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Russell Road Aims for Third West Virginia Breeders' Classic Title

(Charles Town, WV (October 17, 2012) – In addition to nine other challengers, two-time West Virginia Breeders' Classic winner Russell Road will have to overcome a layoff of 62 days if he hopes to add a third win in the most lucrative race for West Virginia-breds on this Saturday night's West Virginia Breeders' Classics XXVI card at Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races. The \$500,000, 1 1/8 mile Breeders' Classic will be run as the featured 8th race on the card with a post time of 10:45pm EST.

Russell Road, who has won the 2009 and 2011 versions of the \$500,000 Classic, last faced competition on the track back on August 18 in the \$50,000 Frank Gall Memorial – a 7 furlong restricted race that resulted in a front running victory. Following his win in the Gall, the now six-year-old had some minor ailments that caused him to train up to the Breeders' Classic. However, according to trainer James W. Casey, the light schedule was still partially by design.

"We were debating racing in the prep anyhow," explained the patriarch of local breeding and racing operation Taylor Mountain Farm. "We wanted to race him lightly. We wanted one prep, and then run here but we were pointing to this race most importantly."

This will be the fifth time in his career that Russell Road has attempted a race after a layoff between 60 and 100 days. The first four tries have produced just a win and a third place finish, with none of those races being contested at a distance longer than a mile.

Still, Casey isn't concerned about how his stable star is coming into the race.

"I believe he's at top of his game. I was talking to (owner) Mark (Russell) this morning, and I believe he is training and running better than he ever has before."

A win by Russell Road would push his career earnings to nearly \$1.5 million, behind only Soul of the Matter on the list of highest earning West Virginia-breds of all-time.

Luis Perez, who rode Russell Road to his 2011 West Virginia Breeders' Classic win, is once again in the saddle.

While Russell Road may be the seasoned veteran, his prime competition could come from the youngest horse in the field, in three-year-old **Lucy's Bob Boy**.

Trained by Sandra Dono, Lucy's Bob Boy has been near unbeatable this year, reeling off five straight wins after a pair of runner-up efforts to start his three-year-old campaign. In his lone start against older horses, a win in an August 19 allowance, the gelding defeated Strawberry Cupcake by 4 ¼ lengths. That win looked even better for Lucy's Bob Boy when Strawberry Cupcake subsequently won the Roger Ramey Handicap – the final local prep for the Breeders' Classic – in his next start.

According to his trainer, the decision to take part in the \$500,000 Classic over the \$85,000 West Virginia Lottery Breeders' Classic restricted to three-year-olds wasn't a tough one or based solely on the difference in purse money.

"It wasn't tough at all," says Dono about the call to run in the night's featured event. "I think we have the best three-year-old and it is time to prove it. We gradually brought him to this point with a purpose."

While the question about whether he can handle his elders has been answered, Lucy's Bob Boy has yet to answer the distance question – namely whether or not the 9 furlongs of the Breeders' Classic is in his scope. With all 9 of his career starts coming between 4 ½ and 7 furlongs, Saturday night will mark his first try around Charles Town's 3-turn, 1 1/8 mile route.

"This may be the only thing we have against us. We have to prove our self, but he is bred to go long."

At first glance, Dono's confidence in her horse's breeding appears well founded as Lucy's Bob Boy's sire, Flatter, has produced graded stakes winners going farther than mile including multiple Jockey Club Gold Cup (G1) winner Flat Out and Apart and his dam, Love For Lucy, was multiple stakes placed going a 2 turn 7 furlongs at Charles Town.

Gustavo Larrosa, who has ridden Lucy's Bob Boy in all 7 of his career wins, will have the mount once again on Saturday night.

Trainer Jeff Runco hopes to add his fourth victory in the Breeders' Classic and will saddle a pair of contenders in an effort to do so.

Sea Rescue, who won the 2010 Breeders' Classic at odds of 57-to-1 recently notched just his second win in 17 starts since the richest victory of his career two years ago.

