

PRESQUE ISLE DOWNS

RACING NOTES

By Kevin Decker

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Justifiable Steel Steals the Princess of Sylmar on the Engine

Last month, trainer Aaron West sent his three-year-old filly Justifiable Steel to Presque Isle Downs to face Pennsylvania-breds for the first time. She had rattled off two wins in a row at Indiana Downs against claimers of the turf. Both efforts were won going wire to wire. The question that needed answered was how would she like the Tapeta surface at Presque Isle Downs.

It turns out, the answer is very much so, thank you.

She went one mile and seventy years virtually untouched in that first start over the surface, a state-bred allowance going a route of ground. Her performance impressed her jockey immensely.

"When we came up here last time, we were just cruising around and got over the track really well," said jockey Oscar Villarreal.

The wire-to-wire win by six lengths was convincing enough to consider something bigger.

Rather than enter into another allowance spot for Keystone-breds, the connections decided to step up into stakes company, facing older rivals in the 17th Running of the Princess of Sylvar Stakes for \$75,000 guaranteed at one mile and 70 yards.

The only other three-year-old entered, Smooch Up, scratched out making Justifiable Steel the only sophomore facing older rivals in the race.

When the gates opened at the start, she bound for the lead. With Night Nurse (jockey Walter Alencar) putting down the early pressure by racing about a length off Justifiable Steel. The opening fractions were 23 1/5 seconds to the quarter, and 46 1/5 to the half.

"Today, it was perfect. We had speed on the outside, and once she got a head of run, she just travelled around there really beautiful," added Villarreal.

She controlled the race from start to finish. After dispatching the early challenge from Night Nurse, morning line favorite Modarosa (jockey Antonio Gallardo) was next to close ground on the leader. She would repel that challenge in the stretch, sending Modarosa to finish second. Foxy Junior (Jamar Torres) was third for trainer Bernie Houghton, while last year's winner, Candy Reward, was never a factor and finished forth. Final time was 1:10 2/5 minutes.

"Once she gets on the bridle, she gets comfortable. She has a massive stride and gets over the track easy," said Villarreal.

The three-year-old daughter of Justify out of the Munnings mare Northern Beauty was bred in Pennsylvania by Blackstone Farms LLC. Terry Stephens is the winning owner. Justifiable Steel has now won four of six races lifetime and looks to be one to reckon with in the PA-bred stakes events for distaffers in coming months and years.



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