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SUFFOLK

By DAVID GRENING

Perhaps because he's getting a little older himself, trainer Nick Zito has come to appreciate the virtues of having a top older horse in his barn. Perhaps the fact that he has two such animals still going strong at age 7 is another reason.

Zito will get to display one of those 7-year-olds in front of a new audience Saturday when he saddles the brilliantly quick New York-bred gelding Commentator in the \$500,000 Massachusetts Handicap at Suffolk Downs. Commentator is the only

graded stakes winner among the seven horses entered in the Mass Cap, whose winner earns an automatic berth into next month's \$5 million Breeders' Cup Classic at Santa Anita as part of the Win and You're In series.

Commentator already secured his berth in the Classic – if Zito and owner Tracy Farmer elect to run in that race – by winning the Grade 1 Whitney Handicap in July at Saratoga. It was the second Whitney triumph for Commentator, and Zito sounds as if he and Farmer covet a

third Whitney in 2009 more than this year's Classic.

"If you ask the Farmers, 'Would you like to win the Breeders' Cup Classic or would you like to win the Whitney,' I promise you they'd say the Whitney," Zito said.

There was a time when the only race Zito coveted was the Kentucky Derby. His two victories in that race – with Strike the Gold in 1991 and Go for Gin in 1994 – were essential for Zito earning Hall of Fame status in 2005.

But with Commentator and

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BARBARA D. LIVINGSTON

The field

Massachusetts Handicap

Purse: \$500,000; 1 1/8 miles

PP	HORSE	JOCKEY	WT.	ODDS
1	Beck and Call	T. Piermarini	110	20-1
2	Commentator	J. Velazquez	122	3-5
3	Won Awesome Dude	C. Lambert	112	8-1
4	Cuba	P. Cotto Jr.	112	6-1
5	Volcanic Force	C. Dooley	110	20-1
6	Dr. Pleasure	C. Velazquez	112	7-2
7	Riversunrlylee	P. Gonzalez	112	15-1

Track odds

Television: TVG

Proud Spell in cozy spot

Proud Spell wins the Alabama over Music Note, her chief rival for the 3-year-old filly Eclipse Award. She faces easier competition Saturday in the \$750,000 Cotillion at Philadelphia Park. Article, page 4.

Commentator's numbers stand out in Mass Cap

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Wanderin Boy — a 7-year-old who recently topped the \$1 million mark in earnings — Zito has shown what he can do with a top older horse.

"When I was younger it was just the Derby," said Zito, 60. "As you get older you like to be in the class where you're allowed to show your skills with the older horses — that actually makes you a better trainer. For us, that's a big thing, we're happy about it. The ownership's important, I don't care what anybody tells you."

That he has only made 19 starts at this stage of his career obviously tells you Commentator has been a project. Problematic shins have forced several stops and starts for Commentator, but his health has certainly not been an issue this year. Commentator owns this year's two highest Beyer Speed Figures, a 119 in a one-mile allowance at Gulfstream and a 120 in the Whitney at 1 1/8 miles.

"His brilliance is unprecedented," Zito said. "When he runs those figures it's scary."

And while speed is Commentator's biggest weapon, Zito believes Commentator could rate if need be. Zito said the horse sat off Elite Squadron early on in the Richter Scale.

"If he's going his natural gait there could be a horse in front of him at the start of the race, but that horse won't be in front of him after the race," Zito said.

Volcanic Force and Riversrunrylee have shown the ability to run fast early fractions, but neither has the quality of Commentator.

who at 122 pounds is spotting the field 10 to 12 pounds.

By the numbers, the Mass Cap is a mismatch. Commentator has won 12 of 19 starts and earned \$1,541,936. The other six horses have combined to win 39 of 190 starts and earned \$1,365,327. Commentator has 11 triple-digit Beyer Figures; the rest of the field has four.

If there is an upset, Dr. Pleasure is the most likely candidate to do it. A son of Thunder Gulch and champion mare Beautiful Pleasure, Dr. Pleasure is coming off an allowance win which was his first start since undergoing throat surgery. Trainer John Ward hopes whatever speed that exists in the race is competent enough to stay with Commentator for a decent amount of time.

"I think somebody's going to challenge him," Ward said. "But Commentator does finish strong. I think the middle of Commentator's races is where he wins and loses his races. If somebody doesn't take him on in that middle segment, then he's very tough to beat."

Cuba, a 7-year-old New Jersey-bred, has won 11 of 37 races and finished third in the Brooklyn and Excelsior handicaps in 2006. Beck and Call and Won Awesome Dude complete the field.

The Mass Cap will go as race 10 of 11 on a card that begins at 12:45 p.m. The card includes the \$100,000 James B. Moseley Sprint Handicap, the \$50,000 Drumtop, and the \$50,000 Robert M. O'Malley Memorial Stakes. An all-stakes pick four will be offered.