



For Immediate Release:
Saturday, September 24, 2016

SONGBIRD REMAINS PERFECT IN WINNING G1 COTILLION Connect Runs Big to Win PA Derby

Fans packed into Parx racing Saturday afternoon to witness the greatest day of racing in the history of the Bensalem race track. The biggest stars of the sport competed in the track's two signature events, the G2 \$1.25 million Pennsylvania Derby and the G1 \$1 million Cotillion Stakes. Two year-old champion and Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist was favored to beat 11 rivals the Derby while two year-old filly champion and the undefeated Songbird looked for her 11th straight win in the Cotillion.

Sent off as the overwhelming choice against five rival 3-year-old fillies, Songbird (\$2.60) was floated wide into the first turn as Grade 1 Acorn winner Carina Mia went from the lead from post 1 and was taken well off the rail.

Songbird settled comfortably while tracking Carina Mia through early splits of 23.81 and 47.71 seconds, as Grade 1 Kentucky Oaks winner intently tracked those two from close range.

Given a shake of the reins by Hall Of Fame rider Mike Smith, Songbird readily drew alongside Carina Mia around the turn, took command just after six furlongs in 1:12.04 seconds and bounded away through the stretch while appearing well within herself, as Carina Mia held second by nearly seven lengths over Cathryn Sophia.

The order of finish was completed by Land Over Sea, Disco Rose and Queena Esther.

Songbird won by 5 ³/₄ lengths, and her combined margins of victory through 11 wins – 10 of them graded stakes – is more than 60 lengths.

“She was so happy, so calm and cool,” said Smith, the only rider last year's Eclipse Award-winning filly has known. “She drew away...she was having fun today, that was the old her and I was so glad to see that. There have been times when I had to ask her for a jump or two, maybe in the Coaching Club American Oaks for about a good 100 yards, but she does things so easily and I'm so blessed to be a part of her. She seems to have blossomed. I don't know if that's possible or not.”

Songbird will most assuredly become the sixth Cotillion winner to be crowned champion 3-year-old filly. She ran 1 ¹/₁₆ miles in 1:44.02 seconds over a fast track, and the

\$610,000 winner's share swelled her lifetime earnings to \$3,372,000 for owner Rick Porter and Hall Of Fame trainer Jerry Hollendorfer, who are in agreement about where the daughter of Medaglia d'Oro will run next.

“ I think Jerry (Hollendorfer) and I agree the (Breeders' Cup) Distaff is the race to run her in,” said Porter, who was in attendance Saturday after being hospitalized when Songbird won the Alabama.

“There's some big cheese in that race, but that's the fun of it – hook the big ones and hopefully beat 'em. All along we've thought about sticking with the girls. The time will come next year when we talk about it. I think I can talk (Jerry) into taking a shot. It doesn't get any better than to watch her today, she was just gorgeous. I'm proud to watch her race, she gives me chills every time. It's just so much fun to watch her run. I thought this race fit in with the Breeders' Cup, the timing is perfect.”

Hollendorfer, who also saddled Cyrus Alexander to win the \$150,000 Frosted earlier on the five-stakes program, noted, “It's been a real pleasure working with Songbird and with Rick Porter and Mike Smith. Everybody seems to be on board with everything that we're trying to do.

“I don't think we need a race in between, and we didn't plan one,” he continued. “Right now I would say we could train up to the Breeders' Cup. We'll fly (home to California) early Wednesday morning, along with all the other California horses (Cyrus Alexander and Who's Out). You come to a point in the road where you have to meet the big ones, and there's a couple of big ones out there at Santa Anita, Beholder and Stellar Wind, those horses can really run. Our horse can really run, so we'd like to try those, and I think that's good competition – if we all get there to the race at Santa Anita, so you have to get there first. We'll be looking forward to it if we can get there, and I think that we will.”

Under a masterful ride from two time Eclipse winning jockey Javier Castellano, Paul Pompa, Jr.'s Connect rallied to the lead with an eighth of a mile to go and then held off the gallant charge of Gun Runner to win the Pennsylvania Derby by a half-length. Breaking from post four, Connect was able to establish excellent early position on the inside of the race track, fourth into the first run while Awesome Slew, from his inside gate, made the front and clicked off a fast opening quarter mile of 23.01. Castellano sat patiently with Connect as they turned into the backstretch, losing a position to fifth nearing the half mile pole, but never leaving his spot nearest the rail. Awesome Slew clicked off the half in 47.35 and now Nyquist loomed. He was third on the outside, just behind the speedy grey Cupid, while Connect began to slowly inch his way closer, again, on the inside.

Awesome Slew finally put away Cupid with just less than three eighths to go, Nyquist now moving to second, Gun Runner now making a three wide move, and Connect saving every bit of ground and putting himself within striking range as the leaders came to the quarter pole. Finally turning for home the pressure was too much for Awesome Slew as

Nyquist gained a very short lived lead. Connect was rolling on the inside and Gun Runner was closing on the far outside. Connect got a slight lead with just less than a furlong to go and Gun Runner was valiantly trying to sustain what he hoped would be a winning bid, but to no avail. The ground saved by Castellano would be the difference, as Connect held off Gun Runner to win the lion's share of the huge \$1.25 million purse.

Assistant trainer Cherie DeVaux was here to saddled Connect for winning trainer Chad Brown. "He broke really well and found himself in a really good position on the rail saving ground," said DeVaux. "Javier was really patient with him, took his time and made his run and the horse was really gutsy to hang in there."

Castellano, who won the 2007 PA Derby with Timber Reserve, remarked, "This kind of horse, he's a big horse, and I think he put it together today and I'm very satisfied with the way he did it today."

Off at 10-1, Connect paid \$23.20, 9.80 and 7.20. Gun Runner (5-1) did just about everything to win, finishing second and returned 5.40 and 4.00. Wild About Deb (61-1) made a solid late run for third and paid 21.20 to show. Nyquist had every chance to win but came up short in the stretch run, fading to finish sixth. The final time for the one mile and one-eighth on a fast track was 1:50.20.