

By DAN ILLMAN

Belmont

JULY 5, 2004 MONDAY

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WONDER AGAIN (9th, \$9.90) parlayed a nice trip under Edgar Prado into a big victory in the Grade 2 New York Handicap. The winner of the Grade 1 Garden City Breeders' Cup Handicap at Belmont in 2002, Wonder Again had only reached the winner's circle once in her subsequent nine races, but seemed to relish the soft turf course. A daughter of Silver Hawk, Wonder Again stalked pacesetter **BINYA** for six furlongs before taking over for good entering the stretch. Wonder Again is a multiple winner at Saratoga, so she must be respected at the upcoming Spa meet.

How does Todd Pletcher do it? The man is simply out of this world with first-time starters, and he struck again with **VICARAGE** (4th, \$5.10). Ridden by Pletcher's main man, John Velazquez, Vicarage rushed up quickly to engage favored pacesetter **NORTHERN CONCORDE** and proved best by more than three lengths. Firstster **MR. HEARTBREAKER** rallied for third and may get there next time.

Veteran **FULL FLOW** (5th, \$7.60) is best known for his turf exploits but has Beyered 99 on the main track, and he looked like a winner every step of the way in an off-the-turf \$50,000 claimer. Don't ignore sons and daughters of Eagle Eyed on dirt (Peeping Tom, etc.). Hard to believe that fourth finisher **SUPERVISOR** was 14-1 against Empire Maker in last year's Belmont Stakes.

WILLY O'THE VALLEY couldn't have been more impressive dominating New York-bred N1X runners. By Will's Way, he should stretch out successfully down the road.

JULY 8, 2004 THURSDAY

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Bill Mott might have another top turfer in his barn as **OLD FORESTER** (6th, \$7.50) decimated the faster division of maiden special weights in his grass debut. Old Forester, a son of Forestry, pressed **SEE LATHAM** through identical 23.01-second opening quarter-miles before drawing away as a much-the-best winner. Firstster **LOUIE THE SLEW** (by underrated turf sire Slew Sangue) chased the pace while three wide and galloped out very well. Favored **CATSGOT-NINELIVES** ran well to be second best. Think this race will come back as a key race.

First-time Lasix is a very powerful angle in maiden races, as **BRASSY BOOTS** (3rd, \$6.60) showed her juvenile filly rivals. She rode the speed-favoring track to perfection under a confident Ariel Smith, but think she will encounter a much-tougher pace scenario next time out. **NEW YORK DREAM** galloped out nicely for Team Pletcher.

VALID AGAIN (7th, \$5) looked like the lone speed on paper, but was rated back early by Jorge Chavez. It didn't really matter as he angled outside entering the stretch and prevailed in a long stretch drive. **SCOTT** isn't very quick from the gate, and he may have been compromised by the speed-favoring surface.

Other against-the-bias runners to be mindful of are **CANNON IN G** (1st), **MANHATTAN EXPRESS** (2nd), and **TITANIUM** (9th). Titanium was claimed by Gary Contessa for \$40,000, and should show improvement in his next start.

JULY 9, 2004 FRIDAY

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Nice ride by seven-pound bug Zarella Ore on **NICELY** (3rd, \$18.80). Taking advantage of the apprentice allowance, Ore sent Nicely right to the front, and the two of them bucked an apparent outside bias. **DOUBLE DOWN** ran in spots while down on the deep rail and may need blinkers. No real excuse for heavily favored **SILK SPLENDOR**. The chalk dueled hard with the winner while in the two path, but came up empty when the real running began.

Allen Jerkens has done a great job with **SMOKUME** (8th, \$4.60). There was a time when Smokume, a son of Smoke Glacken, refused to switch leads, but he did so on cue today, and he ran down front-running **QUICK ACTION** to take the Ogygian Stakes. Quick Action dueled hard with **FOREST GROVE** while bogged down on the deep rail, and held gamely for the place.

RAISE DEVIL (2nd, \$5.60) was 0 for 20 on dry tracks coming into today, but benefited from an inside-out trip under Javier Castellano to win a \$50,000 claimer. She was claimed by Steve Klesaris. Favored **GIMME FEVER** set the pace on the inside and wasn't disgraced in defeat. She goes to Michael Miceli's barn. **SUAVE QUEEN** may be one to watch as she was taken by Richard Dutrow Jr.

