

THOROFAN

VOICE

Vol. XIV

Sept 9, 2008

REFLECTIONS FROM THE SPA

Summer weather was slow to arrive in Saratoga and Labor Day came on its earliest day possible. No wonder I was unprepared for the race meet to be over. The meet opened with three weeks of rain varied only by heavy to ridiculously heavy. One day the deluge washed out the track, forcing a cancellation after the second. There were 14-percent fewer turf races than in 2007. Four plus dollars for gas and a lagging economy were no help to the season. The saving grace was that NYRA delivered so many great races.

Tin Cup Chalice cast a spotlight on the New York breeding program when he won the Albany to become the first horse to win the OTB Big Apple Triple. The undefeated colt set himself up for the \$250,000 bonus by previously winning the Mike Lee at Belmont Park and the New York Derby at his home track at Finger Lakes. I was a small player in this business and I recognize the thrill this horse created for his connections and the stimulus this success will give to other breeders.

John Kimmel created a new level for cloud nine by winning seven consecutive races at the meet. H. James Bond went winless until the last day of the meet, but saved getting a “duck” by winning the Glens Falls Handicap and another race on the final card.

Ginger Punch getting up to take the Personal Ensign was a thrilling display of the tenacity of a champion. Nick Zito’s Commentator wiring the field to take the Whitney for a second time was a race to remember. The stretch duel between Proud Spell and Music Note in the Alabama was incredible, Proud Spell simply determined not to be beaten. No one on the backside was necessarily rooting against Colonel John in the Travers but Neil Howard is such a favorite among his peers that home-track buddies were ardently hoping he had the nod at the wire. Colonel John beat Mambo in Seattle by a whisker, but we all saw enough to recognize that Mambo in Seattle will be a force to reckon with down the line. If Colonel John really is the better colt and he adds a couple more victories this year, he could send Big Brown off to stud without a year-end championship. The fall is going to produce some very exciting racing.

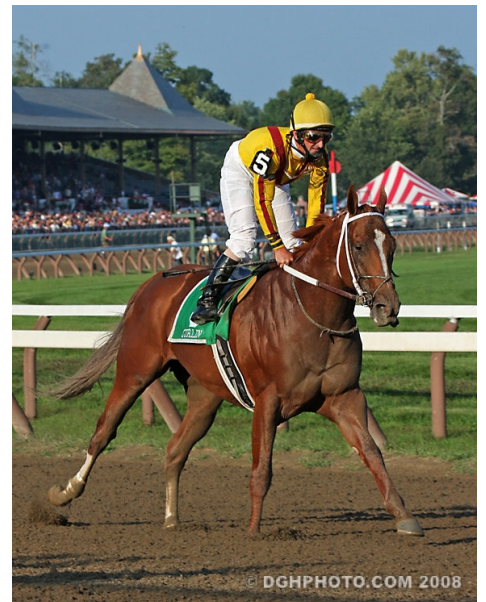
Woody Stephens often said, “No one commits suicide if he has an unraced two-year-old in the barn.” If you’ve raced one and he shows you enough to put him in the Hopeful, you never want to die. I was rooting hard for Cribnote, Rick Violette’s handsome New York-bred. He headed south right out of the gate, finally coming over to join the field only to blow the turn. Too bad, Rick, he should have won by five. The disappointment had to sting, but you can bet no one connected to Cribnote is contemplating jumping off a bridge.

There were a lot of hopes riding on the Hopeful. When it was over the meet’s leading rider and trainer were both home free. Munnings painted Pletcher into the place position in the trainers’ race by running third. Alan Garcia insured his spot atop the jockey standings when he booted Bobby Frankel’s Vineyard Haven home, 21/2 lengths clear of the errant running Cribnote. After the race Kieran McLaughlin joined Alan Garcia in the winners’ circle to accept their respective titles. The pair had teamed up to win several races at the SPA, the last of which was Cobblestone Way in Monday’s sixth race. I have difficulty not to go on about this pair. They are both fine envoys to our sport.



The mighty Curlin won the Woodward and in so doing passed Skip Away in the all-time earnings list. One more victory will put him over the \$10 million mark and ahead of current leading money-winner, Cigar.

We had so many great races. Once the weather cooperated the meet was all you could hope for except for one thing. If we can't fill the house on a picture-perfect day by featuring the best horse in the world in a historically important Grade 1 race in Saratoga, racing has a problem. It disappointed me that the reigning North American Horse of the Year and top-ranked horse in the world on any surface was not a bigger draw. If we are going to ask owners to forego huge profit-potential in the breeding shed and keep champions in training we have to support them better. We were lucky to have Curlin in a \$500,000 race. A brimming crowd should have been there to see him run. The message is crystal clear, until we get on track to attract real race fans, we can expect weakened numbers.



Curlin after the Woodward