

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Darren Rogers
Senior Director, Communications & Media Services
Churchill Downs Racetrack
(502) 636-4461 (office)
(502) 345-1030 (mobile)
Darren.Rogers@KyDerby.com

PLAYED HARD WIRES FIELD IN GRADE III, \$485,000 FALLS CITY ON THANKSGIVING DAY

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, Nov. 24, 2022) – Rigney Racing’s **Played Hard** broke on top, dictated the pace and turned back challenges at the top of the stretch from **Bellamore** and **Moon Swag** to draw clear late and win Thursday’s 107th running of the \$485,000 Falls City (Grade III), the traditional Thanksgiving Day fixture for fillies and mares at Churchill Downs.

Trained by **Phil Bauer** and ridden by **Joel Rosario**, Played Hard ran 1 1/8 miles over a fast track in 1:49.39 while defeating Bellamore by one length in wire-to-wire fashion.

Breaking from post four in the field of six fillies and mares, Played Hard maintained a length advantage over **Leader of the Band** down the backstretch while setting quarter-mile splits of :23.71, :47.43 and 1:11.43. Leader of the Band gave way leaving the turn as Bellamore, from the outside, and Moon Swag, from the inside, ranged into contention. Played Hard cut the final turn wide and had plenty left as she opened up down the stretch for the one-length victory as the odds-on 2-5 favorite.

“She keeps getting better,” Rosario said. “She fought hard on the lead and didn’t want to give it up. There were a couple horses that got close to her but she never gave way.”

This marked Played Hard’s second graded stakes win in her last three starts, both coming at Churchill Downs. In September, she scored a comfortable 5 3/4-length win in the \$393,000 Locust Grove (GIII) for her first graded stakes triumph.

“I’m actually pretty speechless right now,” Bauer said. “This is what it’s all about. You win a half-million dollar race on your home track with your family and the greatest owner (**Richard Rigney**) in attendance. It can’t get much better on Thanksgiving. I’m so proud of Played Hard. She pinned her ears back and didn’t want to let anyone by.”

Prior to Thursday’s Falls City, Played Hard finished third behind eventual Breeders’ Cup Distaff (GI) winner **Malathaat** and **Army Wife** in the \$600,000 Spinster (GI) at Keeneland on Oct. 9.

“Things didn’t work out last time in the Spinster but we got her back to Churchill and she loves it here,” Bauer said. “We’re excited to keep her in training next year.”

Played Hard paid \$2.90, \$2.44 and \$2.10. Bellamore, the 10-1 fourth betting choice ridden by **Martin Garcia**, returned \$6.14 and \$4.06. **She’s All Wolfe** closed late to finish another five lengths back in third at odds of 17-1 under **Joe Rocco Jr.** and paid \$4.94.

Moon Swag, Leader of the Band and **Ava’s Grace** completed the order of finish.

With the Falls City win, Played Hard improved her overall record to five wins, five seconds and two thirds in 14 starts. Thursday’s lofty \$305,520 first prize jumped her earnings to near-millionaire status at \$978,390.

Bauer said the goal for Played Hard in 2023 is to secure a Grade I win.

Played Hard is a 4-year-old bay daughter of Into Mischief out of the Tiznow mare Well Lived. She was bred in Kentucky by **Susan Casner**.

Racing at Churchill Downs continues Friday with the popular day-after Thanksgiving card highlighted by the 148th running of the \$750,000 Clark presented by Norton Healthcare (GI) for older horses, featuring Kentucky Derby winner **Rich Strike**. The Clark goes as Race 11 of 12 at approximately 5:56 p.m. (all times Eastern). The first race is 1 p.m.

DALIKA (GER) WIRES FIELD IN GRADE III, \$268,500 CARDINAL

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, Nov. 24, 2020) – Dalika (GER) scored her third front-running graded stakes win of the year when she rolled to a 1 3/4-length victory over **Perseverancia** in Thursday's 47th running of the \$268,500 Cardinal (Grade III) on Thanksgiving Day at Churchill Downs.

