LIGHTLY-RACED COVENANT ATTEMPTS FIRST STAKES VICTORY IN SUNDAY’S $100,000 DOGWOOD STAKES PRESENTED BY GE APPLIANCES

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, Sept. 21, 2017) – Hall of Fame trainer Bill Mott currently has a one-win advantage (701-700 wins) over Dale Romans in the all-time leading trainer standings at Churchill Downs but the veteran horseman hopes to increase his margin in Saturday’s $100,000 Dogwood Stakes Presented by GE Appliances (Listed) with impressive Saratoga maiden-winner Covenant.

“Well, Dale hasn’t caught us yet,” assistant trainer Kenny McCarthy joked. “We have some live horses this week and Covenant has a big chance on Saturday night in the Dogwood.”

The 11-race evening program – the final nighttime card at Churchill Downs this year – also will include a marquee race for purebred Arabians: the $100,000 President of the United Arab Emirates Cup, a Grade I event over 1 1/16 miles for 4-years-old and up featuring defending champ and two-time reigning Arabian Horse of the Year Paddys Day.

Covenant, a 3-year-old filly by Speightstown, has only two races under her belt – a second-place finish to graded stakes winner Salty in a maiden special weight on March 5 at Gulfstream Park and a 6 ¾-length romp on July 24 at Saratoga.

“We just got her to Kentucky on Wednesday,” McCarthy said. “We just jogged her this morning but she’ll gallop in the first set Friday morning. She really looked impressive at Saratoga. This race is a tough spot, especially breaking so far outside, but she certainly looks the part.”

Mott, who returned to his New York base earlier in the week after spending time in Kentucky at the Keeneland September Yearling Sale, has two prior victories in the Dogwood: Sky Girl (2003) and Mrs. Revere (1984).

Jockey Florent Geroux is signed on to ride Covenant in the Dogwood.

“I haven’t ridden her yet,” Geroux said. “I saw her maiden race this summer while I was at Saratoga and she looks nice. I’m excited to ride her Saturday.”

Tequilta, one of the chief rivals to Covenant, is expected to scratch from the Dogwood in favor of running in Saturday’s $300,000 Charles Town Oaks (Grade III), according to Racing Secretary Ben Huffman.

The complete Dogwood field from the rail out (with jockeys and morning line odds): Pinch Hit (Jon Court, 15-1); Champagne Problems (Calvin Borel, 20-1); Tequilta (Luis Saez, 4-1); Nineteenth Street (Alonso Quinone, 20-1); Too Much Tip (Julio Garcia, 10-1); Minnie Blip (Miguel Mena, 15-1); Cara Blythe (Alex Canchari, 20-1); Farrell (Channing Hill, 3-1); Student Body (Brian Hernandez Jr., 12-1); No More Babies (Joe Rocco Jr., 15-1); My Sweet Stella (Ricardo Santana Jr., 15-1); Jordan’s Henny (Corey Lanerie, 12-1); Covenant (Geroux, 4-1); and Perfect Wife (Chris Landeros, 12-1).

All 3-year-old fillies will carry 118 pounds except for Tequilta, who will tack 122.

The Dogwood, won last year by G. Watts Humphrey Jr.’s Mines and Magic, will be run as Race 9 at approximately 10:11 p.m. (all times Eastern) on an 11-race card that begins at 6 p.m.

WHILE WILKES IS AWAY, HALL OF FAME TRAINER NAFFZGER WILL PLAY – The last two weeks trainer Ian Wilkes spent most of his time traveling on Interstate-64 to the Keeneland September Yearling Sale from his Churchill Downs base but the veteran horseman had little to worry about as he left the stable under the careful watch of Hall of Fame trainer Carl Nafzger and 16-year assistant trainer Bob Tucker.

“When all else fails, at least I know I have a Hall of Famer in my back pocket,” Wilkes said. “I think I’m the only trainer around that can say that.”

Wilkes kicked off the September Meet with two victories from 11 starters but has watched every start 75 miles away at Keeneland.

“He certainly has been putting in the work at the sale,” Nafzger said. “It’s so tough on you as you have to make the drive back and forth from Louisville to Lexington for two weeks. I used to get a hotel down there because my mind would be racing the entire drive. I mentally couldn’t take it. Ian has been coming out in the mornings for training and then high-tailing it to the sale, buying the future stars.”

Nafzger, 76, has recorded 1,129 victories throughout his 41-year career but has stepped back in recent years, transferring all but one horse to Wilkes.