Much like Sea Rescue, Runco's other hope, Edward Krishack's **Fred High**, also likes to come from off the pace. However, the conditioner who saddled Researcher to consecutive wins in the \$1 million Charles Town Classic isn't concerned about their running styles or the way the race shapes up on the front end.

"I think the one (Fred High) will be a little closer after several sprints, said Runco. "I also think there is enough pace in the race that it will work out ok for them."

Fred High, fourth in last year's Breeders' Classic, has been knocking at the door at Charles Town despite being just 1 for 15 over the strip in his career, with 8 of those defeats being second place finishes.

Fred High and Sea Rescue will start side by side in posts 8 and 9 and have the services of riders J.D. Acosta and Jose Montano respectively.

Another horse knocking at the door without finding the winners' circle frequently over the past 2 years, Baer's Racing Stable's **Son of a Bear**, is back for his second try in the \$500,000 Breeders' Classic. Trained by now David Walters, Son of a Bear could only muster an 8th place effort in last year's race as the fourth betting choice.

In 2012, Son of a Bear's campaign has included 2 wins in 8 starts, with 4 of the 6 losses resulting in second place efforts. The only race the son of Bowman's Band was worse than third in was his most recent outing in the Roger Ramey when he finished 4th. While the multiple runner-up finishes might not be problematic, the gelding's 0-for-6 record going longer than mile does give his trainer some cause for concern.

"The distance is questionable because he's unsuccessful going long so far," said Walters who has saddled almost 1,300 winners in his career. "He got close the first time I ran him. That's best he's run. He got stopped and got beat a length or so. On that night it did not appear to be a factor, but on other occasions it has."

Kendrick Carmouche rides Son of a Bear in the Breeders' Classic.

Fast Break Racing Stable's Black Belt has finished third and second respectively in the last two Breeders' Classics and is also back for another crack at one of the country's richest restricted stakes.

However, his five-year-old season hasn't proved kind to the Gerald Bennett trainee as he's dropped all four of his outings in 2012. After his lone Charles Town start of 2012 resulted in a third place finish in the Frank Gall, Black Belt's most recent outing came over Presque Isle's synthetic surface and he could do no better than a sixth place finish in an optional claiming allowance.

T.D. Houghton has the mount on Black Belt.

Allegheny Jack, Figpenn, Lively Reparations and Rummy's Command fill out the body of the race with Silver Tie Affair, Swinging Bernie, Luca's Wind Dancer and Vivo sitting on the also eligible list.

\$500,000 WEST VIRGINIA BREEDERS' CLASSIC

October 20, 2012

Race 8 - Post time 10:45pm EST

3&up, 1 1/8 miles

PP. Horse, Jockey, Weight, Trainer

- 1. Allegheny Jack, Travis L. Dunkelberger, 122, Christopher W. Grove
- 2. Black Belt, T.D. Houghton, 122, Gerald S. Bennett
- 3. Russell Road, Luis A. Perez, 122, James W. Casev
- 4. Son of a Bear, Kendrick Carmouche, 122, David Walters
- 5. Figpenn, Joshua Navarro, 118, Ollie L. Figgins, III
- 6. Lively Reparations, Carlos L. Castro, 122, James H. Starkey
- 7. Rummy's Command, Daniel Feliciano, 122, Donald T. Blankenship
- 8. Fred High, J.D. Acosta, 122, Jeff C. Runco
- 9. Sea Rescue, Jose Montano, 122, Jeff C. Runco
- 10. Lucy's Bob Boy, Gustavo Larrosa, 118, Sandra A. Dono

Also Eligible

- 11. Silver Tie Affair, Francisco Maysonett, 122, Hassan Elamri
- 12. Swinging Bernie, Victor Lebron, 122, Michael J. Maker
- 13. Luca's Wind Dancer, Larry C. Reynolds, 122, Timothy C. Grams
- 14. Vivo, Gustavo Larrosa, 122, Anthony K. Grigsby