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## Caps off to Commentator

7-year-old records  
14-length victory

By Mark Blaudschun

GLOBE STAFF

Throughout most of the spring and summer, the management at Suffolk Downs tried to put together a race of horses past and present, making overtures to Curlin, last year's 3-year-old champion, and Big Brown, the reigning 3-year-old, for the 66th Massachusetts Handicap.

Nothing came of the idea, which forced the folks at Suffolk to come up with an alternative plan, based not on a classic horse race but a classic horse.

Yesterday, on a sun-kissed afternoon with a hint of fall, Commentator showed up in all of his glory.

The 7-year old gelding, trained by Nick Zito and ridden by Johnny Velazquez, brought back memories of past winners such as Seabiscuit, Riva Ridge, and Cigar, breezing to a MassCap-record 14-length victory before an appreciative crowd of 17,712.

"This horse is incredible now," said Zito. "The horse is so good. We have a horse on top of his game. You have to say that Curlin, Big Brown, and Commentator are the top three."

While Curlin and Big Brown are still proving themselves, still upping their stud value with each performance, Commentator is a horse with a different business plan.

"This horse, since he is a gelding, we don't have to worry about the residual value, so we can run when we want," said Zito.

He could enter Commentator in the Breeders' Cup Classic at Santa Anita next month, but is unlikely to do so for a variety of reasons. However, Zito left a small opening for the trip.

"You have to think about the Breeders' Cup," said Zito. "It's a



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Johnny Velazquez can rest easy as Commentator crosses the finish line 14 lengths ahead of the competition in the 66th MassCap, earning his 13th career victory.

long way to go for a synthetic surface. As you know, I'm not crazy about anything artificial. There's nothing wrong with dirt."

In so many ways, Commentator is a throwback to the days of racing on dirt tracks simply for the pleasure of racing. That is what Commentator has done on a steady basis for several years, sticking to the dirt on the New York racing circuit in the summer and the Florida tracks in winter.

Commentator's previous effort was another head-turner, a solid 4-length victory at the Grade 1 Whitney Handicap at Saratoga July 26.

When the attempts to get Big Brown and Curlin dissolved, Suffolk officials went after Commentator. Neither Zito nor owner Tracy Farmer needed much convincing. Both liked the surface and the Suffolk ownership group was a strong voice against the slaughter of horses.

The marketing plan was

changed to accent the potential of what Commentator could do. And he didn't disappoint. He broke cleanly from the No. 2 post and watched Riversrunrylee set a quick early pace (:23, :46) before he made his move at the 3-furlong pole.

"He relaxed really well," said Velazquez of a horse that went off at staggering 1-10 odds, which was only matched by Cigar in 1996.

"I really didn't want to be in a speed duel, so I was very content with the way we were going up the back side. I eased him away from the other horses and he moved very confidently."

As Riversrunrylee faded — he finished last in the seven-horse field — Commentator did in his 20th race what he has done so well throughout his career. He exploded coming into the stretch for his 13th victory, as Won Awesome Dude and Cuba carried out their roles as the place and show horses, respectively.

Commentator finished the 1 1/4 miles in 1 minute 48.97 seconds, paying \$2.20 across the board. Won Awesome Dude, with Casey Lambert up, paid \$4.60 and \$3, and Cuba, with Pedro Cotto Jr., brought \$2.80.

Commentator's performance was worthy of special attention.

"It's a wonderful blessing for me to have a horse like this," said Zito. "He ranks right up there with all the other great ones."

Yesterday, no one was going to argue.

On the undercard, Hold on Smokey won a duel with Rockhurst to win the \$50,000 Robert O'Malley Memorial. Velazquez warmed up for his MassCap ride by guiding Thunders Dove to a win in the \$50,000 Drumtop, then taking Real Estate to victory in the \$100,000 James B. Moseley Sprint.

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