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Broodmare of the Year? Irish Sovereign is making her case

By Bill Finley

Winning just three races and earning a little over \$100,000, Irish Sovereign may not have fulfilled her potential on the racetrack, but she's more than made up for that in her second career.

There may not be a broodmare anywhere in America having a better year than Irish Sovereign, who calls Overbrook Farm in Colts Neck home. Her best known offspring, of course, is Irish War Cry, whose year already includes wins in the Grade 2 Wood Memorial and Holy Bull Stakes and a second-place finish in the Belmont Stakes-G1. While the spotlight was shining on Irish War Cry, his 5-year-old half-brother Irish Strait won the Grade 3 Red Bank Stakes at Monmouth May 27. It was the first graded stakes win by the son of English Channel. A third "Irish Sovereign," 4-year-old Irish Defence, won a Jersey-bred allowance at Monmouth June 16 and won two races last year. She is by First Defence.

Irish Sovereign has had six foals to race and all have won.

"What these horses have done, it's brought a lot of excitement to the farm, our friends, our neighbors and New Jersey racing," said Overbrook farm manager Rory Huston. "New Jersey racing needs this type of thing to try to stimulate the breeding program because we are in a downward spiral. It has created a lot of excitement for everybody."

Huston was also the trainer of Irish Sovereign and still has a small string of horses for Isabelle de Tomaso, who owns the mare



Future broodmare star: Irish Sovereign was a winner of a New Jersey-bred allowance at Monmouth Park in June 2004 for breeder/owner Isabelle de Tomaso and trainer Sharon Huston.

and all her offspring. As a 3-year-old, Irish Sovereign, who is by Polish Numbers, broke her maiden at first asking, in a \$40,000 maiden claimer at Aqueduct. Her best efforts would come the following year when she won a pair of New Jersey-bred allowance races at Monmouth. Huston always thought she had talent, but realized her career was sure to be hampered by physical problems.

"I trained her along with my wife, Sharon, and she was a real project," Huston said. "If you look at her she has a very poor hind end on her. My vet at the time told me, 'If you get this mare to the races you deserve a medal.'"

Twelve of Irish Sovereign's 13 races were at 6 furlongs or shorter. She tried the 1-mile



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Irish Sovereign's two best offspring: graded stakes winners Irish War Cry (left) and Irish Strait (right).

distance one time, finishing eighth. Now her two graded stakes winners have won at 9 furlongs on the dirt and at 1 mile on the grass. That doesn't necessarily surprise Huston.

"The thing about New Jersey-breds, it's hard to get a Jersey-bred race to go long," he said. "We always wanted to try her at a distance, but most the time it just never worked out. She was a nice big mare. She looked like she could go further."

Irish War Cry has never run in a New Jersey-bred race as it was clear from the start he had the talent to take on open stakes company for his trainer, Graham Motion. Though he was born at Overbrook he was there initially for less than two weeks as he accompanied his dam to Kentucky so she could be bred again. Still, Huston remembers him as a standout foal.

"He was nice big foal and he definitely stood out over the other ones," Huston said.

Irish War Cry returned to Overbrook that July before being sent to Brookdale Farm in Kentucky and later to Webb Carroll's training center in South Carolina to prepare for his debut.

Irish War Cry will now be pointed towards the Haskell, a race de Tomaso wants to win, perhaps, more than any other. She is the daughter of Amory L. Haskell, the founder of modern day Monmouth Park and the person for whom the race is named.

Meanwhile, de Tomaso and her sister, Hope Jones, are keeping Huston and the team at Overbrook busy. Seventeen mares delivered foals at Overbrook this year, nine of them owned by either de Tomaso or Jones.

"They are great owners and have been in the business a long time and have put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into the

game," Huston said. "It's good to have owners like that. We really appreciate them."

The trajectory of Irish Sovereign's broodmare career shows a change in de Tomaso's approach to breeding. After being barren the first year to Pleasant Tap, the next three sires the mare was bred to were Oratory, Political Force and Even the Score. It's only recently that de Tomaso has stepped up and started breeding to "A list" sires like Irish War Cry's sire, Curlin. Huston said that's due to a number of factors, one of them being her desire to produce a horse capable of winning the Haskell. He also said de Tomaso, who lives in Italy part of the year, has disbanded her breeding program over there because of the decline of that country's racing industry. That has allowed her to focus more on her Jersey-breds.

It will be a while before we see a new Irish Sovereign baby on the racetrack. After Irish War Cry, she was bred to Lookin At Lucky but was barren. She was bred back to the same sire and produced a filly named Lucky Irish, who is now a yearling. She however is a Kentucky-bred. The next in line is a Graydar weanling filly. A New Jersey-bred, she was born at Overbrook.

Perhaps the Lookin At Lucky and Graydar offspring will also prove to be top horses, but it's hard to imagine any of them outdoing Irish War Cry. The earner of \$979,460 in his first seven starts, he will go down as one of the top New Jersey-breds ever.

"I am very proud to have to been involved with that horse," Huston said. "Especially since it's been so long since a Jersey bred has been to the Triple Crown races and here he was the favorite in the Belmont. It's been a proud moment for us, for the farm, for everybody involved. It's once in a lifetime that you get an animal like that. That is if you're lucky."



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Foal Gallery: 2017 New Jersey-Breds



Colt born May 10 by Micromanage out of \$238,130-earner Basic Trick, by Phone Trick, was bred by Mildred Fleming and foaled at Hunter's Run Farm in Neptune.

