THE THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY NEWSLETTER



Post Time

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Sea Devil rallies to win Sapling Stakes

Trainer Eddie Owens Jr. is never bashful about trying a good Jersey-bred in open company, but it isn't often that they have trips as eventful as the one Sea Devil did to win the $100,000 Sapling Stakes at Monmouth Park Sept. 5.

The Holly Crest homebred broke on the lead, took the field of seven other 2-year-olds to the half that way, and then was passed by three horses. But jockey Jorge A. Vargas Jr. held his ground along the rail and when an opening appeared coming out of the final turn Sea Devil re-rallied, having just enough to hold off the Kelly Breen-trained Raku by a nose.

The winning time for the mile was 1:38.26.

"He wasn't supposed to be on the lead," said Owens. "He broke so sharp that the jockey just let him run into the bit. By that time the other horses caught up. I got worried because I really didn't think he had room coming out of the turn when he was turning for home.

"He had something in the tank. I wasn't worried about that. I was worried about being on the lead early.

"But he had a nice breather in the backstretch even after those three horses passed him. He was fine then."



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Sea Devil (right), a son of Sea Wizard, gets through along the rail to beat Raku by a nose in the Sapling.

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Sent off at 7-1, Sea Devil broke his maiden in impressive fashion two starts back before a tiring fifth-place finish in the Dover Stakes at Delaware Park on Aug. 8 in his first stakes try.

Owens chalked up that disappointing effort to "a combination of things."

"I don't think he shipped good in his last start," Owens said. "He didn't like shipping at all. Then as soon as we walked on the track there was a driving rain and in the stretch he had mud hitting him in the face."

Vargas, who earned his first career Grade 1 win aboard Baby Vino in the NYRA Bets Haskell Stakes last month, said he just needed to be patient throughout with the son of Sea Wizard.

Sea Devil took the field to the quarter in :23.75 and he was still clinging to the lead through a half in :47.42 before being passed on the outside by Rasasi, Hes Steelin Mylady and Raku.

As that group swung out of the final turn, Raku was four-wide and Sea Devil was on the rail.

Hes Steelin Mylady finished third, 2 lengths behind Raku.

"The plan was to be stalking. But he broke too sharp. I just let him kind of roll out of there without him doing it too quickly," said Varga. "I was able to get a rail trip because he broke so well. He was content on the lead but in the backstretch I felt I had to give him a breather. They kept coming at him and I thought 'this is the time to give him a breather.'

"After that I was just hoping for the hole to open [coming out of the final turn]. He's a nice horse. He's a little bit of a tricky horse. He likes being in company. Obviously I got lucky when the hole opened up for me. The key to me was getting him that breather on the backstretch.

"I knew even when he got through the hole coming out of the turn that he was not going to open up because that's not him. He kind of waits for horses. He likes that. But once he got hooked up by [Raku] on the outside he wanted to fight."

Even-money favorite Gorillaz, trained by Danny Gargan, never made an impact in the race after a tardy break. But Sea Devil, a son of Sea Wizard, did – even with five Kentucky-breds among his seven competitors.

"The only people who dismiss him as a Jersey-bred are the people looking at the *Racing Form*," said Owens. "The horses don't know where they're from."

Now with two wins and a second from four career starts, Sea Devil will probably get time off and then come back at 3.

"I've learned my lesson. I'm not chasing any dreams," said Owens. "He might be done for the year unless he tells me let's go do something. But if I have to put him on a van I'd rather not ship him anywhere because he did not ship well. If I do put him on the van it would be two days before he runs next time."

2026 Monmouth Park meet sees declines in handle and attendance

Monmouth Park officials immediately turned their focus to 2027 following the conclusion of the track's 81st season Sept. 13, with the meet seeing declines in average total handle and average on-site handle.

The 50-day meet was reduced to 48 days, with extreme heat and heavy smoke from the Canadian wildfires forcing the cancellation of the July 3 and July 4 live cards.

Average total handle for 2026 was $2,845,807 compared to $3,641,403 last year. Average on-track handle was $281,772 compared to $341,340 in 2025.

"The easy way out is to blame outside forces like the foal crop and weather, but that won't get us any solutions," said Dennis Drazin, Chairman and CEO of Darby Development LLC, operators of Monmouth Park Racetrack. "It's very difficult to compete with neighboring states that all have casino or slot machine money fueling their purses.

"Nevertheless, we will continue to work with the Governor and our legislative leaders to deliver for our fans, horsemen and all New Jerseyans and we will not stop until Monmouth Park and the Thoroughbred industry are on firm footing.

"As for this year we are turning the page and focusing on 2027 and the years beyond."

Thanks in part to record Father's Day and Mother's Day crowds, average attendance held steady. This year's average attendance was 6,532 compared to last year's average of 6,650.

Father's Day attracted a crowd of 30,367 while Mother's Day drew 16,368 fans.

Attendance for NYRA Bets Haskell Day was 35,608 despite severe stormy weather, heavy downpours and a flash flood watch.

Weather also had an impact on the three-day Memorial Day weekend, with all 12 races scheduled for the turf taken off the grass because of heavy rain.

On the individual front, Paco Lopez captured his record-tying 13th riding title (and eighth straight). Lopez and Joe Bravo now share the mark for most titles at Monmouth Park.

Jorge Delgado repeated as leading trainer, first catching the fast-starting Kelly Breen and then holding him off late. Delgado's 25 wins included six 2-year-old winners at the meet.

Brad's Equine Adventure, owned by Brad Altschuld, earned leading owner honors for the first time, doing so on the final day when Denying won the third race for his 10th winner of the meet.

"It's especially meaningful because I did this to honor my [late] mother [Carla]," said Altschuld, who credited trainer Wayne Potts for his successful meet. "I started with one horse on my 40th birthday two years ago and I have between 15 and 20 now, so to win the owner's title in such a short time is something I'm extremely proud of. My mother, who passed away in 2024, was the one who taught me about racing so it means a lot personally to do this to honor her memory."

Christian Maragh was the leading apprentice with 14 wins, good for eighth place in the riding standings.



Happy Offering was the leading NewJersey-bred earner at the 2026 Monmouth Park meet.

Top New Jersey-breds at Monmouth Park meet

This is a list of the top 12 highest earning New Jersey-breds during the 48-day Monmouth Park meet from May 9-September 13.

Horse	*Breeder*	*Earnings*
Happy Offering	Carmine Spinella	$153,375
Cairo Surprise	Hope Haskell Jones	$143,375
Book'em Danno	Bright View Farm & Christine Connelly	$135,000
La Resolana	Gerardo Franco	$133,500
Sea Devil	Holly Crest Farm	$118,430
Summer's Comin	Helen & Joseph Barbazon	$105,000
Post Command	Law Legacy Stables LLC	$102,329
One Fine Wine	Barrister Breeding LLC	$88,625
J J Zo Zo	Jose Armando Garcia	$71,500
Summer Flower	Dini Racing	$70,500
Doin This	Rory K. Huston	$67,219
Jewel of the Ocean	Colonial Farms	$62,000

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A check or money order for $100.00 must accompany this form. Spouses are encouraged to join the **TBANJ** under joint membership status. This fee would total $150.00 per couple. Each spouse must fill out a separate form to accompany the payment. Membership will be effective upon receipt and will be in force each calendar year and must be renewed annually.

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