

New York-Breds Samraat, Uncle Sigh Prep for Kentucky Derby

OZONE PARK, N.Y. ó New York-breds Samraat and Uncle Sigh, who will be ridden in the Kentucky Derby by New York's leading jockeys, brothers Jose and Irad Ortiz, Jr., had their penultimate workouts for the May 3 Run for the Roses on Friday morning at Belmont Park.

Samraat, whose five-race unbeaten streak ended when second to leading Derby contender Wicked Strong in the Grade 1 TwinSpires.com Wood Memorial, worked a half-mile in 49.12 seconds on the main track under exercise rider Simon Paine. Owner Leonard Riggio of My Meadowview Farm and Jose Ortiz, who is second to his brother in the 2014 jockey standings at Aqueduct Racetrack, were both on hand to watch the 7 a.m. work.

óIt was perfect ó if we did it again, I don't know that we'd want to change anything,ó said trainer Rick Violette of Samraat, currently No. 5 on the Kentucky Derby points leaderboard, just behind Wicked Strong. óIt was in hand, he stretched his legs, changed leads and pulled up good; he's acting like he just went out for a little jog. A week away, we'll go our steady mile ó next Friday or Saturday ó and go from there. It's pretty cool.ó

Violette said he and Ortiz are well aware of the importance of getting Samraat to properly change leads at Churchill Downs.

óThere's no question it's a priority,ó he said. óI don't think he can win the Derby without changing leads. When he did change leads really late in the Wood, he went and got second. It's a big thing. Jose is aware of it í I think he's got to be very aware of that before he turns for home in [the Derby]. You like a sweeping change coming out of the turn, almost accelerating, and to use that momentum to go do what he has to do. I don't think you can lay on horses in the Derby; there's too many that can come and get you. So you need to set sail at the head of the lane and run to the wire.ó

Uncle Sigh, who finished second to Samraat in the Grade 3 Withers and Grade 3 Gotham prior to a fifth in the Wood, went out at 9:30 a.m. on the training track. Outfitted with blinkers and with exercise rider and former jockey Nick Santagata in the irons, Uncle Sigh broke off several lengths behind stablemate Thug Daddy before blasting through along the rail at the top of the stretch and cruising to the wire five lengths in front. His time for five furlongs was 1:00.31, with splits of 12.63, 24.73 and 36.81 seconds, galloping out in 1:13.02 and up in 1:26.72.

óIt was perfect,ó said Santagata of the work by Uncle Sigh, who moved up on the Derby leaderboard to grab the 20th and final slot in the starting gate at Churchill Downs when Grade 1 Florida Derby winner Constitution suffered a shin injury. óI sat behind, he ate dirt. The last couple of races he hasn't eaten dirt; he was outside, he's been in the front. So it was a different situation [today], and he responded well. We put him [behind a horse] and we came through the rail in case you got to come through a little hole in the Derby. Hopefully, we'll get lucky on Derby Day. Hopefully, we'll get a better break than we did in the Wood Memorial and we can place him better. I think the blinkers will do that. I think the blinkers will make him a little better out of the gate and be in a little bit better position.ó

Samraat, a son of Noble Causeway, and Uncle Sigh, sired by Indian Charlie, are bidding to join 2003's Funny Cide as the only New York-breds to win the Kentucky Derby.

According to available records, Irad Ortiz, 21, and Jose Ortiz, 20, will be the first brothers to ride against each other in the Derby since 1976, when Chris McCarron was sixth on Cojak and Gregg McCarron finished fifth aboard On the Sly.

“I think that’s a pretty good story — two brothers, both from New York, riding two New York horses in the Derby,” said Riggio. “You don’t see that very often.”