

Comparing Dancers to Prospectors

Different trends in inbreeding to two turf icons

by
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A few summers ago, in another publication, I reported on the number of stakes winners inbred to Mr. Prospector. It just so happened that when I began to explore the question, Mr. Prospector's first crop had been born 25 years earlier, in 1976.

By the end of 2001 there had been 28 unrestricted stakes winners in North America and Europe only, that carried multiple strains of that great stallion. In order to put that figure in some sort of perspective, I looked back 10 years earlier when Northern Dancer's first crop would have been 25 years old. At the end of 1991, there were 24 unrestricted stakes winners (in North America and Europe) who showed inbreeding to Northern Dancer.

So where do things stand now?

In the past two years, 16 more stakes winners inbred to Mr. Prospector have appeared, for a current total of 44. Of those, 16 involve a strain of Fappiano, his oldest, and arguably most prolific, sire son. Nine involve Forty Niner, a foal of 1985 and based on the performance of his sons in 2003, the other side of the Fappiano argument.

Mr. Prospector's prowess as a broodmare sire is also displayed in the sample of his inbred stakes winners, as 17 of them carry a female strain.

Looking back to 1992 for Northern Dancer, we find that there were a total of 40 stakes winners inbred to the legendary Windfields stallion. By the end of 1993 the total stood at 53. So the score: 44 for Mr. Prospector, 53 for Northern Dancer with six months still left for Mr. Prospector to "catch up."

Increase in stakes races

On the surface, it looks like Mr. Prospector inbreeding is right about where it should be. Northern Dancer is the only other stallion that has had a similarly transcendent impact on the breed in recent history.

Indeed, a survey of the stallions standing in Kentucky (at \$3,500 or more) shows that 56 percent carry a strain of Northern Dancer within six generations, while 40 percent carry Mr. Prospector. But a little closer look reveals some potential weaknesses.

One thing that I found two years ago was the large disparity in the number of stakes races run in the 1980s as compared to the 1990s. Northern Dancer's first inbred stakes winner appeared in 1985, 19 years after his first crop was born. That year there were 1,867 unrestricted stakes races (run under black type conditions) run in North America and Europe. The average number of such races run per year in the five year period ending in 1985 was 1,268.

Mr. Prospector's first inbred stakes winner appeared in 1993, 17 years after the birth of his first crop. In 1993, there were 2,212 unrestricted races run in North America and Europe with the five-year average being 2,132.

So while the number of stakes winners inbred to these two stallions is similar at similar points in history, the opportunity for progeny inbred to each stallion to win a stakes race has not been the same. It should also be noted that huge increase in stakes

races run comes solely from North America. The number of stakes races run over European courses has remained largely constant, in the high 600s to low 700s, since at least 1985.

Foreign accent

It's true that Northern Dancer has had a larger impact in Europe than Mr. Prospector has (so far, anyway). In fact, 31 of the first 53 stakes winners inbred to Northern Dancer performed in Europe, while the same is true of only four of the Mr. Prospector inbreds so far. There were also, on average, more stakes races run per year in North America in the 1990s than were run per year on both continents in the 1980s.

Another apparent knock against Mr. Prospector inbreeding, at least when stacked up against that of Northern Dancer, is the percentage of graded winners among the inbred stakes winners.

Strategic Maneuver was the first stakes winner inbred to Mr. Prospector and she achieved that status by winning the Spinaway Stakes (G1) at Saratoga. Since then El Corredor won the Cigar Mile (G1), Elusive City won the Prix Morny (G1) in France, Whywhywhy won the Champagne (G1), and Volponi captured the Breeders' Cup Classic (G1). However overall, only 23 percent of the whole group are graded stakes winners.

By contrast 45 percent of the first 53 stakes winners inbred to Northern Dancer were group/graded winners. The percentage for group/grade one winners is equal though, at 11 percent.

Table I lists all the stakes winners inbred to Mr. Prospector to date. It shows the source strains for each runner. For added interest, information is included as to whether the stakes winner represents a male line descendant of Mr. Prospector, and if so, whether it represents a male line/male line cross, that is, the sire is from the same sireline as the broodmare sire. Also noted is whether Mr. Prospector is the broodmare sire of the sire, which might underline the value of inbreeding to this particular position. 



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