

January Heat Wave

Unbridled's Song, Giant's Causeway hot in early 2008

by
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The racing calendar in early January is as cold and barren as a northern winter landscape. But the progeny of both Unbridled's Song and Giant's Causeway have made the most of the relatively limited stakes opportunities during the first few weeks of the new year.

Unbridled's Song had his best season yet in 2007, with 13 stakes winners, a pair of Grade 1 winners, his first three stakes winners as a broodmare sire (two of whom are graded winners) and the sales toppler at the Keeneland September Yearling Sale. His final stakes winners of the year came on December 30th when Gift of Song wired the Lemhi Go Stakes at Calder. Even though the calendar has changed, the now 15-year-old son of Unbridled shows no signs of slowing down, with three new stakes winners already in 2008.

Unbridled's Song was the sire of a pair of new stakes winners on the second Saturday in January. Stage Luck, a \$1.5 million daughter of Unbridled's Song and Grade 1 winner Golden Ballet, got up in time to win the Affectionately Handicap at Aqueduct. Later that afternoon, the five-year-old Silver Whirl won his stakes debut in near wire-to-wire fashion in the \$100,000 Louisiana Handicap at Fair Grounds. On the prior Saturday, the previously multiple graded stakes-placed Noonmark was victorious in the Grade 3 Mr. Prospector Handicap, one of the highlights of the opening weekend card at Gulfstream Park.

Another Giant Year?

Giant's Causeway had his best season in 2007 as well, with a career-high 16 stakes winners and another top five finish on the General Sire list. It's true that he's had a lot of foals working for him, but it's nevertheless been quite a run for the Coolmore-based Storm Cat son whose first crop debuted in 2004. He's been represented by at least 10 stakes winners the past three years and has ranked seventh, third and now fourth among the leading sires in North America in that same time period.

Two of his 16 stakes winners from last year have already claimed stakes victories in the new year and both look like they could be factors on the Classic trail. The undefeated New York-bred Giant Moon rocketed to his first open company stakes win in the Count Fleet Stakes at Aqueduct on January 5. The newly-turned three-year-old had previously won the Sleepy Hollow Stakes and Damon Runyon Stakes in restricted company.

The once-beaten Cowboy Cal is drawing comparisons to Barbaro after his sensational wins in last fall's Laurel Futurity and the January 1 Tropical Park Derby (G3). Barbaro, of course, captured both of those grass stakes in similar fashion before proving equally adept on dirt. While Cowboy Cal lost his debut sprinting on the dirt last summer at Saratoga, he'll no doubt be back on the main track, this time at two turns, to see if he is Classic material.

A Final Look Back

Thanks in large part to Horse of the Year Curlin, two sire records fell in 2007. Curlin's sire Smart Strike set the North American record with \$14,358,570 in progeny earnings and his damsire Deputy Minister led all broodmare sires with a record total of \$16,382,938.

Fellow Lane's End barnmate A. P. Indy ranked second on the General Sire list with \$9,775,575, a total normally good enough to be leading sire. In fact, that figure is higher than his 2006 and 2003 numbers when he was America's leading sire. A. P. Indy has now been a top five stallion every year this decade, save for 2002 when he ranked seventh. Lane's End placed yet another stallion in the top five, with Langfuhr checking in fifth.

Distorted Humor has yet to top the General Sire list, but he's done just about everything else since his first crop debuted in 2002. For the second consecutive year he has been represented by 20 Northern Hemisphere stakes winners, a feat matched only by Storm Cat. 2007 also marked the third straight year he's been the leading sire of stakes winners (he was tied with A. P. Indy with 17 stakes winners in 2005). In the past 30 years only Danzig has led the nation in stakes winners for three consecutive years. The legendary son of Northern Dancer actually was the leading sire of stakes winners for four years in a row, 1991-1994.

Distorted Humor also added another feather to his cap on January 5 when U. S. Cavalry won the Turfway Prevue Stakes. The Officer gelding is the first stakes winner out of a mare by Distorted Humor.

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