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Contact: Kevin Kerstein
Kentucky Racing Communications
Churchill Downs, Ellis Park, Turfway Park
(610) 420-6971 (mobile)
(502) 635-4712 (office)
Kevin.Kerstein@KyDerby.com

RIGNEY, BAUER REFLECT ON JONATHAN'S WAY IROQUOIS VICTORY TO BEGIN ROAD TO KENTUCKY DERBY

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Sunday, Sept. 15, 2024) – Rigney Racing and trainer **Phil Bauer** celebrated a significant victory Saturday as **Jonathan's Way** took the field gate-to-wire in the 43rd running of the \$254,745 Iroquois Stakes (Grade III) at Churchill Downs, earning the colt 10 qualifying points towards the 151st Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI).

"It was an unbelievable day for our barn," Bauer said. "Watching him turn for home in the Iroquois, he looked so comfortable on the front end. His ears told a story – he was just waiting for **Joel (Rosario)** to ask for more. And, really, Joel didn't have to push him much at all.

"For only his second start, he showed a lot of heart and gave us a new dimension in his running style. He cooled out great and was in perfect (Sunday) morning."

Jonathan's Way is only the second horse that Bauer and Rigney Racing have had on the Road to the Kentucky Derby leaderboard. The duo previously campaigned **Another Lemon Drop**, who finished fourth in the 2015 Lecomte (GIII) at Fair Grounds. This latest victory, however, feels different for the owner, **Richard Rigney**.

"We actually bought him as a weanling for \$290,000 and we were thinking high things of this horse from the beginning," Rigney said. "I have a great team behind me and I use **John Moynihan** as my bloodstock agent. The great thing about John is he's not looking at the page behind the horse but the physical attributes.

"Seeing him already reward us is surreal. Being one of the top favorites for both the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (GI) and Kentucky Derby (GI) is a dream come true. This is the greatest sport in the world."

Jonathan's Way, an Ohio-bred son of top freshman sire Vekoma, broke sharply from post 9 in a field of 11, taking command of the one-turn mile and leading the field through fractions of :23.21 and :46.62. He held off late charges from rivals **Owen Almighty** and **Giocoso**, ultimately finishing 2 ¾ lengths ahead in a swift 1:36.08. The win banked \$131,130 for Rigney Racing and positioned Jonathan's Way at the top of the Road to the Kentucky Derby leaderboard.

Jonathan's Way's success also creates a unique connection to one of Ohio's best-bred champions, **Harlan's Holiday**. That legendary horse was broken by **Barry Berkelhammer**, who also handled Jonathan's Way's early development.

The colt's next target is the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (GI) on Friday, Nov. 1 at Del Mar, according to Bauer.

Owen Almighty tallied five points for his runner-up effort under jockey **Irad Ortiz Jr** for trainer **Brian Lynch**.

"I think he learned a lot in the race," Ortiz said. "He was in a good spot tracking off the pace but he's never really been between horses like that. He was listening to me and did everything I asked him to do. I was happy with him."

Giocoso finished 4 ¼ lengths back of Owen Almighty and earned three qualifying points.

"He's going to have a bright future," jockey **James Graham** reflected after the race. "At the top of the stretch I was loaded and not moving a muscle in the saddle. He handled the dirt fine. He's got all grass on the bottom side of his pedigree and broke his maiden on the turf before this."

The **Dale Romans**-trained **Mesero** finished fourth and added two points.

"I think he got a lot out of the race being only his second start," Romans said. "It says a lot about a horse going to stakes company after only one start."

Sandman, a highly regarded \$1.2 million purchase for **D.J. Stable**, **St. Elias Stable**, **West Point Thoroughbreds** and **CJ Stables**, added one point for his fifth-place finish under jockey **Jose Ortiz**.

"We didn't win the race but I think with more experience Sandman is only going to keep improving," Ortiz said. "As the distances start to get longer, he should move forward."

The Iroquois Stakes began the Road to the Kentucky "Prep Season." The next stop is Oct. 5 with the Breeders' Futurity (GI) at Keeneland, Champagne Stakes (GI) at Aqueduct and American Pharoah (GI) at Santa Anita, each offering points on a 10-5-3-2-1 scale to the top five finishers.

DOWN THE STRETCH – Racing continued Sunday at Churchill Downs with a first post of 12:45 p.m. There was two-day carryover in the 20-cent Derby City 6 Jackpot of \$128,960. The bet spanned Races 5-10. ... Following dark days Monday and Tuesday, live racing will resume Wednesday with a first post of 12:45 p.m. ... Thursday is a special “Purple Takeover” for the Twilight Thursday program, celebrating a partnership with Lou City and Racing Louisville soccer teams. Fans can meet some of their favorite players from both teams while enjoying the eight-race program, \$2 domestic beer, live music and local food trucks. Gates open at 4 p.m., first post is 5 p.m. ... Friday is Senior Day and guests 60 and older can enjoy a chef’s table lunch on Millionaires Row for \$45. Tickets can be purchased by calling (502) 636-4450. ... Four stakes events highlight Saturday’s 11-race card: the \$300,000 Dogwood (Grade III) for 3-year-old fillies at seven furlongs; \$300,000 Bourbon Flight for 3-year-olds at 1 3/16 miles; \$300,000 Harrods Creek for 3-year-olds at seven furlongs and \$175,000 Seneca Overnight Stakes (Listed) for 3-year-old fillies at 1 1/16 miles. ... Sunday, Sept. 22 is Family Adventure Day at Churchill Downs with more than 15 kid-friendly activities including stick horse races, face painting, inflatables, bubble stations and more. Additional details are available on www.churchilldowns.com.

ABOUT CHURCHILL DOWNS RACETRACK

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