ROMANS’ ASSISTANT SIMMS HAS FIRSTHAND OUTLOOK ON VETERAN’S DAY

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Friday, Nov. 10, 2017) – Mark Simms, assistant trainer to Churchill Downs’ co-all-time leading trainer Dale Romans, has a different perspective on Veteran’s Day after serving more than five years as an Officer in the United States Army.

“I actually really wanted to be a trainer before I went to college,” Simms said. “I received my trainer’s license at a young age and horse racing has always been in my blood.”

Simms spent most of his childhood in North Dakota but moved to Virginia for high school and college.

“I had a lot of opportunities for a football or track scholarship but I joined the ROTC in high school when we moved to Virginia. When I was talking with different colleges, Virginia State University offered me a full-rider scholarship to go to school and join their ROTC program. My mom told me right away, ‘You’re going there.’

“I grew up in a horse racing family. My father and grandfather were both into horses. My dad, who was also in the Army, would always say I walked into a horse barn when I was born. We traveled a lot with his job but I always found a way to work with horses when I had time off from school.”

Simms graduated from Virginia State University in 2011 with a dual degree in Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement Administration and Animal Sciences.

“In college I was rated the highest out of my classmates so it made me eligible for many of the Army’s Officer positions,” Simms said. “I toyed with the idea of joining the FBI directly out of college but ended up taking a position as a Brigade Assistant Intelligence Operations Officer and traveled to Korea for a year. While I was in Korea I would go to the racetrack in Seoul with many of the Korean soldiers. I would pick out the horses that looked good on the track and they would help translate the program. We had a good system.”

Following Simms’ tour in Korea he was ordered to Fort Knox in Kentucky. While he was stationed in Kentucky, Simms reached out to several trainers, including Romans, for a job working with horses.

“At the time, (Churchill Downs’ Stable Office Administrative Assistant) Tari Hendrickson was working as Dale’s bookkeeper,” Simms said. “She ended up helping me get in with their barn and I would drive out to the farm in Goshen, Ky. from Fort Knox to help out the grooms. I still knew I wanted to get into horse racing but I wanted the opportunity to serve in Afghanistan before the war was over. In 2013 I was deployed to Afghanistan and served as an Intelligence Officer in the 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division.”

Simms returned to Kentucky in June, 2014 and served as a Senior Intelligence Officer until 2016 when he joined GE Appliances’ Junior Officer Leadership Program.

“I have a great job right now,” Simms said. “With working for GE, I don’t have to be in the office until 8 a.m. so I can still come to the barn in the morning. I was able to take out my assistant trainer’s license in Kentucky pretty easy after being a licensed trainer in a different state.

“Dale and his main assistant, Baldemar (Bahena), have taught me so much about horse racing. When I grew up I never dealt with the quality horses they have in their care. I eventually want to go out on my own next year once my program at GE is complete. Dale has been extremely supportive of my career the last five years. He’s taken me to the sale and introduced me to a lot of his clients. I’m so grateful for that and hopefully it helps when I step out on my own.”

Simms is one of several locally-based horsemens who have served in the military including Rick and Jeff Hiles, Gary “Red Dog” Hartlage, Neil Howard, and Will VanMeter.

Military Appreciation Day at Churchill Downs will take place on Saturday, and all United States veterans and active military will receive free general admission with proof of identification. Additionally, men and women who served American in the military can spend a day at the races with family and friends in the track’s Sky Terrace for just $29 per person – a nearly 25-percent discount – by calling (502) 636-4450. The package includes admission, a race day program, Chef’s Table buffet and soft beverages.

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THE PLAYER BREEZES FIVE FURLONGS IN :59.60 IN PREPARATION FOR CLARK HANDICAP – Carl Hurst and William “Buff” Bradley’s The Player continued his preparation for the Grade I, $500,000 Clark Handicap Presented by Norton Healthcare with a five-furlong move in :59.60 Friday morning at Churchill Downs.

The Player, under jockey Calvin Borel, clipped through splits of :24.40 and :36.20, before galloping out six furlongs in 1:12.60 and seven furlongs in 1:26.60, according to Churchill Downs’ official clocker John Nichols.

