



NYQUIST VS. EXAGGERATOR: ROUND 7 IN PENNSYLVANIA DERBY

For immediate release

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BENSALEM, Pa. (Thursday, September 22, 2016) – After six previous meetings that include one-two finishes in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile and the Kentucky Derby, **Nyquist** and **Exaggerator** go toe to toe for Round 7 in Saturday's Grade 2 Pennsylvania Derby at Parx Racing.

The past three renewals have been won by 2013 3-year-old champion Will Take Charge, 2014 Breeders' Cup Classic winner Bayern, and Frosted, winner of the Met Mile and Whitney this year, so with year-end honors potentially on the line, the Pennsylvania Derby's 40th running certainly feels a lot more like a Grade 1 event. With Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist and Preakness winner Exaggerator in the field, the purse has swelled to \$1.25 million, and either one could claim leadership of the division with a victory.

Nyquist swept his five of his starts as a 2-year-old en route to an Eclipse Award, and looked like a serious Triple Crown threat after beating Exaggerator for the fourth time in the Kentucky Derby, but the latter turned the tables on his nemesis over a sloppy track in the Preakness. Nyquist was sidelined by a fever soon afterward, and 10 weeks later he fell prey to Exaggerator's late run once again in a sloppy renewal of the Haskell.

Nyquist spent the remainder of the summer at San Luis Rey Downs in Southern California, as trainer Doug O'Neill sensed it was time for a change of scene.

"We decided after the Haskell he was definitely going through a growth spurt where he had gotten taller and just got a little light on us, and decided he needed a tranquil setting...and not be overwhelmed with a lot of the stress of what racetracks can sometimes do," O'Neill explained. "He's really flourished, he's put on a lot of weight, he's doing really well. Hopefully we'll see some positive results. We're thinking we need to run a big race Saturday. I'd be lying if I said I thought he could get beat Saturday and still be 3-year-old champ."

After being softened up fighting for the early lead twice, O'Neill will attempt to orchestrate a change of tactics as Nyquist breaks from post 9 and outside several quality speed horses.

"I'd definitely love to see him off the pace," said O'Neill. "At the Preakness, we're 8 for 8, we draw toward the inside of an 11-horse field and I just envisioned some potential horses trying to cut over in front of us and just be in some traffic trouble, so I was adamant with Mario (Gutierrez) to take it to 'em, and then in the Haskell drawing the rail, that backfired. I envision seeing more of a race like you saw in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile; we're going to let the race unfold and have a target, and go get 'em late. We're all super-pumped, super-optimistic for a big

effort.”

A change of pace for Nyquist could set up some jockeying for position with his arch-rival Exaggerator, who came out of a disappointing race as the Travers favorite none the worse for wear judging from a sharp workout at Churchill Downs last week.

“Everything went beautifully,” said trainer Keith Desormeaux. “The time (second-fastest of 37 at the distance) was right, he finished strong and he galloped out strong.”

Exaggerator appeared to struggle with the deeper tracks at Belmont Park and Saratoga, and although all three of his Grade 1 wins have come in the slop, his connections remain unconvinced he is dependent on help from Mother Nature.

“I thought he might like those deeper surfaces, but it seemed like he couldn't get a real 'push,' so he didn't look like his normal self,” said assistant trainer Julie Clark, who is overseeing the colt's final preparations at Parx. “He was gassed after the Travers, but he came out of it fine.”

Despite the rich purse and the accomplishments of Nyquist and Exaggerator, who have combined for 12 graded stakes wins and earnings of \$8.75 million, 10 others entered the 1 1/8-mile race, headed by **Cupid**, a three-time Grade 2 winner this year, and **Gun Runner**, who has won three graded stakes this season along with third-place finishes in the Kentucky Derby and Travers.

Also in the power-packed field are Grade 3 Smarty Jones winner **Awesome Slew**, Grade 1-placed **Sunny Ridge**, and **Summer Revolution** who won his first two starts stylishly in fast time before running fourth in the Grade 1 King's Bishop.

Gun Runner, trained by newly-minted Hall Of Famer Steve Asmussen, reaffirmed his dislike for off-going in the Haskell, and quickly rebounded with a typically gutsy effort behind Arrogate's track-record run in the Travers to narrowly miss second.

“It was his lifetime best numbers-wise,” confirmed assistant trainer Scott Blasi. “I think he's fairly fresh, and coming off the mile-and-quarter-race we were careful not to over-train him and just be happy with where he's at. He's such an honest, hard-trying horse and the way he's handled himself throughout the campaign this year says a lot about him.”

Cupid has barnstormed the country this year for Bob Baffert, with front-running wins in the Rebel, Indiana Derby and West Virginia Derby for earnings over \$1.3 million.

“We've been all over the place, from Arkansas to Kentucky to New York,” said Baffert's chief assistant Jimmy Barnes, who is here with the easy-to-spot gray colt “Lately he's really picked it up. We're definitely stepping up, but this is probably the right time to do it. We got a good post (5) to work with. I would imagine with everything going right, we break and keep him clean.”

Chad Brown, fresh off his first-ever training title at Saratoga, sends in **Connect**, winner of the Curlin Stakes, and **My Man Sam**, the runner-up finisher in the Blue Grass.

Rounding out the field are **Wild About Deb**, second in the Smarty Jones; **Discreet Lover**, second in the Parx Derby; and the New York-bred **Hit It Once More**, who comes off blowout wins in the New York Derby and the Albany Stakes.

The Pennsylvania Derby is race 11 on a 12-race card, and will be broadcast on Comcast Sportsnet along with the Grade 1 Cotillion and Grade 3 Gallant Bob from 4:30-6:00 Eastern; post time is 5:45.