



BITS ON BREEDING

Dean Hoffman

Always A Virgin Wants to Play in the Big Leagues

One by one, the signs began to appear.

The signs were saying that Always A Virgin wanted to be more than just a regional sire. He wanted to assume his place among the national leaders. That's not easy for a stallion standing in the Midwest, but still those signs kept appearing.



There were certainly hints when his first crop raced in 2012. From a crop of 119 foals, Always A Virgin had 101 starters and 53 winners in 1:55 or faster. Impressive indeed.

But many stallions make a big splash with their first offerings and then

Always A Virgin is Having a Big Year as a Sire (USTA photo)

recede into the background. Besides, most of the splashes Always A Virgin's offspring made were in restricted stakes, a world apart from the rough-and-tumble open competition against the best in North America.

If people weren't paying attention, they got hit between the eyes with a two-by-four in this season's Meadowlands Pace by Always Be Miki. He drew post 9, which certainly doesn't portend an easy trip, but the trip this son of Always A Virgin got was horrible beyond words. He was shuffled almost to the New Jersey Turnpike around the first turn and never got a glimpse of the inside down the backstretch. He continued in the far outside flow around the far turn. He was officially charted as three-wide but perhaps the chart-callers ran out of bubbles attach next to his position.

Always B Miki was four-wide when they passed the three-quarter pole in 1:20.3.

It's at this point that a horse has every right to curl up and come right back into the driver's lap, saying, "I've had enough."

But---amazingly---Always B Miki just kept digging. And digging. He charged when others retreated. He got up for second, timed in 1:47.1.

Has any other horse paced that kind of mile rimmed three-deep all the way?

He just kept winning after that and his last two wins came at The Red Mile in 1:47.4 and in 1:49.3 on a nippy afternoon in a split of the Tattersalls.

A race before Always B Miki won a Tattersalls division,

Always A Virgin's daughter's Nat A Virgin defeated the star filly Uffizi Hanover in 1:50.3 in the Glen Garnsey. And if anyone hadn't noticed, Colors A Virgin won the Jugette at Delaware a few weeks ago.

Surely no one would ever question that Always A Virgin is the real deal after these signs.

Always A Virgin is a 10-year-old son of Western Ideal from the Big Towner mare Neverhave neverwill and he bred 128 mares this season at Victory Hill Farm in Indiana at a \$4,000 stud fee. Methinks that fee might increase for 2015.

It's impressive indeed when an Indiana-based stallion can send forth performers to win on a big stage, as Always A Virgin has done. Such stallions don't enjoy the benefits of a harem of well-bred broodmares as do stallions at the major national farms. And many of the breeders and owners of foals by regional stallions cast their eyes on state-funded races and don't stake their horses to the major national tests. That's why it's so hard for a stallion to crack the top ranks without the support of a major breeding farm.

Always A Virgin was bred by Joe Hurley's Roll The Dice Stable and Hurley owns Always B Miki in partnership with Bob Boni, Lynn Jones, Stuart Hankin, Jillian Luff, and Mitch Skolnick and D'Or Farms.

Always A Virgin burst into the national spotlight as a sophomore in 2007 under the masterful horsemanship of trainer Joe Holloway. He won the New Jersey Sires Stakes final and took his Meadowlands Pace elim with aplomb. He was sent off as the 3-2 betting favorite in the rich final. Driver Brian Sears had Always A Virgin perfectly placed during the 2007 Big M Pace and he was second over entering the stretch. I would've bet a lot of money then he'd be standing in the winner's circle. But when Sears was rallying his pacer, Always A Virgin skipped offstride and lost all hope.

After that episode, Always A Virgin ripped off a win in the Cane Pace at Freehold and came into the Jug looking as if the race was his. He won his elim on the engine easily at 1-5 odds. The only drawback was that the other elim winner Tell All drew post one in the second heat. That so often spells the difference at Delaware. Still, the crowd liked Always A Virgin and made him the 3-5 favorite while Tell All went off at 2-1 in the final.

Before the Jug final, I thought that trainer Joe Holloway merely had to practice his smile for the winner's circle photos. I thought Always A Virgin was clearly the best horse and that he'd prove that.