This was the first timed workout for the 4-year-old Street Hero colt since he scored a three-length triumph in the Oct. 28 Fayette Stakes (GII) at Keeneland.

“The race proved what we always thought about him,” Hurst said. “He is a big horse and took some time to get things going. He really put it all together for the Fayette and I think this is the start of many successful races.”

The Clark Handicap is the most lucrative stakes race of Churchill Downs’ Fall Meet. The 143rd running of the 1 1/8-mile test for 3-year-olds and up annually lures some of the top older horses in North America and is one of seven stakes events to be contested over Thanksgiving weekend. Total prize money offered throughout the meet’s 221 scheduled races is a hefty $11.25 million, which averages to more than $53,000 per day.

McCRAKEN TO SKIP CLARK HANDICAP – Trainer Ian Wilkes has withdrawn multiple graded stakes winner McCraken from consideration for a start in the $500,000 Clark Handicap Presented by Norton Healthcare (Grade I) on Friday, Nov. 24.

The meticulous Australian-born trainer is unsatisfied with McCraken’s progression following a Tuesday breeze at Churchill Downs. Instead, Wilkes has opted to send the son of Ghostzapper to a farm in Ocala, Fla. for some rest and relaxation in advance of a 4-year-old campaign.

“I just wasn’t too keen on how he breezed Tuesday,” Wilkes said. “I don’t want to force anything upon him so I think some time off will do him good. We’ll send him to the farm in Ocala.”

McCraken breezed a half-mile in :50.40 Tuesday, his first recorded workout since finishing third behind The Player and Neolithic in the $200,000 Fayette (GII) at Keeneland on Oct. 28. It was his seventh race this year.

Overall, McCraken has banked $722,228 for his owner/breeder Whitham Thoroughbreds LLC with a record of 10-5-1-2. At 2, he won the Street Sense and Kentucky Jockey Club (GI) at Churchill Downs. He won this year’s Sam F. Davis (GIII) in his 3-year-old debut and subsequently finished third in the Blue Grass (GI) and eighth in the Kentucky Derby (GI).

After the Triple Crown series, McCraken returned to action with a victory in the Matt Winn (GIII) and a narrow loss to Girvin in the $1 million Haskell Invitational (GI) before finishing seventh of 12 in the $1 million Travers (GI) in August.

FREE ONLINE BRISNET PAST PERFORMANCES FOR CHURCHILL DOWNS; NEW BRISNET BETTING GUIDE DEBUTS ON-TRACK – Throughout Churchill Downs’ 21-day Fall Meet, Brisnet.com is offering horseplayers complimentary past performances for each day’s races at the Louisville, Ky. racetrack. To download the free Churchill Downs past performances online, guests can visit: https://www.brisnet.com/product/past-performances/FPP.

Additionally, Brisnet.com has introduced an excellent new product for on-track guests at Churchill Downs. The Brisnet.com Betting Guide features informative Brisnet.com Premium Plus Past Performances for four-to-eight different racetracks around the country in a bound book with high-quality paper. The book will retail for only $5, which means the new product will be significantly cheaper for Churchill Downs’ guests compared to previously-offered past performance products. It also will have better quality and more targeted content for horseplayers.

The new Brisnet.com Betting Guide is available at program stands and other distribution locations throughout Churchill Downs.

MR. MISUNDERSTOOD IS 4-5 FAVE FOR SATURDAY’S COMMONWEALTH TURF – Flurry Racing Stables’ Mr. Misunderstood, who will attempt to remain unbeaten on turf, was made the early 4-5 favorite on Mike Battaglia’s morning line odds for Saturday’s 14th running of the $100,000 Commonwealth Turf (Grade III) at Churchill Downs.

Mr. Misunderstood drew post 6 in the field of eight 3-year-olds, and jockey Florent Geroux has the return call to ride.

The field for the 1 1/16-mile Commonwealth Turf field from the rail out (with jockey and morning line odds): Sharm El Sheikh (Ricardo Santana Jr., 50-1); My Bariley (Fernando De La Cruz, 15-1); Mr Cub (Joe Rocco Jr., 6-1); Parlor (Julien Leparoux, 6-1); Gorgeous Kitten (Corey Lanerie, 8-1); Mr. Misunderstood (Geroux, 4-5); Tiz a Slam (Robby Albarado, 8-1); and Giant Payday (Chris Landeros, 5-1).

