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A test is passed as Book'em Danno emerges as a star in Saratoga

By Bill Finley

Bred in New Jersey by Gregory Kilka and Bright View Farm, Book'em Danno showed from the very start that he was better than the average Jersey-bred. He won four of his first five races before running second in the Group 3 Saudi Derby. The gelding was beaten that day by Forever Young, who would go on to finish a close third in the Kentucky Derby. But Book'em Danno was still in search of that signature victory on his record, the type of win that would prove he is a legitimate, Grade 1, top-class horse.

On June 8 at Saratoga during the Belmont Stakes undercard, he had that chance. The owners, a collection of friends from Jersey who race under the name of Atlantic Six Racing, and trainer Derek Ryan had decided to send the son of Bucchero to Saratoga for the Grade 1 Woody Stephens Stakes. There, he would meet some of the fastest 3-year sprinters in the country in horses like Prince of Monaco, Nash and Valentine Candy.

Could he handle the assignment? It was anyone's guess. But in the 1:21.30 it took him to get from the start to the finish line he answered every question as he beat Prince of Monaco by a half-length. So how good is he? Very good. And what about his future? It's very bright.

"It's hard to explain," said co-owner Jay Briscione. "That was the first time we even ran a horse in Saratoga and we ran in a Grade 1 stakes and we won it. I tell everybody, this is the most exciting thing that has ever happened to us besides our wives and families. I can



COGLIANESE PHOTOGRAPHY

say that for all the guys. It's been such an incredible experience. Given how well he ran in Saudi Arabia and how well Forever Young ran coming back in the Derby, running a race like the one he ran [in the Woody Stephens] justified how good a horse he is."

Breaking from post one under Irad Ortiz Jr., Book'em Danno broke a step slowly but Ortiz quickly got him into the race. He was sitting comfortably in fifth as a pair of longshots were setting blazing fractions. Near the quarter-pole Book'em Danno had taken the lead and opened up by 4 lengths with an eighth of a mile to go. Prince of Monaco, the 8-5 favorite, closed and cut the winning margin to a half-length but it never looked at any point that he would get by Danno.

"When I started moving, he started finding really well on the turn," Ortiz Jr. said. "He started responding really, really good on the

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turn so that helped a lot. Turning for home, I was still in a hold, then I asked him, and he gave me a good kick at the end. That was great. He is a nice horse."

Book'em Danno earned a 100 Beyer figure going 7 furlongs. It was the first Grade 1 win by a Jersey-bred since Green Gratto won the 2017 Carter Handicap at Aqueduct.

"I am biased a little bit, but I think he proved he's the best 3-year-old in the business right now," Ryan said. "I know he hasn't gone up against those horses who go two turns, but he's the most consistent one out there. He really should be 7-for-7. This race didn't change my opinion about him. I know what he had. He's just a race horse."

Ryan worked Book'em Danno at Monmouth nine days prior to the Woody Stephens. He went in :58.20 from the gate and the trainer said the work made a huge difference and had him on go.

The trainer said he will definitely point to the \$500,000 Grade 1 H. Allen Jerkens Stakes Aug. 24 at Saratoga and might find a race for him beforehand (see writeup on page 4).

One thing he will not do is to take on the heavyweights of the division in two-turn stakes like the Haskell and the Travers. After making the decision to pass the Derby, the team decided to stick to the sprint division.

"The Derby wasn't the right time or place for him," Ryan said. "The Derby is a great race, but it wasn't a good fit for him. The Derby never became an issue. We had a plan and we stuck to it.

"I'm not sure about the Breeders' Cup either. One of my main goals is to get him back to Saudi Arabia next year."

Ryan said another reason why he wants to keep Book'em Danno sprinting is that his half-sister, the stakes winner

Girl Trouble, a daughter of Fast Anna, struggled when sent beyond 7 furlongs.

Briscione said he hoped other small-time owners and breeders have been following this horse. He was bought privately from the breeders, and Briscione declined to the state the price. But it couldn't have been much. Stallion Bucchero now stands for \$7,500 and the dam, Adorabella, never raced. At the other end of the spectrum, runner-up Prince of Monaco, who is trained by Bob Baffert, cost \$950,000 at the Fasig-Tipton Saratoga sale.

"The fact that we could get a horse like this should make people want to stay in the business," Briscione said. "People should want to get into the business because there's the possibility of getting a horse like this without having to spend \$1 million. What we've accomplished has been incredible. It's made believers out of us."

