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VAHVA TRAINING 'BETTER THAN EVER' AHEAD OF SATURDAY'S CHICAGO STAKES

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, June 20, 2024) – Grade I winner **Vahva** returns to action Saturday at Churchill Downs in the \$250,000 Chicago Stakes (Grade III) and trainer **Cherie DeVaux** feels confident her 4-year-old filly is poised for another graded stakes triumph.

“Vahva is a fairly easy horse to train, you just have to pay close attention to how she’s doing in the mornings because she’ll tell you if she’s ready to run or not,” DeVaux said. “She’s been training better than ever at Keeneland. There’s been some spacing between her races because she shows signs in the mornings that she’s not quite ready to return to action. She hasn’t shown any of those signs ahead of the race on Saturday.”

Owned in partnership by **Belladonna Racing, Edward Hudson Jr., West Point Thoroughbreds, LBD Stable, Nice Guys Stables, Manganaro Bloodstock, Runnels Racing, Steve Hornstock** and **Twin Brook Stables**, Vahva recorded her first Grade I victory six weeks ago in the Derby City Distaff when she rallied from just off a swift early pace, cruising to a two-length score under jockey **Irad Ortiz Jr.**

“I know that it’s out of my control with the pace scenario but it’s always a little questionable when you have a short field,” DeVaux said. “Irad knows her very well and I trust he’ll have her in the right spot depending on what the early pace looks like. I think she’s one of the best fillies in the country but sometimes you never know in these short fields if someone gets a loose lead.”

Run at seven furlongs, the Chicago Stakes field also includes last year’s dominant winner **Society**, who has been on the early pace in 11 of her 12 lifetime starts.

Slated as Race 7 of 11, the Chicago Stakes will have a post time of 3:51 p.m. (all times Eastern). First post is 12:45 p.m.

Here is the field for the Chicago Stakes from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and morning line odds):

- **Society** (Tyler Gaffalione, Steve Asmussen, 4-5)
- **Royal Spa** (Florent Geroux, Rodolphe Brisset, 15-1)
- **Vahva** (Irad Ortiz Jr., DeVaux, 1-1)
- **Chi Town Lady** (Jose Ortiz, Wesley Ward, 10-1)
- **Positano Sunset** (Julien Leparoux, Ian Wilkes, 15-1)

Fans can watch and wager on all the action from Churchill Downs on www.TwinSpires.com, the official wagering provider of Churchill Downs Incorporated and the Kentucky Derby.

GAFFALIONE, ASMUSSEN, JUDDMONTE LEAD WAY IN SPRING MEET STANDINGS – Jockey **Tyler Gaffalione**, trainer **Steve Asmussen** and **Fahad bin Khalid’s Juddmonte** will attempt to hold their respective category leads in the 2024 Spring Meet standings with just nine days of racing remaining.

Gaffalione, an 11-time riding champion beneath the Twin Spires, held a seven-win lead, 39-32, over **Jose Ortiz**. **Luis Saez** was in third with 25 wins followed by **Florent Geroux** (19), **Brian Hernandez Jr.** (18) and **Cristian Torres** (18).

Asmussen, a 27-time champion trainer at Churchill Downs and the track’s all-time win leader, held a massive 10-win cushion over **Brad Cox** 28-18. **Mike Maker** was in third with 16 wins followed by **Greg Foley** (10) and **Joe Sharp** (9).

In the race for leading owner, Juddmonte’s nine wins topped the standings over **Three Diamonds Farm** (6), Asmussen (5), **Godolphin** (4), **Paradise Farm Corp.** and **David Staudacher** (4) and **Rigney Racing** (4).

Racing continued Thursday at Churchill Downs with a first post of 5 p.m.

DOWN THE STRETCH – Live racing resumed Thursday at Churchill Downs for the penultimate “Twilight Thursday” program of the Spring Meet. First post for the eight-race program was 5 p.m. and fans in attendance were able to enjoy \$2 domestic beer, live music from **Southern Sirens** and local food trucks **Acme Chicken Bowls**, **Bamba Eggrolls**, **Celtic Pig**, **Home Fry** and **Red Top Dogs**. ... Race 4 on Friday is named in honor of late trainer **Dan Sanner** who died in early 2023 at age 61 following a long battle with cancer. ... “Inside Churchill Downs” is back Friday at 6 p.m. on **ESPN 680/105.7**. Join Churchill Downs Communications duo **Darren Rogers** and **Kevin Kerstein** as they preview the weekend action at Churchill Downs with special guests **Bob Ike** and **Mark Doche** of **HorseBills.com**. Those outside the Louisville area can listen live on www.espnlouisville.com. ... For more information about the Spring Meet, visit www.churchilldowns.com.

ABOUT CHURCHILL DOWNS RACETRACK

Churchill Downs Racetrack (“CDRT”), the world’s most legendary racetrack, has been the home of The Kentucky Derby, the longest continually held annual sporting event in the United States, since 1875. Located in Louisville, CDRT features a series of themed race days during Derby Week, including the Kentucky Oaks, and conducts Thoroughbred horse racing during three race meets in the Spring, September, and the Fall. CDRT is located on 175 acres and has a one-mile dirt track, a 7/8-mile turf track, a stabling area, and provides seating for approximately 60,000 guests. The stable area has barns sufficient to accommodate 1,400 horses and a 114-room dormitory for backstretch personnel. CDRT also has a year-round simulcast wagering facility and Race and Sports Book. www.ChurchillDowns.com.

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