Free Brisnet.com past performances for Saturday’s card and every racing program for Churchill Downs are available online at https://www.brisnet.com/product/past-performances/FPP.

The Commonwealth Turf will go as Race 10 on Saturday’s 11-race program with a scheduled post time of 5:36 p.m. (all times Eastern). The first race is 1 p.m.
ROMANS VS. MOTT – Dale Romans, a 51-year-old native of South Louisville, began Friday just one win away from surpassing Hall of Famer Bill Mott as the all-time leading trainer in races won at Churchill Downs – a record that 64-year-old Mott has held for 31 years. Mott and Romans are tied with 702 wins at Churchill Downs.

- Romans Entries: Mizz Tutu (Friday, Race 2); Little Irishdancer (Friday, Race 3); King Zachary (Friday, Race 7); and Coach Rocks (Saturday Race 7); Dance Rhythms (Sunday, Race 5); and Storm Runner (Sunday, Race 6).

- Mott Entries: Ecru (Friday, Race 7); Border Force (Friday, Race 10); Love Mo (Saturday, Race 7); Honey Don't (Sunday, Race 6); and English Dancer (Sunday, 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, trainer Greg Foley (399) is one win away from 400 career victories beneath the historic Twin Spires while trainer Ian Wilkes is targeting 200 career victories at Churchill Downs (195 wins).

STAKES CLOSINGS – Nominations for several Thanksgiving Week stakes races close Saturday at midnight:

- $200,000 Falls City Handicap (GII) (Nov. 23, 1 1/8 miles on dirt for fillies and mares)
- $100,000 River City Handicap (GIII) (Nov. 23, 1 1/8 miles on turf for 3-year-olds and up)
- $500,000 Clark Handicap Presented by Norton Healthcare (GI) (Nov. 24, 1 1/8 miles on dirt for 3-year-olds and up)
- $200,000 Mrs. Revere (GII) (Nov. 24, 1 1/16 miles on turf for 3-year-old fillies)
- $200,000 Kentucky Jockey Club (GII) (Nov. 25, 1 1/16 miles on dirt for 3-year-olds)
- $200,000 Golden Rod (GII) (Nov. 25, 1 1/16 miles on dirt for 3-year-old fillies)

Horseman can nominate online by visiting https://www.churchilldowns.com/horsemen/stakes/nomination-forms/ or can call Assistant Racing Secretary and Stakes Coordinator Dan Bork at (502) 636-3806.

“INSIDE CHURCHILL DOWNS” RETURNS FRIDAY – “Inside Churchill Downs” airs Friday at 6 p.m. on ESPN 680/105.7. The weekly one-hour horse racing radio show is co-hosted by Churchill Downs Racetrack’s John Asher, Darren Rogers and Kevin Kerstein, and delivers a wide-ranging list of interesting guests, from jockeys, trainers, owners to well-informed handicappers and other industry insiders. Those outside the Louisville radio market can listen live online at http://www.espnlouisville.com/ or via podcast on the station’s website or https://soundcloud.com/.

Friday’s guests include assistant trainer Norman Casse and NBC’s Randy Moss.

DOWN THE STRETCH – Churchill Downs’ popular “Who’s the Champ?” Handicapping Contest will return 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 will take place Sunday between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on the Clubhouse second floor at the top of the Gate 17 escalators. … Reserved seating for Thanksgiving Day is going fast. Thanksgiving Day at Churchill Downs has been a Louisville tradition since 1969. More than 7,000 turkey dinners with all the trimmings – the largest number anywhere in the region – will be served on Thursday, Nov. 23, and fans will enjoy 12 races beginning early at 11:30 a.m. Dining packages start at $70 ($27 for children age 2-12) which includes admission, a racing program, reserved seat and a scrumptious Thanksgiving feast. … The delicious “Stakes and Eggs” brunch special returns every Sunday during the Fall Meet in the Stakes Room. The special $45 package for adults and $22 package for children includes a seat in the Stakes Room on the fourth floor of the Clubhouse and all-you-can-eat access to the brunch menu. … The 50/50 charitable gaming raffle is back for the Fall Meet. 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 and for more information.

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