Amatteroftime springs upset in Friendly Lover Handicap

Monmouth Park Press Release

There was nothing on paper to suggest that Amatteroftime would even be a factor in the \$88,400 Friendly Lover Stakes for Jersey-breds at Monmouth Park June 9.

The 9-year-old was coming off an eight-month-plus layoff, was on a 12-race losing streak and hadn't beaten state-breds since winning the Charles Hesse III Handicap in 2021.

He was also up against a 1-20 shot in Great Navigator.

But given a rousing stretch ride by Isaac Castillo, Amatteroftime surged to the lead in the final sixteenth of a mile and went on to post a stunning upset by three-quarters of a length over No Cents. Irish Boolum was another 3 lengths back in third, with a tiring Great Navigator



finishing fourth in the eight-horse field.

Amatteroftime, bred by New Farm, has career earnings of \$615,928.

"I think the time off had a lot to do with it," said trainer Miguel Penaloza, who is conditioning Amatteroftime for the first time in the gelding's 54-race career. "We made a few adjustments with him, changing his shoes and a couple

of other small things, but I can't say I expected this. On paper Great Navigator looked unbeatable. But you just don't know in horse racing."

With stretching-out sprinter No Cents trying to steal the 1-mile race on the front end through pedestrian early fractions of :25.46 and :49.54, Castillo had Amatteroftime fifth on the outside.

Great Navigator, breaking from outside post eight, managed to get to the rail for Paco Lopez but appeared to spend all of his energy rushing up from fourth to go after No Cents' big lead late in the final turn.

Castillo had Amatteroftime outside and the son of Eskendereya managed to close into those slow early fractions as Great Navigator faded. No Cents was stubborn in defeat.



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"This horse always tries and I know the horse has the experience so I tried to keep him relaxed," said Castillo. "He was able to relax and he ran really great. I liked where we were coming down the stretch, seeing a target for him to run at late. We were in a good position when it was time to run."

Now 10-for-54 lifetime,

Amatteroftime last won on Nov. 2, 2022, going 0-for-11 last year.

Penaloza took over the training duties from Ramirez Silvino in the winter.

"I don't know if he has come back better at 9 than he has been before but he has been working well and I told the owners [East Street Stable LLC] this

morning that I had a feeling he would run well," said Penaloza. "Did I expect him to win? I can't say that.

"I don't know if the race fell apart but I am very pleased with the way he ran. This is the first stakes race I have ever won at Monmouth Park so it's a good feeling."

A four-peat for He'spuregold in the Irish War Cry

By Bill Finley

He'spuregold, a 6-year-old bred and owned by John Bowers Jr., isn't going to make the Hall of Fame or win an Eclipse Award. That's fine by his trainer, Kelly Breen. With his class, his determination and his durability, he has won over his trainer, who calls him one of his all-time favorites. How can you not love a horse who is so honest that he won the same stakes race four years in a row?

That's exactly what happened when the son of Vancouver won the July 7 Irish War Cry Handicap at Monmouth. It was his fourth straight win in the Jersey-bred stakes run at a mile on the turf.

"He's such a nice horse. I can't stop thinking about him," Breen said. "He is something else. I've been thinking about this all day, that he is such a nice horse. I actually feel like I have a connection with the horse.

"I have been consulting with Patty Hogan the last couple years so far as keeping him sound and dealing with certain issues. He has his issues. But he is so classy, so nice to be around. When I first got him his legs weren't in the best shape, which makes it even more remarkable that he could do this four years in a row. It's beyond my imagination so far as what a horse can handle and keep on running. He is the epitome of a war horse. He's had surgeries and he is still just a warrior. He comes back year after year. I'm so proud to train him."

Breen has only been training for



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Bowers for about five years. The first horse bred by Bowers that Breen trained was Valedictorian, who is a half-sister to He'spuregold. That mare won five stakes races for Breen, including the Grade 3 Eatontown and Suwanee River.

"She was claimed from John and the woman, Harriet Sawyer, had her with another trainer," Breen explained. "She found me out and said I have a Jersey bred, will you take it to Monmouth Park with you? That was actually the first horse bred by John Bowers that I ever had. We won multiple stakes, open stakes.

"From there I started picking up Mr. Bowers' horses here in New Jersey. Valedictorian was one of the key things that introduced me to Mr. Bowers. I wish I trained for him 20 years ago. Since we've been together for the past five years or so we've won a bunch of stakes races together, Jersey-breds and open stakes. He breeds a really nice horse and he takes pride in what he does."