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“My wife Wanda owns one horse (5-year-old maiden Scamp) so I kept it in my name,” Nafzger said. “That’s really the only reason it’s in my name, because of her.”

Along with his full stable of horses at Churchill Downs, Wilkes has his second string based at the Skylight Training Center in nearby Goshen, Ky. with Tucker.

“I still think Carl’s had the lucky hand putting on the saddle to start the meet,” Tucker said. “We’ve had a solid start to the meet and hopefully we can keep the good luck going.”

Wilkes is seven wins away from recording 200 victories at Churchill Downs.

ROMANS VS. MOTT – Trainer Dale Romans became only the second trainer in the history of Churchill Downs to record 700 victories but the South Louisville native is still one win behind Bill Mott’s all-time leading trainer mark at Churchill Downs, trailing 701-700 wins.

Mott and Romans both have three entries Thursday-Saturday at Churchill Downs.

Romans: Laughing Levi (Thursday, Race 8); Mizz Tutu (Saturday, Race 1); and Bandito (Saturday, Race 6)
Mott: Mosca (Thursday, Race 3); Super Shack (Friday, Race 10); and Covenant (Saturday, Race 9)

MILESTONE WATCH – Along with the heated-battle between Dale Romans and Bill Mott for the all-time leading trainer honors at Churchill Downs (701-700 wins), trainers Kenny McPeek (399) and Greg Foley (397) are approaching 400 career-victories beneath the historic Twin Spires while trainer Ian Wilkes is targeting 200 career victories at Churchill Downs (193 wins). … Trainer Mike Tomlinson is just one win away from 500 career victories. The Oklahoma native has 499 victories so far in his 28-year career.

MEET LEADERS – Corey Lanerie, a 13-time leading rider at Churchill Downs, holds a 6-5 win lead over Brian Hernandez Jr. after the first three days of the September Meet. Lanerie won five races on Sunday. Chris Landeros is in third with three victories. … Trainer Kenny McPeek took the early lead in the trainer standings, recording three victories. Six trainers are tied in second with two victories: Tom Amoss, Rusty Arnold II, Wayne Catalano, Brad Cox, Chris Hartman and Ian Wilkes. … G. Watts Humphrey Jr. and Fern Circle Stables are tied atop the owner standings with two victories each.

DOWNS AFTER DARK – Break out your bow ties and get ready to sip Kentucky’s finest bourbon while you bet on the world’s greatest Thoroughbreds at this Saturday’s Downs After Dark: Bourbon, Bets and Bow Ties presented by Stella Artois and Woodford Reserve. General admission is $10, reserved seating starts at $20 and dining starts at $70 at www.churchilldowns.com/downsafterdark. Gates open at 5 p.m. with first post at 6 p.m.

Guests will enjoy an evening infused with contemporary yet timeless Southern style in everything from food and music to décor and local art. In addition to eleven live races under the stars, the evening will feature live music on the Plaza Stage, specialty cocktails from Woodford Reserve, bow tie stations, and interactive art exhibits.

Dining guests will enjoy a chef’s table that features bourbon inspired dishes including Woodford Reserve Bourbon mustard glazed pork loin, farmers’ market garden salad with Woodford Reserve sorghum dressing and warm bread pudding with Woodford Reserve caramel sauce.

DOWN THE STRETCH – Racing returns Thursday beneath the Twin Spires with the first of two Twilight Thursday cards of the September Meet. Fans will enjoy $1 draft beer, live music by James Lindsay, food trucks and receive wagering advice at the Racing 101 booth. Admission starts at $3 with the first of eight races kicking off at 5 p.m. … The annual YMCA Safe Place Services Turf Classic will take place Friday between Races 8 and 9 on the turf course. YMCA corporate representatives and Louisville Firefighters will participate in the seven-furlong race to help raise money for the YMCA Safe Place Services. … The “Who’s the Champ? Handicapping Contest” will be held on Sundays, Sept. 24 and Oct. 1. 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 those days between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on the Clubhouse second floor at the top of the Gate 17 escalators. … The 50/50 charitable gaming raffle returns for the September Meet at Churchill Downs. Proceeds from the raffle will go towards charitable organizations that benefit from the Churchill Downs Incorporated Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that helps support the critical work of nonprofits in our industry, make a difference in important public health programs and provide meaningful opportunities in art and education. Visit www.derbygives.com to purchase tickets.

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