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ROMANS CLOSING FAST ON HALL OF FAMER MOTT TO BECOME CHURCHILL DOWNS’ ALL-TIME LEADING TRAINER

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, June 22, 2017) – South Louisville native Dale Romans is on the verge of achieving one of his lifelong goals: to surpass Hall of Fame horseman Bill Mott as the all-time leading trainer in races won at historic Churchill Downs, home of the world-famous Kentucky Derby.

Following a scorching five wins from 13 starters last week, Romans began Thursday with 12 Spring Meet wins and 695 career victories beneath the Louisville track’s iconic Twin Spires. That total put him six wins back of Mott’s all-time mark, which currently stands at 701 and is eligible to grow.

New York-based Mott, who has continued to have a productive string of horses at Churchill Downs for several years under the care of assistant Kenny McCarthy, has held Churchill Downs’ all-time win record for 31 years when he surpassed Henry Forrest (271) in 1986.

“I don’t know if we’ll get the job done this week, next week or in September but we’ll get there,” Romans said. “It’s been my life’s goal to reach this milestone and we’re almost there.”

Romans, 50, grew up on the Churchill Downs backstretch learning his trade from his father, veteran trainer Jerry Romans, who passed away in 2000 – two years after saddling his 211th and final winner at Churchill Downs.

“When I came to the track as a kid I would always see this guy named Bill Mott winning multiple races a day, training the most quality horses and living the good life,” Romans said. “I would always tell myself, ‘I want to be him when I grow up.’ It makes it even more special to be battling for the title with Bill.”

Romans took out his trainer’s license at age 18 and saddled his first winner, Miss Mindy, at Turfway Park on Feb. 15, 1987. He’s recorded more than 1,900 since, including major stakes triumphs with top-level horses such as millionaire Grade I winners Roses in May, Little Mike, Shackleford, Kitten’s Joy, Silver Max, Keen Ice, Dullahan, Paddy O’Prado, Tapitsfly, Swift Temper, Brody’s Cause, Thorn Song and Court Vision.

But, cumulatively, the 695 – and growing – wins at Churchill Downs have meant the most.

“I grew up around Churchill Downs,” said Romans, a 14-time leading trainer at Churchill Downs. “My dad was a very successful trainer and I would always come to the races hoping to follow in his footsteps.

“I took out my trainer’s license at a young age. It’s sort of been a full-circle career. I used to worry about if I could get stalls for my horses at Churchill and make ends meet. Now, we’re sitting on this milestone. It’s truly amazing. I’ve had a lot of great help over the years and this is very exciting. But let’s not put the cart before the horse, though.”

Romans has 11 horses entered over the next four days at Churchill Downs with seven racing days left in the Spring Meet: Lucky Number One’s (Thursday, Race 8); Sportscaster (Friday, Race 5); Singing Bullet (Friday, Race 8); Tizthelead (Saturday, Race 11); Mizz Tutu (Saturday, Race 11); Silver Wraith (Sunday, Race 1); Gurlin (Sunday, Race 3); Little Irishdancer (Sunday, Race 4); Prado Vision (Sunday, Race 4); Blake’s Lucky Star (Sunday, Race 6); and Watch Me Whip (Sunday, Race 9).

Mott, 63, has three local entrants this week: Special Vintage (Friday, Race 4); Harkness (Saturday, Race 8); and Cite (Saturday, Race 9).

“Bill (Mott) and I are good friends,” Romans said. “We had dinner together at the Breeders’ Cup last year and he joked with me saying ‘I’m coming at you full-steam to start the Fall Meet.’ He had about eight horses entered on opening day but only recorded one win. He joked with me the next morning saying, ‘I’m done, come get me.’”

Romans will be in Maryland through Saturday judging a yearling competition but is expected to return to Churchill Downs on Sunday.

The Top 10 All-Time Leading Trainers at Churchill Downs at the start of Thursday’s action: 1. Bill Mott (701); 2. Dale Romans (695); 3. Steve Asmussen (608); 4. D. Wayne Lukas (524); 5. Bernie Flint (479); 6. Tom Amoss (444); 7. Greg Foley (397); 8. Kenny McPeek (391); 9. Angel Montano Sr. (368); and 10. Dave Vance (351).
FINLEY'SLUCKYCHARM MADE 4-5 MORNING LINE FAVE FOR SATURDAY'S $100,000 CHICAGO 'CAP – Carl Moore Management LLC’s outstanding female sprinter Finley'sluckycharm will attempt to remain unbeaten at Churchill Downs when she concedes between six and 10 pounds to her 12 rivals as the 4-5 morning line favorite in Saturday's 28th running of the Chicago Handicap (Grade III) for fillies and mares over seven furlongs.