Bowers also bred the dam of He'spuregold and Valedictorian, the Smart

Strike mare Smart N Classy. She was a two-time stakes winner who also won the Grade 3 Eatontown Stakes.

Bowers is wrapping up his breeding and racing operation. Breen said that he has retired many of his mares and is no longer buying new ones to replace them.

"He is not young and he is ready to move on to a new chapter in his life," Breen said. "His broodmares were passing away and he did not replace them."

Courtesy of He'spuregold he's likely to have something more to cheer about for quite some time.

After last year's Irish War Cry, Breen couldn't find another Jersey-bred stakes for He'spuregold and ran him in four open company races with mixed results.

"We don't have many options left so far as Jersey bred races go, so I'm sure there will be some races for him out of town in the near future," Breen said.

He'spuregold is a eight-time winner from 27 career starts. In addition to the Irish Way Cry he won the Charles Hesse III Handicap in 2022.

"He is such a cool horse," Breen said. "I'm so happy for John Bowers. He has been a great supporter of Jersey bred for a long time. I get sentimental with this horse. He's a Jersey-bred, just like me. I've been going through a lot lately. I had surgery last year and I'm not walking well. This horse has helped. I take everything he has done to heart."



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Book'em Danno surges late to win Jersey Shore Stakes

Monmouth Park Press Release

Trainer Derek Ryan and Book'em Danno got everything they wanted out of the \$115,000 Jersey Shore Stakes July 19 at Monmouth Park – but just barely.

Roused by jockey Samuel Marin as he launched a furious stretch drive, Grade 1 winner Book'em Danno surged at the wire to beat Little Ni by a nose in his final prep before the Grade 1 Allen Jerkens at Saratoga Aug. 24.

“That’s a nice horse that ran second,” said Ryan. “We got what we wanted out of the race. He had to fight for it today. If all things go well, we’ll be back in Saratoga to run in the Allen Jerkens.”

A gelded New Jersey-bred son of Bucchero owned by Atlantic Six Racing, Book'em Danno improved to 6-for-8 lifetime (with two seconds). Coming off a win in the Grade 1 Woody Stephens at Saratoga June 8, he went off 1-5 in a reduced field of four 3-year-olds.

The winning time for the 6 furlongs was 1:09.23.

Little Ni, a Kentucky-bred son of Mohaymen trying stakes company for the first time after starting his career with three straight wins, looked like a winner until Book'em Danno steamrolled through the lane.

“He ran great. He got beat. I don’t know if it was by a better horse,” said trainer Eddie Owens Jr. of Little Ni. “We did all of the work. He ran a winning race except for the last jump.

“We’ll talk to the owners and figure out if we will take him up to Saratoga or if we’ll look for something different. We’ll find something that suits him. As well as he ran it’s disappointing to lose by a nose after a great effort.”

Book'em Danno, who began his career with two straight wins at Monmouth Park, paid \$2.40 to win.

But his prospects were not promising when he was fairly well back early on in the race through opening fractions of :22.14 and :44.50.

“He broke well, but what happened is I didn’t want to rush him in the beginning because I know if you ask him he will go,

so I didn’t want to rush him,” said Marin, who is now four-for-four aboard Book'em Danno. “I know what kind of horse I have. He was pretty comfortable and I didn’t want to get myself in a bad spot. Little Ni is a good horse.

“The track is really deep and Danno was trying to handle it. If I asked him earlier he would have won easily. Right now, I’m 22, this is the best horse I have ever ridden. Hopefully I get a chance on more like this.”

It was another 5¼ lengths back in third to Buccherino as Book'em Danno and Little Ni seized the moment with a stirring stretch duel.

“We ran good. We just lost on the last jump against a Grade 1 winner,” said jockey Jairo Rendon, the rider of Little Ni. “It was a big race for [Little Ni] and he performed well. We were trying to hold on but [Book'em Danno] is a really good horse, too.

“My horse gave me a good race. I knew he was going to run big today too. It would have been really tough to beat that horse but we almost did it.”

Mia’s Crusade scores fifth career stakes win in Jersey Girl Handicap



EQUI-PHOTO, INC.

Monmouth Park Press Release

Trainer Chuck Spina said he may never figure out why Mia’s Crusade threw in a rare clunker in her prior start, but once a mid-day rain storm doused Monmouth Park July 6, he knew his 5-year-old mare would be just fine again.

