ASMUSSEN BARN ALL SMILES AFTER GUN RUNNER’S FOSTER ‘CAP ROMP

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Sunday, June 18, 2017) – Trainer Steve Asmussen was still beaming Sunday morning following Gun Runner’s stellar seven-length victory in Saturday night’s $500,000 Stephen Foster Handicap Presented by GE Appliances (Grade I).

“There’s not more I can say then this horse is simply the real deal,” Asmussen said. “We’ll look at races at Saratoga for his next start, possibly the Aug. 5 Whitney (GI), but the big relief is already getting him a spot in the Breeders’ Cup Classic.”

Ridden by jockey Florent Geroux, Gun Runner became only fifth horse to win the Stephen Foster the year after winning the Clark Handicap here in the fall: Hopeful Word (1985-86), No Marker (1989-90), Saint Liam (2004-05), and Blame (2009-10).

Gun Runner covered the Stephen Foster’s 1 1/8-mile distance in 1:47.56 – the fifth-fastest running of the race. The colt’s victory margin was a record and eclipsed Street Cry (IRE), a winner of the Dubai World Cup in his previous start, who won the 2002 Foster by 6 ½ lengths.

“You know, going back and thinking about the race, it’s very rare as a jockey that you can feel a horse never getting tired in a 1 1/8-mile Grade I,” Geroux said. “He’s a pretty phenomenal horse.”

There was no rest for the weary as the 30-year-old French jockey breezed two horses for Asmussen on Sunday morning.

BATTAGLIA, ESPINOZA TO GUEST ANNOUNCE THURSDAY, FRIDAY AT CHURCHILL DOWNS – Longtime Churchill Downs track announcer and current morning line odds maker Mike Battaglia and Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races announcer Paul Espinoza Jr. will fill in for Travis Stone on Thursday and Friday, respectively, while Stone gives the commencement speech at his former high school in Schroon Lake, N.Y.

Battaglia, who spent 19 years as Churchill Downs’ announcer (1978-96), will step behind the mic for Thursday’s eight-race program that kicks off at 5 p.m. (all times Eastern).

Espinoza, 27, began calling at Charles Town, located in West Virginia, full-time in 2016. Previously, the West Virginia University alum was the Sports Director at WHAG-TV in Hagerstown, Md. The first of nine races Friday kicks off with a first post of 12:45 p.m.

Stone is scheduled to return to the Churchill Downs’ microphone Saturday afternoon.

STAKES PROBABLES – Next Saturday’s 11-race card at Churchill Downs is highlighted by the $100,000 Chicago Handicap (Grade III) for fillies and mares at seven furlongs.

The Chicago Handicap will be staged for the 28th time Saturday but this will mark the first time it will be held at Churchill Downs. Previously, the race was staged at Churchill’s sister track, Arlington Park near Chicago.

Finley’sluckycharm, the 5 ½-length winner of the May 27 Winning Colors (GIII), is expected to headline the field. Other possible starters include Crooked Stick, Kathballu and She Maybe Wild.

MILESTONE WATCH – Trainer “Buff” Bradley has three chances Sunday to notch win No. 100 at Churchill Downs: My Bright Idea (10-1 on the morning line in Race 6), American Cowgirl (10-1, Race 9), and Haynesome (20-1, Race 10). … Trainer Dale Romans (694 victories) is seven wins behind Churchill Downs’ all-time leading trainer Bill Mott (701).

DOWN THE STRETCH – There’s a $108,427 carryover for the 20-cent minimum Single-6 Jackpot on Sunday’s 10-race card. The Single-6 covers Races 5-10 and starts at 2:43 p.m. ET. … The “Who’s the Champ? Handicapping Contest” returns Sunday. Interested participants can enter for $35 ($30 for TSC Elite members) for a chance to win the $1,000 cash voucher first prize by placing mythical $2 win and place bets on Races 3-8. Second place receives a $500 voucher and third place is worth a $200 voucher. Registration takes place between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on the Clubhouse second floor at the top of the Gate 17 escalators. … Saturday’s $100,000 Chicago Handicap (Grade III) is the centerpiece of an action-packed, four-day, Thursday-Sunday racing week at Churchill Downs. Post times each day: Thursday (5 p.m.), Friday (12:45 p.m.), Saturday (12:45 p.m.) and Sunday (12:45 p.m.). … The Twilight Thursday abbreviated eight-race program starts at 5 p.m. and is highlighted by $1 beers, food trucks (Red Top Gourmet Hot Dogs, Pollo, 502 Café, Mark’s Feed Store and Zoom Zoom Yum), live music on the Plaza stage by Louisville’s Alex Wright and a Wagering 101 tent for betting advice. … The Sunday, June 25 card features the return of Family Adventure Day Presented by Kroger. The day of racing is complimented by plenty of family activities in the Plaza area including pony rides, inflatables, a petting zoo, stick horse races on the turf course, face painting and more.

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