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FIRST MISSION PROVES MUCH THE BEST IN ALYSHEBA

LOUISVILLE, KY (May 3, 2024) – **Godolphin’s First Mission** raced past longtime leader **T O Saint Denis (JPN)** passing the eighth pole and went on to a four-length victory in the 21st running of the \$730,000 Alysheba presented by Sentient Jet (GII) for 4-year-olds and up Friday afternoon.

Trained by **Brad Cox** and ridden by **Florent Geroux**, First Mission completed the mile and a sixteenth in 1:42.03 over a sloppy track. It was the third consecutive stakes win of the afternoon for Geroux and the second of the day for Cox.

T O Saint Denis rocketed to a daylight advantage and carved out fractions of :22.96 and :46.77 as First Mission saved ground along the rail racing in third. On the far turn, First Mission moved into second but at the top of the stretch he was still three lengths in back of the leader.

T O Saint Denis still had the lead at the eighth pole, but First Mission was in high gear and swept past for his fifth victory in eight starts. The victory was worth \$450,910 and improved his career earnings to \$1,273,020.

Favored in the field of eight, First Mission returned \$4.14, \$3.50 and \$3.16. T O Saint Denis, ridden by **Ryusei Sakai**, returned \$17.68 and \$8.98 and held second by a nose over **Il Miracolo**, who paid \$6.10 to show under **John Velazquez**.

It was another three lengths back to **Steal Sunshine** with **Call Me Fast**, **Money Supply**, **Trademark** and **Pipeline** following in order.

ALYSHEBA QUOTES

Florent Geroux (jockey, First Mission, winner) – “When you get in a pace scenario like that, you just have to be patient and ride your race. I give a lot of credit to (T O Saint Denis). He ran a huge race. Deep in the stretch my horse was picking up his stride and he finished very easily.”

Brad Cox (trainer, First Mission, winner) – “I was glad we weren’t up there with him (the pacesetter). We were sitting a decent trip, I was hopeful we were not too close with the fractions. But he’s been training really well. He’s been spot on really since a month out of the Pegasus, he really turned it on. Right before the Oaklawn race (the Essex), he really turned it on and showed us what he was showing us leading up to the Pegasus. We really liked him that day (in the Pegasus), it wasn’t meant to be. We just drew a line threw it. But it’s worked out for him ever since.

“We thought Pipeline would be on the lead and that we’d be tracking him. But overall, I’m proud of the effort. I think we have him in a rhythm now. I think he’s a Grade I caliber horse, and we believe there is one out there with his name on it, maybe multiples, and this sets us up to take a swing at it.”

“I mean, I felt like we had (the pacesetter) measured. Our horse stays on well and I thought he was going to get there. I was just hoping someone else wouldn’t come running on late given the pace early on.”

Ryusei Sakai (jockey, T O Saint Denis, second) – “I’m very proud of how my horse ran. This race should be some good experience for me in preparation for tomorrow’s Derby (in which he will ride T O Password).”

John Velazquez (jockey, Il Miracolo, third) – “My horse took about an eighth of a mile to get going. When we got to the turn, he dropped into it but when we got to the backstretch, he came was off the bridle and I was like ‘come on buddy, stay here, stay here.’ I thought (Jose Ortiz on Pipeline) would have some horse, but I had to go around him. But when I got my horse going, he started running. He’s a funny horse. If he doesn’t feel someone going with him, he kind of waits. I was getting to the horse running second and he was getting there but then he hung a little bit.”

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