Able to sit a stalking trip behind longshot Sea Maiden through the opening five-eighths of the 1-mile Jersey Girl Handicap for Jersey-bred fillies and mares, Mia’s Crusade took control

coming out of the final turn and then had just enough left to hold off the furious late charge of 1-2 favorite Riding Pretty for a nose victory.

The winning time on a grass course listed as firm even after the rain was 1:35.82.

It marked the fifth stakes win in state-bred company for the daughter of Greenpointcrusader, who was bred by Dianne Boyken and is owned by



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Prancing Horse Farm LLC. Just as impressive is that she has now won Jersey-bred stakes races sprinting on the grass, going a mile on the turf, sprinting on a sloppy track and sprinting on a fast track.

"I have never ridden a horse that wins on so many surfaces," said jockey Jomar Torres, who has ridden Mia's Crusade in her past 16 starts. "Whatever track you put her on she runs. I looked at Jairo Rendon [aboard runner-up Riding Pretty] after the finish and asked him who won it. He said he thought I did. But I wasn't sure."

Mia's Crusade won her seasonal debut in the Spruce Fir Handicap at 6 furlongs on the dirt at Monmouth Park May 18 before a head-scratching sixth-place

finish in the Smart N Classy Handicap in her next start.

She was beaten 20¼ lengths that race – an obvious aberration for an ultra-consistent horse who now has eight wins, two seconds and two thirds from 19 career starts.

"She's just so honest," said Spina. "To be honest, I can't figure out why she ran as poorly as she did last race. I couldn't find anything wrong with her. It's just a mystery. Maybe we ran her back too close after the long layoff when she won the Spruce Fir Handicap. We came back in 15 days after that. So, I don't have an answer, and it was frustrating because she is so consistent.

"This game will drive you nuts

because I still don't know why she got beat 20¼ lengths last time. We went over it with a fine tooth comb. We couldn't find anything."

Once Spina saw the rain he felt better about Mia's Crusade bouncing back, since she owns two slop wins and another Jersey-bred stakes victory on a good turf course.

"I do think the rain we had helped her today," said Spina. "She likes moisture when she runs, whether it's grass or dirt."

Torres echoed that sentiment.

"She's amazing. I think the rain helped," he said. "She likes a little moisture, whether it's on the dirt or the grass. And she is getting better and better."

Holly Crest Farms homebred Riding Pretty wins Smart N Classy Handicap

Trainer Eddie Owens Jr. always thought it was just a matter of time before Riding Pretty became a stakes winner. He just didn't expect it to take this long.

Benefitting from an up-close stalking trip behind early dueling leaders, Riding Pretty pulled away for a dominant 7½-length victory in the \$85,000 Smart N Classy Handicap at Monmouth Park June 2.

It marked Owens' third stakes win of the meet, with the veteran conditioner having won the John J. Reilly Handicap with Speaking and Long Branch Stakes with Sea Streak, who romped by a similar margin.

Longshot Autumn's Turn rallied for second, three-quarters of a length ahead of Beach Daze.

"I don't want to say that this was the result of class relief, because Mia's Crusade raced well two weeks ago when she won a stakes race and [Beach Daze] won this race last year and was coming off a win,"



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said Owens. "With the trip we had we were able to be clear on the outside when we were stalking the speed and [Beach Daze] was kind of pinned inside. She's a lot better now than she was last. I ran her one too many times last year on the grass at Gulfstream. She has improved a lot.

"I thought she would win a stakes race way before this."

Ridden by Jairo Rendon, Riding Pretty was third behind Bel Pensiero and Mia's Crusade, with the two taking the six-horse field of Jersey-bred fillies and mares through plodding early fractions of :25.16 and :49.21 for the half.

Rendon then looped her around the pacesetters coming out of the final turn and there were no challenges after that. She paid \$4.00 to win as the favorite.

The winning time for the mile was 1:39.25.

"I was worried about the slow early pace. But once they picked it up and a little bit, and being in a good position like she was, I knew she would finish well," said Owens.

A 4-year-old daughter of Jack Milton owned and bred by Holly Crest Farm, Riding Pretty notched her fourth lifetime win from 19 starts. Since 2023 her record is 3-2-2 from seven Monmouth starts. She was third in the Grade 3 Monmouth Oaks a year ago and fourth in the Grade 2 Beldame Stakes last fall in New York.

"I know she's a talented filly and I got a lot of confidence in her with the way she worked the other day," said Rendon. "So I just put her in the position going into the stretch to let her run. The trip was perfect for her."



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