“It's special to have a horse like this for Carl Moore,” trainer Bret Calhoun said. “He's been a longtime supporter of mine and we've had success many years together. Not only is he a longtime client, but he's also a friend of mine.”

The Chicago Handicap field from the rail out (with jockeys, assigned weights, and morning line odds): Pleasant Tales (Miguel Mena, 115, 15-1); Athena (Joe Rocco Jr., 117, 15-1); Kathballu (Florent Geroux, 117, 8-1); Mines and Magic (Robby Albarado, 117, 15-1); Ivy Bell (Shaun Bridgmohan, 116, 30-1); Improv (Declan Cannon, 116, 20-1); Mayla (Gabriel Saez, 118, 10-1); Finley'sluckycharm (Brian Hernandez Jr., 124, 4-5); Sweetgrass (Chris Landeros, 117, 10-1); She Mabee Wild (Jon Court, 117, 30-1); Covey Trace (Jack Gilligan, 117, 30-1); Put Da Blame On Me (James Graham, 114, 15-1); and Stageplay (Corey Lanerie, 115, 15-1).

G. Watts Humphrey Jr.’s Improv is expected to scratch.

The Chicago Handicap will go as Race 10 at approximately 5:21 p.m. (all times Eastern) on an 11-race card that begins at 12:45 p.m. The program also has two allowance races and a trio of maiden special weights, including a five-furlong sprint for 2-year-old fillies.

Located some 330 miles from its northern namesake, this will mark the first year that the Chicago Handicap will be staged at Churchill Downs. Its first 27 runnings were contested at Arlington Park, the Louisville track's Churchill Downs Incorporated sister track in Arlington Heights, Ill. Had Churchill Downs Racetrack and its horsemen not stepped up to host the Chicago Handicap, the popular Midwest graded stakes race for fillies and mares would have gone on hiatus in 2017.

BATTAGLIA, ESPINOSA TO FILL IN 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 Espinosa Jr. will fill in for Travis Stone Thursday and Friday respectively while he 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).

Espinosa Jr., 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.

MEET LEADERS – Following a five-win day on Stephen Foster night, Brian Hernandez Jr. (38 wins) is now only eight victories behind leading rider Corey Lanerie (46) in the jockey standings. Julien Leparoux is in third with 25 trips to the Winner’s Circle. … Following his victory with Gun Runner the $500,000 Stephen Foster Handicap (Grade I), Steve Asmussen holds a 17-16 win lead in the trainer standings, ahead of Ian Wilkes. Brad Cox is three wins behind Asmussen in third with 14 victories. … Ken and Sarah Ramsey and Maggi Moss hold a tie atop the owner standings with seven wins each. Janis Whitham’s Whitham Thoroughbreds is one win behind in third. There are seven days remaining in the 38-day Spring Meet.

MILESTONE WATCH – Trainer “Buff” Bradley has two chances Thursday to notch win No. 100 at Churchill Downs: Tempestuous Angel (15-1 morning line, Race 5), and Funny Holiday (8-1, Race 6). … Trainer Dale Romans (695 victories) is six wins behind Churchill Downs' all-time leading trainer Bill Mott (701).

DOWN THE STRETCH – This week’s Twilight Thursday abbreviated eight-race program is highlighted by $1 draft beers, food trucks, live music on the Plaza stages by Louisville’s Alex Wright and a Wagering 101 tent for betting advice. There also is a growing $112,293 jackpot carryover for the 20-cent minimum Single-6 Jackpot on Races 3-8, which is scheduled to commence at 5:58 p.m. … Sunday’s card will feature 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. … “Inside Churchill Downs” airs every Saturday from 10-11 a.m. on ESPN 680/105.7 with hosts John Asher, Darren Rogers and Kevin Kerstein. The one-hour radio program features interviews from top trainers, jockeys and handicappers around the track. Those outside the Louisville area can stream live on www.espnlouisville.com. … 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.

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