

House of Cards



It's a Royal Flush the latest example of the Bob Johnson influence on the Northern Plains Derby

By Ryan Roshau, NDHP Media Relations

The record book will show that Kenny Olson trained the winner of Sunday's \$5,000 Northern Plains Derby and with all due respect to that veteran horseman, those in the know will long consider this race another example of conditioner Bob Johnson's stronghold on racing in Fargo. For the fifth time in six runnings at the Fargo track, a Johnson trainee won the Derby. This time it was with a chestnut gelding who, like Johnson himself, came with South Dakota roots.

That gelding, a battle-tested son of Its a Royal Time had won \$12,647 in his career based exclusively in South Dakota and Minnesota. It was a career that started early in the barn of Johnson who had him since he was a long yearling. He was always highly thought of by the Lemmon, SD native who saw him finished second in the SD-Bred QH Futurity in May of 2013. He was fourth in the \$20,000 Minnesota Stallion Breeders' Futurity last summer and Johnson believed in him enough to give him a shot in the lucrative NCQHRA Futurity at Canterbury in August, a race valued at \$45,000 that saw him finish sixth. "He's always been real sound," Johnson said. "He's been a good horse from the get-go. He's just a hard trying, good horse."

But after back to back runner-up efforts as the heavy favorite at Fort Pierre this spring there was a thought that he was getting passed over by some of the deeper horses in the Johnson barn. One of which was Hasta Be Brief who won the SD-Bred Derby at Brown County Fair this year besting Sammi Santana, the winner of the Northern Plains Futurity at Canterbury last summer.

With the stir fry of results, the Northern Plains Derby in Fargo turned out to be a collection of talented horses with countless potential outcomes to one of the most anticipated races of the meet.

Perhaps it was the deep resume of It's a Royal Flush or Johnson's reputation for winners, or maybe it was the hot start that jockey Don Proctor was off to at the Horse Park meet, but all those factors conspired to make the chestnut a 9-5 favorite at post time. The eight horse field was closely bunched on the odds board as 15-1 were the highest odds of the longest shot, a horse named Jumpn Mermaid who was a consistent second in three of her last four starts.

Breaking from the five hole, 'Royal Flush was tested all the way and Proctor knew they were in for a horse race, "I got challenged the whole way and I wasn't sure as it was nip and tuck but we had just enough at the end."

Just enough indeed, withholding a furious charge by Sammi Santana, the 5-2 second choice, to win by a neck. Third choice Hasta Be Brief, another Johnson graduate was 2 ¼ lengths in front of North Dakota-bred Dontthrotlemystyle, who was subsequently disqualified to fifth, replaced by Blurred Cash.

Back at Canterbury after his BHR Guys Flash Me qualified for the Finals for the August 3rd NCQHRA Futurity, Johnson took time to reflect on adding more hardware to his Fargo mantle. "I don't know about that," he laughed, "good horses usually do it."

But Proctor, a long-time associate of Johnson's, gives a great deal of credit to the moustache man. "He gets the right inventory of horses and puts them where they belong," Proctor said. "You enter them where they belong you'll be ok."

And with the Northern Plains Futurity in a couple of weeks there could be a pair of "ok" juveniles lining up for Johnson as it is safe to say he has designs on that race as well.