Dalika (GER), a 6-year-old mare owned by **Paul Varga's Bar Mar Equine LLC**, ran 1 1/8 miles over firm turf in 1:50.61 to collect the seventh stakes win of her career. Most notably, Dalika (GER) determinedly won the \$500,000 Beverly D. Stakes (Grade I) at Churchill Downs in August and followed that with a triumph in the \$726,580 Kentucky Downs Ladies Turf (GIII) in September.

Brian Hernandez Jr. rode the winner for trainer **Al Stall Jr.**

Breaking from post position five in the field of nine fillies and mares, Dalika (GER) established position from the outset while setting fractions of :24.36 and :49.07 as the 8-5 favorite **Adventuring** rated in second down the backstretch. **Curly Ruth** attempted to challenge from the outside on the final turn but was quickly dismissed. At the head of the stretch, Dalika (GER) had a two-length advantage over the chasing **Adventuring** as **Perseverancia**, who rated well back in seventh early on, rallied late in the stretch for the place.

"I've learned from watching (the late former jockey) **Miguel (Mena)** ride her that you just stay out of her way and she'll give you her best run," Hernandez Jr. said. "She's just a solid filly. I told (owner) Paul (Varga) after the race that she could've easily went a mile-and-a-half today."

The triumph was worth \$148,800 and increased her earnings to \$1,441,586. She boasts a record of 10-7-0 in 31 starts.

"Since we got her as a 2-year-old she's been so consistent in her races," Varga said. "She really likes it over here at Churchill. She's had 31 races in her career, at all distances, and she's given us 10 wins now. She's so tough on the lead. She's actually been a seven-time runner-up. This year particular she's had a tough campaign. Every time it looks like she's going to get passed she stays game."

Dalika (GER) returned mutuels of \$5.72, \$4.14 and \$3.20 as the 9-5 second betting choice. **Perseverancia**, ridden by **Julien Leparoux**, returned \$9.16 and \$4.84 at odds of 12-1. Third-place finisher **Adventuring**, under **Joel Rosario**, was another 1 1/4 lengths back in third and paid \$2.86 to show.

The order of finish was completed by **Sunny One**, **Lake Lucerne**, **Flippant**, **Pass the Plate**, **Curly Ruth** and **Disappearing Act**. **Wave of Goodness** was scratched.

Prior to the Cardinal, Dalika (GER) finished last of six in the \$317,282 Fall Harvest on the Breeders' Cup undercard at Keeneland.

"We just threw her last race out at Keeneland in the Fall Harvest," Hernandez Jr. said. "Things didn't go her way that day and that wasn't the Dalika that we know."

Dalika (GER), a gray or roan daughter of **Pastorius (GER)** out of the Hurricane Run (IRE) mare **Drawn to Run (IRE)**, was bred in Germany by **Gestut Ammerland**.

FALLS CITY QUOTES

Joel Rosario (jockey, Played Hard, winner) – “She keeps getting better. She fought hard on the lead and didn’t want to give it up. There were a couple horses that got close to her but she never gave way.”

Phil Bauer (trainer, Played Hard, winner) – “I’m actually pretty speechless right now. This is what it’s all about. You win a half-million dollar race on your home track with your family and the greatest owner in attendance. It can’t get much better on Thanksgiving. I’m so proud of Played Hard. She pinned her ears back and didn’t want to let anyone by. Things didn’t work out last time in the Spinster but we got her back to Churchill and she loves it here. We’re excited to keep her in training next year.”

CARDINAL QUOTES

Brian Hernandez Jr. (jockey, Dalika, winner) – “I’ve learned from watching (the late former jockey) Miguel (Mena) ride her that you just stay out of her way and she’ll give you her best run. She’s just a solid filly. I told (owner) Paul (Varga) after the race that she could’ve easily went a mile-and-a-half today. We just threw her last race out at Keeneland in the Fall Harvest. Things didn’t go her way that day and that wasn’t the Dalika that we know.”

Paul Varga (owner, Dalika, winner) – “Since we got her as a 2-year-old she’s been so consistent in her races. She really likes it over here at Churchill. She’s had 31 races in her career, at all distances, and she’s given us 10 wins now. She’s so tough on the lead. She’s actually been a seven-time runner-up. This year particular she’s had a tough campaign. Every time it looks like she’s going to get passed she stays game.”

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 saddling paddock and 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. www.ChurchillDowns.com.

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