

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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GRADE I DERBY CITY DISTAFF WINNER VAHVA TAKES DOWN CHICAGO STAKES

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Saturday, June 22, 2024) – Vahva, winner of the \$1 million Derby City Distaff (Grade I) on Kentucky Derby Day, collared front-running defending race champ **Society** with a furlong to run and turned back a late charge by longshot **Positano Sunset** to win Saturday's 34th running of the \$249,500 Chicago Stakes (Grade III) at Churchill Downs by 1 ¼ lengths.

Irad Ortiz Jr. rode Vahva to victory for trainer **Cherie DeVaux** and the ownership group comprised of **Belladonna Racing LLC, Lynne Hudson, Edward J. Hudson Jr., West Point Thoroughbreds, Nice Guys Stables, Twin Brook Stables, Steve Hornstock, LBD Stable LLC, Manganaro Bloodstock** and **Runnels Racing**. She ran seven furlongs over a fast track in 1:21.01.

The victory was worth \$154,500 and boosted Vahva's earnings to \$1,732,810 with a record of 6-3-2 in 13 starts.

"She loves this long stretch here at Churchill Downs and is 4-for-4 over the surface," DeVaux said.

This was the 4-year-old mare's fourth stakes win and second this year at Churchill Downs. In May, Vahva scored a two-length win in the Derby City Distaff presented by Kendall-Jackson Winery, also at seven furlongs. As a 3-year-old, she won last year's \$750,000 Charles Town Oaks (GIII) before landing the \$350,000 Raven Run (GII) at Keeneland.

"We knew how talented she was but when you have a nice horse like Society being the lone speed, it does make you a little nervous," DeVaux said. "Irad gave her a great trip and she was very impressive running her down."

Society, who won last year's Chicago Stakes at Ellis Park by 10 ¾ lengths, was kept early off a 231-day layoff and led the compact field of five fillies and mares through early splits of :22.44 and :44.61. Vahva, never more than two lengths back, ranged into contention around the turn and the two raced shoulder-to-shoulder through the stretch. Inside the final furlong, Vahva spurred clear from the outside for the win.

"In her last couple starts she's been breaking so sharply," Ortiz Jr. said. "She did that again today and I just let her settle knowing Society was really the only speed in the race. The entire race I felt like she'd have enough kick when we'd need it down the lane and she did."

Vahva paid \$2.92, \$2.30 and \$2.10 as the odds-on 2-5 betting choice. Positano Sunset, under **Julien Leparoux** at odds of 17-1, returned \$5.62 and \$2.96. Society, who finished a neck back of the runner-up with **Tyler Gaffalione** aboard at 2-1, paid \$2.20 to show.

Chi Town Lady was fourth and **Royal Spa** was fifth.

The next regional graded stakes sprints for fillies and mares will be run at Saratoga: the \$200,000 Honorable Miss (GII) at six furlongs on July 24 and \$500,000 Ballerina Handicap (GI) over seven furlongs on Aug. 24. In Kentucky, Ellis Park will host the \$125,000 Twin Bridges over six furlongs on July 22 followed by the \$175,000 Groupie Doll at one mile on Aug. 11.

"We mapped out her campaign with three targets," DeVaux said. "She passed the first one with the Derby City Distaff. Then the Ballerina Stakes at Saratoga and eventually the (Nov. 2) Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Sprint at Del Mar. We'll play things by ear on what races we use to get to these targets but this was an important one for us today in helping us continue our path to the Breeders' Cup."

Vahva is a daughter of Gun Runner out of the Harlan's Holiday mare Holiday Soiree and was bred in Kentucky by **Woodford Thoroughbreds LLC**.

CHICAGO QUOTES

Irad Ortiz Jr. (jockey, Vahva, winner): “In her last couple starts she’s been breaking so sharply. She did that again today and I just let her settle knowing Society was really the only speed in the race. The entire race I felt like she’d have enough kick when we’d need it down the lane and she did.”

Cherie DeVaux (trainer, Vahva, winner): “We knew how talented she was but when you have a nice horse like Society being the lone speed, it does make you a little nervous. Irad (Ortiz Jr.) gave her a great trip and she was very impressive running her down. She loves this long stretch here at Churchill Downs and is 4-for-4 over the surface. We mapped out her campaign with three targets. She passed the first one with the Derby City Distaff (GI). Then the (Aug. 24) Ballerina Stakes (GI) at Saratoga and eventually the (Nov. 2) Breeders’ Cup Filly & Mare Sprint (GI) at Del Mar. We’ll play things by ear on what races we use to get to these targets but this was an important one for us today in helping us continue our path to the Breeders’ Cup.”

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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