Derby duel may fuel Preakness

by Hank Wesch

LOUISVILLE, Ky. - Carl Nafzger and Larry Jones, trainers of 1-2 Kentucky Derby finishers Street Sense and Home Spun, respectively, crossed paths Sunday morning on the Churchill Downs backstretch.

"My mother thinks Carl is the greatest," Jones said. "She has been a fan of his since way back. She said that if I didn't win the Derby, she was glad Carl did. So, I told Carl he gets her now. She can go live with him."

The story was related with a smile, like almost every racetrack tale told by Jones, a fun-loving, cowboy hat-wearing Kentucky native. And he's got a million of them.

Of course, he was only kidding.

But something in the voice inflection and delivery communicated that Jones really didn't relish being the runner-up in the world's most famous horse race, even if it was to a longtime friend for whom Jones expresses nothing but great respect.

And make no mistake, Jones is spoiling to turn the tables in leg two of the Triple Crown series, the Preakness Stakes, come May 19 at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore.

"We'll see who can come back in two weeks," Jones said. "In two weeks it could be a whole different story.

"There's a reason there has not been a Triple Crown winner since 1978. They don't give those things away. And if I have my say about it, there won't be a Triple Crown winner this year, either."

Early Sunday, Nafzger sent Street Sense out to the Churchill Downs track for a one-mile jog around the oval where he ended the long-standing Breeders' Cup Juvenile and Juvenile Champion jinxes with his 2 1/4-length victory over Hard Spun on Saturday.

Usually, on the morning after the Derby, the winner is walked around the shedrow or allowed to graze in a nearby grassy area, then given an open-air bath.

But Nafzger, old school and proud of it, follows his own instincts.

"I used to run quite a bit," the former bull rider said. "And even the day after I'd run five miles I'd feel like going out and doing a little something, just to get up and keep moving. I think it's good for him."

Nafzger wouldn't make any commitment regarding the Preakness, saying that Street Sense would "probably" be there if all the physical indicators are good through the next few days.

"If Carl doesn't want to go to Pimlico, it's all right with me," Jones said. "I'm not going to draw him a map how to get there."

Hard Spun is definite for the Preakness. Other Derby starters that officials from the Baltimore track are listing as "possible" include third-place Curlin, fifth-place Sedgefield and 17th-place Teuflesberg. The so-called "new shooters," jumping into the Triple Crown series after missing the Derby, include Chelokee, XChanger, King of the Roxy, Slew's Tizzy and either Flying First Class or Starbase, the latter two coming from the D. Wayne Lukas stable.

Chelokee, third in the Florida Derby, is trained by Michael Matz, who conditioned Barbaro and will be returning to the race and site of the 2006 Derby winner's tragic breakdown.

Xchanger won the Federico Tessio Stakes at Pimlico, Slew's Tizzy the Lexington at Keeneland and Flying First Class the Derby Trial at Churchill Downs in their most recent starts. King of the Roxy was second in the Santa Anita Derby, Starbase second in the Lexington.

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