies on the track at the Spa this year. Stellar and Midnight Cry parlayed maiden wins in early August into stakes placings later in the meet. Stellar, by freshman sire Grand Slam, ran a troubled second in the Adirondack (G2), while Midnight Cry, a daughter of Smart Strike, rallied well to be third in the Spinaway (G1), with Stellar in fourth.

"Sky Mesa's win also provided a much-needed boost to his sire, Pulpit."

Another filly maiden winner from the meet has also already proven her stakes mettle. Fortuitous, a daughter of Dynaformer, who broke her maiden in an August 19 maiden grass contest, won a division of the Natalma Stakes (G3 Can) on September 7 at Woodbine.

Del Mar in August

Of course they run two-year-old races at Del Mar as well. While Icicle Beer at Reds won the meet's definitive juvenile race, the Del Mar Futurity (G2), it is a Seattle Slew colt named Vindication that many feel was California's best juvenile this summer. After two visually impressive wins in maiden and allowance company, he made his stakes debut in the Kentucky Cup Juvenile (G3) and scored convincingly.

The best two-year-old filly on the West Coast is also without a stakes win. In her third start, Santa Catarina, closed well on the inside of winner Miss Houdini (by Belong to Me) to be second in the Del Mar Debutante (G1). This daughter of Unbridled only figures to get better and the mile and an eighth of this year's Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies (G1) should be right up her alley.

On the Freshman Sire standings, we find Elusive Quality still in control with nearly \$625,000 in progeny earnings, due in large part to his colt Elusive City, winner of the Prix Morny (G1) in France and Richmond S. (G2) in England. Primarily on the strength of Awesome Humor, Distorted Humor checks in second followed by Swiss Yodeler, Grand Slam and Tale of the Cat. The latter, it should be noted has overtaken Elusive Quality in terms of number of individual winners with 14.

On the other end of the spectrum, Kentucky stallions Swain and Will's Way have had their first winners since the last issue of *OBI*. Both stallions were top notch performers going a route of ground so it is of little surprise that we haven't seen any winners prior to August from them.

Other sires with their first winners in the past month: Mr. Sutter (Forty Niner, NY), King's Grant (Vice Regent, NY) has sired the stakes winner Quiet Rose, Haint (Devil's Bag, CA) and Proud and True (Mr. Prospector, FL). Proud and True is especially noteworthy as he is a stakes-placed full brother to Our Emblem and has sired three winners in a three week span from mid-August to early September.

A check of the overall Juvenile Sire standings shows no change in the top three, with Storm Cat, Elusive Quality and End Sweep again in that order. Distorted Humor has edged ahead of A.P. Indy and Swiss Yodeler into fourth. **TOB**



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