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Surgery the right diagnosis

Dr. Pleasure in form for MassCap

By Nancy Marrapese-Burrell
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He finished third behind Brass Hat and Fairbanks in last year's Massachusetts Handicap, but Dr. Pleasure may well have a new lease on his horse racing life.

In early May, after the Keeneland spring meeting, Dr. Pleasure had laser surgery on his throat. His recovery went so well that the 5-year-old will be back at Suffolk Downs tomorrow for another shot.

"We found and diagnosed a type of a breathing problem he had, an entrapped epiglottis, which usually you don't see occur in horses of his age," said trainer John Ward. "We did the procedure, which is not a drastic procedure to do. And, as a result of it, he came back very well.

"I don't know if during the surgery they adjusted something else in there, but he seems to have found himself a new level [at which] to compete."

In his last race, Aug. 10 at Saratoga, he won by more than 8 lengths. In the 66th running of the MassCap, he will start from the No. 6 post in the seven-horse field.

"I think that's a very good draw for us; it puts us a little bit outside of [favorite Commentator]," said Ward. "I'm pretty happy with that."

Ward won't be at Suffolk for the race, but his wife, Donna, will be there again. There was a consensus that mistakes were made last year with regard to what was told to Cornelio Velasquez, who will be riding Dr. Pleasure again this year.

"We thought maybe we gave some bad instructions to the rider last year and tried to come from too far off the pace," said Ward. "But we come back against a very consistent horse who has won a couple of Grade 1s in Commentator.

"Commentator is definitely the model of consistency right now but we're improving. We're going to have a good race. [Commentator jockey John Velasquez] rides that horse so well. They're going to be a tough combination to beat.

"But one thing about it, Boston is going to see two class acts riding up there, so that ought to be a good day."

Dr. Pleasure comes from im-

pressive stock. He is the first foal from champion filly Beautiful Pleasure and was sired by Thunder Gulch.

"In personality traits, we do see a lot of Beautiful Pleasure in this horse," said Ward. "He does have some natural speed. He's got some Thunder Gulch in him and the Gulches always get better when they're older, so, yeah, this horse genetically should improve as he gets older. That's the reason we've just kind of taken our time with him."

Although the trainer has been patient, he admits there are times when he has wondered why Dr. Pleasure hasn't been more consistent.

"This is exactly what we would want from the first foal of a champion mare, a horse that was consistent and was really workmanlike and was able to perform at the higher levels," said Ward.

"We chose Thunder Gulch as a sire because we wanted some-

thing we knew was going to be consistent.

"As far as this horse as a racehorse, it was a little disappointing that we weren't getting the consistency out of the animal, but since we have found the breathing problem — and if everything works all right — this horse's whole style of training has changed around, and training, plus age, hopefully equates to an animal who has picked up 4, 5, or 6 lengths on his performances."

Ward said the problem with the epiglottis was that as a result of irritation, a membrane grew that restricted Dr. Pleasure's breathing.

"They lasered the tissue away so the epiglottis could flip back and forth like it should," said Ward. "It seems like it's made him a more efficient horse in terms of his ability to breathe. It was really odd for us to find this in a horse that was 5 years old."

Having said that, though, Ward isn't assuming that Dr. Pleasure will now automatically win every race he enters.

"One good performance doesn't mean you've got a new career," said Ward. "But I think the way he was training before and the way he has trained since, this must be what the problem had been for him getting to the next level."

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Massachusetts Handicap field

When: Tomorrow. Where: Suffolk Downs. Purse: \$500,000. Distance: 1 1/8 miles.

PP	Horse	Jockey	Odds
1	Beck and Call	Tammi Piermarini	20-1
2	Commentator	John Velasquez	3-5
3	Won Awesome Dude	Casey Lambert	8-1
4	Cuba	Pedro Cotto Jr.	6-1
5	Volcanic Force	Clifford Dooley	20-1
6	Dr. Pleasure	Cornelio Velasquez	7-2
7	Riversrunrylee	Pedro Gonzalez	15-1