ACCRETION (4th, \$21.80) doesn't have much black type in her immediate family, but she is by the turf-loving Cozzene, and enjoyed a beautiful ground-saving, pace-tracking trip. She won easily, but looked green doing it, swishing her tail and switching leads several times in the stretch.

JULY 10, 2004 SATURDAY

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Game performance by **CHRISTINE'S OUTLAW** (8th, \$29.60) in the Grade 3 Poker Handicap. He went straight for the early lead, dispatched of classy pace rival **BURNING ROMA**, and had enough left to stave off favored **MILLENNIUM DRAGON** in the lane. The Dragon continues his streak of hard-luck losses, although he had every chance to run down the winner in the stretch to no avail.

TOMORROWS BANQUET (1st, \$2.80) was 2-5 in the opener, and that should tell you about the quality of the field he faced. He never really had an anxious moment for Pablo Fragoso and Mark Hennig, but the race should be viewed as a possible negative key event.

DARN THAT GIRL (3rd, \$4.10) earned a huge Beyer Speed Figure in her debut last month, and ran another excellent race today. Rating off the quick splits set by firstster **CAPE OF GOOD HOPE** and **ONE STORMY MAMA**, Darn That Girl rolled up to the leaders on the final turn and drew away with ease. **TAYLOR'S WISH** was outrun early, but finished decently, and may want to go longer.

THEATRICAL CAT (5th, \$2.80) was made the heavy 2-5 favorite off a pair of nice-looking turf lines, but she was life-and-death to run down 21-1 **WHAT THE HAIL** in the stretch. Things should get tougher for Theatrical Cat as she steps up in class. **CABO DE NOCHE** is going to win at a price one of these days.

Hard-hitting **HYDER** (4th, \$7.10) loves to win, and he ran down sharp Delaware invader **HIT NOW** to take a \$40,000 claiming race.

JULY 11, 2004 SUNDAY

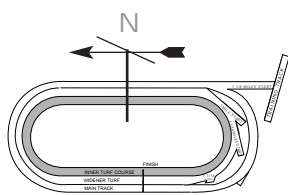
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Tremendous effort by **MEDALLIST** (8th, \$8.80) to win the Grade 2 Dwyer. A speedy son of Touch Gold, Medallist was sent immediately to the lead by Jorge Chavez, opened up a clear advantage after throwing down a second quarter in 21.62 seconds, led by eight lengths after going 1:07.96 for three-quarters of a mile, and held on to prevail in a quick 1:40.02. True, he may have been helped by the speed-favoring nature of the track, but there's no denying that this was a superb performance. **THE CLIFF'S EDGE** was run off his feet early, but made a nice wide run against the bias to prove second best. If he remains healthy, he can prove a threat in the big races for 3-year-olds at Saratoga.

HOW LONG (1st, \$6.40) took a tremendous amount of money for his debut last month, but raced greenly and finished off the board. Adding Lasix for his second start, How Long raced up close to the pace under John Velazquez and drove clear to win by open lengths. **IDE GOT STYLE** had trouble and raced against the bias.

SUGAR PUNCH (2nd, \$3.50) has done nothing wrong since taking up residence in the Dutrow barn. He pressed speedy Monmouth invader **ROYAL MAST** before taking control in upper stretch. Sugar Punch looks like a very promising New York-bred for a partnership headed by the hot IEAH Stables.

Surprise, surprise. Another Pletcher-Velazquez debut winner. This time, they struck on the turf with **COPYCO**, a juvenile son of Cozzene. **BUILDERS OPTION** rallied powerfully in the lane, and should appreciate added distance at the Spa.



TRACK TRENDS

DATE	CONDITION	FORECAST	WIND/TEMPERATURE	COMMENT
MON. JULY 5	Good 1-3, fast 4-5, sloppy 6-8, 10/Turf soft, off 5-7	Clear, rain	Calm, 79°	No apparent bias.
THURS. JULY 8	Fast/Firm (Rails @ 18 feet)	Clear	Calm, 83°	Speed was favored.
FRI. JULY 9	Fast/Firm (Rails @ 18 feet)	Clear	Calm, 79°	Edge to outside paths.
SAT. JULY 10	Fast/Firm (Rails @ 18 feet)	Clear	Calm, 79°	No apparent bias.
SUN. JULY 11	Fast/Firm (Rails @ 18 feet)	Clear	Calm, 83°	Speed was favored.