Holloway never had reason to smile. Always A Virgin got away third behind Tell All as Southwind Lynx broke stride when he tried to duck into the two hole. With no pressure, Tell All's driver Jody Jamieson backed the second quarter down to a laughable :29.2. Always A Virgin sat on his back and had a chance to get out, but nearing the half the 13-1 Hotrod Mindale came up to ride shotgun outside the leader. I knew then that Always A Virgin was in a whole lot of trouble. When the pacesetter gets such a soft second quarter in the Jug and has a blocker on the outside, the

(continued on next page)

horse trapped in third is in an impossible position.

And third is where Always A Virgin wound up in the Jug, although he was flying when he got loose and straightened away in deep stretch. Alas, too late.

He won at Lexington and won the Messenger at Yonkers. If he'd won the second heat of the Jug, Always A Virgin would have seized the Triple Crown. While the Triple Crown has lost much of its prestige, it still has historic significance.

The son of Western Ideal finished the season with a 13-2-2 slate in 20 starts and a 1:48.4 mark. He raced at age four but didn't enhance his resume and then went off to stud in Indiana.

Always A Virgin has demonstrated his right to a spot among the top national sires. And his story is just beginning.

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Gingras Picks Limelight Beach



Yannick Gingras will hope to bask in the "Limelight" Saturday

Named originally to drive both Little Brown Jug winner Limelight Beach and North America Cup winner JK Endofanera for trainer Ron Burke in Saturday's American Nationals, Yannick Gingras has chosen "Limelight."

Ron Pierce has picked up the assignment on JK Endofanera.

It couldn't have been an easy choice, and the Balmoral linemaker lists JK Endofanera as the favorite and not Limelight Beach.

After losing his first 12 starts of the year Limelight Beach has won three straight, including the Jug and a Bluegrass series race

at the Red Mile.

Burke has four horses in the race, including Somesizesomestyle (Corey Callahan) and At Press Time (Matt Kakaley)

Menary: Heart Problem Caused He's Watching's Meltdown

He's Watching, who was beaten 66 lengths in Saturday's Tatersalls at the Red Mile, suffered from a heart problem during the race, according to trainer Dave Menary. Menary labeled the problem as "flipping his heart."

Another way to describe the condition might be an atrial fibrillation, an electrical disorder of the heart rhythm. Menary believes the problem was a one-time thing and he fully expects his Meadowlands Pace winner to return to the racing wars soon.

"It's not a condition," Menary said. "A horse can do it because of an imbalance of electrolytes. Some horses might do it once in their lives. We were lucky he converted back on his own. We are just going to address the problem and we'll be back. It's something that happens to horses, a fluke thing."

Menary said he has not picked out any races for his colt, but doesn't think he'll be sidelined long.

"He's happy to be home right now," he said. "It won't be long until we're back. Nothing is etched in stone; I'll take it week by week. We knew something had to be wrong. '46' pacers don't go miles in 6 minutes. It was not the 27.4 quarter that took the wind out of his sails. We were super confident coming into the race and that's why we supplemented him. It was a bad day for a good horse. We'll turn the page and end the year on good note."

White Bliss Fourth in Pocono Qualifier

Making his first appearance on the track, the rare white standardbred White Bliss finished fourth in a qualifier at Pocono Downs yesterday. His time was 1:58.1. He was driven by trainer Åke Svanstedt. His career has been delayed by a bout of colic over the winter.



Rarity White Bliss

Following the qualifier, co-owner Tristan Sjoberg said via his Twitter

account that it was "a good experience" for White Bliss. He said the horse will qualify again next week at Pocono Downs and "hopefully start one or two weeks later."

Meadowlands Announces \$600,000 Winter Late Closer Program

EAST RUTHERFORD, NJ - A blend of familiar names along with some new ideas will comprise the 2015 Winter Late Closer Program at The Meadowlands, with Finals combining to an estimated \$600,000.

Races like the Super Bowl, Charles Singer Memorial, Buddy Gilmour and Clyde Hirt all return, but this year they are joined by five new events for trotters and pacers alike.

There are three events for trotters, the Super Bowl,