Micromanage colt out of Cee the Country, by Gold Token, born on May 4, has been named Patriotic Country. He was bred by Mildred Fleming and foaled at Hunter's Run Farm in Neptune.



The New Jersey-bred Racing Challenge

Here is the New Jersey-bred Racing Challenge Leaderboard through June 25. Please visit www.njbreds.com for additional information on this exciting event

Fillies and Mares Division

Horse	Breeder	Owner	Points
Twofour Six Oh One	Albert and Lynn Ott	Tony Wilson	13
Bustin Out	Dianne Boyken	Joseph and Gayle Ioia	10
Jersey Rich	Wes Carter	Anna Popovich	10
Boomerang Miss	Colonial Farms	Liz Dodd	10
Julia Choubouli	Joe-Dan Farm	Quiet Winter Farm	10
Pier Village	Red Oak Stable	Red Oak Stable	9
Cookie Cookie	Joel Kligman	Menotti Lembo	8
Don's Escapade	Patricia Generazio	Cesar Alcala	7
Stylish Notion	Hope H. Jones	Hope H. Jones	4
Rmilliondollarbaby	Law Legacy Stables	Law Legacy Stables	4

Colts and Gelding Division

Horse	Breeder	Owner	Points
Irish Strait	Isabelle de Tomaso	Isabelle de Tomaso	10
Light's Gone Wild	Joseph and Gayle Ioia	Joseph and Gayle Ioia	8
Phonemyposseagain	Bright View Farm	Joseph and Gayle Ioia	8
Gone Astray Kiss	Judy Sessa	Metro Thoroughbreds	8
Mello Groove	Hope H. Jones	Hope H. Jones	8
Greed Is Good	Joseph Birnbaum	Ocean View Stables	7
Paper Street	Isabelle de Tomaso and Hope Jones	Rory Huston	7
Fake Frontier	Isabelle de Tomaso and Hope Jones	Isabelle de Tomaso and Hope Jones	6.5
Lucky Six	Dianne Boyken	Shore Point Stable	6.5



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Rutgers' McKeever elected president of Equine Science Society

Kenneth H. McKeever, professor in the Department of Animal Sciences at Rutgers University, and associate director of research at the Rutgers Equine Science Center (ESC), was elected president of the Equine Science Society (ESS) at its bi-annual meeting June 2 in Minneapolis. The Society is the preeminent international body of equine researchers, teachers, extension specialists, and industry representatives whose focus is to promote quality research in the areas of equine science.

McKeever will serve a two-year term as president, after previously serving on the Board of Directors as secretary/treasurer and vice-president. Carey Williams, associate professor in the Department of Animal Sciences at Rutgers University and associate director of outreach at ESC, was also elected to the Board of Directors where she joins ESC director Karyn Malinowski.

"It is a humbling honor to be elected by my peers to lead the Equine Science Society, and as president my major goal will be to work to build public awareness of the excellent research, teaching and outreach efforts of our members," said McKeever. "The wide range of expertise provided by our members is a major resource for horse owners, veterinarians, policy makers, and anyone interested in better horse care through research and education."

McKeever will also strive to bridge a connection between past and future medical science, and its history of using horses as a comparative model. "We follow in the footsteps of those who used horses in the 18th and 19th centuries as an animal model for many of the classic discoveries in the field of medical physiology."

United States Supreme Court to hear sports betting case

The United States Supreme Court has decided to hear the case for sports betting, ensuring a nearly six-year battle will reach a final conclusion by early next year.

The writ of certiorari, announced June 27, brings two consolidated cases before the court, *Christie, Gov. of NJ, et al. v. NCAA et al.* and *NJ Thoroughbred Horsemen v. NCAA et al.*

"We are thankful the Supreme Court has recognized the importance of this case and are grateful that they will take up the matter this year," said Dennis Drazin, advisor to the New Jersey Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association. "It has been a very long road to get to today, which hopefully marks the beginning of the end of this unfair law that benefits certain states at the expense of all others."

That law, the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act passed in 1992, allows for only four states to presently conduct wagering on sporting events. In 2011, Garden State voters overwhelmingly backed sports betting and New Jersey then passed the Sports Wagering Act, permitting licensing and regulation of sports gambling. The State was subsequently sued based on the 1992 federal law, with on-going litigation since.

"On behalf of Monmouth Park Racetrack, the New Jersey Horsemen's group and the people of New Jersey, an entire

team has been working ardently on this matter for years. It has been their hard work and sticktoitiveness that has brought about today's decision and hopefully a positive outcome from the Court."

"I'm thrilled that we got certiorari at the Supreme Court," said Gov. Chris Christie. "Very few cases get granted certiorari by the Supreme Court, so I'm very optimistic and looking forward to having conversations later today with Ted Olson who represents us on the Supreme Court. And I don't know, I'm feeling pretty good he's got a .750 winning percentage in the Supreme Court, so I feel pretty good having Ted Olson represent us. So you know, again, if the Supreme Court goes the other way I don't know what our options are, but we'll have to make that evaluation at the time. But the fact that the Supreme Court granted cert in this case is a very good sign for sports betting having a future in New Jersey. I'm encouraged by it. We're not declaring victory, but at least we're in the game and that's what we want to be."

The Supreme Court will likely hear this matter in the fall with a final decision to follow several months later.



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