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John Bowers Jr. named recipient of 2024 Virgil "Buddy" Raines Award

Monmouth Park Press Release

Prominent New Jersey owner and breeder John Bowers Jr., whose Roseland Farm Stable boasts an impressive list of state-bred stakes winners, has been named the 2024 recipient of the Virgil "Buddy" Raines Distinguished Achievement Award.

The Raines Award, currently in its 29th year, is presented annually just prior to Monmouth Park's season opener. It honors men and women who have demonstrated a continuing commitment to the sport of Thoroughbred racing as an owner, trainer or administrator, and whose conduct has been exemplary for professionalism, integrity and service to the sport.

Bowers has twice been honored by the state's Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association as the Breeder of the Year in New Jersey (2020 and 2021).

He bred and owned He'spuregold, the state's champion older male in 2022, as well as top New Jersey-bred performers Valedictorian, Pickin' Time, Royal Urn and Thistyranthaclass.



Pickin' Time won the Grade 3 Nashua Stakes in 2020; Royal Urn was the state's champion male sprinter and older horse in 2021 and Thistyranthaclass was a multiple stakes winner.

Bowers also bred Grade 3 winner Smart N Classy, who has a stakes race named for her at Monmouth Park. Stay Smart, a daughter of Smart N Classy who was bred and owned by Bowers and his long-time advisor Ed Rosen, won the race in 2020.

"John Bowers Jr. has been synonymous with New Jersey-breds for over 40 years," said Michael Campbell, executive director of the Thoroughbred Breeders' Association of New Jersey. "His breeding operation has produced horses that can compete in the biggest races, and I am proud they are New Jersey-breds. He is a worthy recipient of the Buddy Raines Award, considering his impact on the New Jersey breeding and racing programs."

Bowers and his wife Joan established Roseland Farm Stable in nearby Colts Neck in 1974.

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"He is the epitome of what a person would want to be as far as training Jersey-breds," said three-time Monmouth Park training champion Kelly Breen, who has trained for Bowers the past six years. "He has bred some of the most talented Jersey-breds we've seen in recent years.

"He's a great owner to work for. He breeds and owns horses but he also cares about his old horses. I think we've claimed a couple of horses just so they could be retired and taken care of once they were done racing.

"It's a well-deserved honor."

Jersey-bred Sea Streak could be Haskell bound

by Bill Finley

Sea Streak, a New Jersey-bred gelding by Sea Wizard, had shown potential in his first six races. He ran second behind Jersey-bred star Book'em Danno in his debut and missed winning the Mucho Macho Man Stakes at Gulfstream by just three-quarters of a length in a third-place finish. But that one big effort, the one that would get his connections excited, had always eluded him.

"I have been high on him every time that I started him," said trainer Eddie Owens Jr. "He had come up a little short a couple times but he was still learning the game. I have been chasing a dream with this horse. He was a little green early and would run in spots."

He is not chasing the dream any longer. In what was by far the best start of his career, Sea Streak demolished the competition in the May 11 Long Branch Stakes, winning by 7¼ lengths over Heartened, the race favorite who came out of the Todd Pletcher barn.

"He finally put it all together the other day," Owens said.

Jairo Rendon had the mount, the first time since Oct. 1 of last year when Sea Streak broke his maiden at Aqueduct. The native of Colombia decided to get aggressive and those tactics worked. Sea Streak broke sharply before setting into third position on the rail, right off of the leaders. Rendon, still saving ground, had his horse in front on the far turn. In the stretch, he simply ran away from his competition.

"Eddie told me if they let you go to the lead you'll be on the lead," Rendon said. "But if they fight for the lead let him relax and go at his pace. He's a horse that knows what to do. I got the best trip I could get.

"I breezed the horse the other day and I knew he was ready to go. And I knew he could get the distance. He's a Jersey-bred but he's a very good horse. He has been running against some



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good horses at Gulfstream and in New York."

"I knew he had the potential to run the way he did," Owens said. "He ran a totally different race than he had before. He never went right to the lead like that. In his previous starts, we ran him in allowance race at Gulfstream, and he just ran in spots."

Owens said Sea Streak's next start would possibly be the June 15 Pegasus (he ran fifth behind Tuscan Sky). Like the Long Branch, the Pegasus is a prep for the Grade I Haskell, which will be run this year July 20.

Owens is not the type to get too high on his horses. But he has an improving 3-year-old coming off the best race of his life. There's no reason not to think of the Haskell, a race that has never been won by a Jersey-bred.

"Do I have a Haskell horse? I don't know," Owens said. "He's still learning and he's still growing. He could be a Haskell horse. I'm not saying he's not. I'm going to let him tell me. I'm excited. This horse is going to be alright. I'm not going to say he's going to win the Haskell. But if he runs to his potential, he'll be right there. He's getting better."

The Long Branch was also a big day for New Jersey sire Sea Wizard as Sea Streak became his third stakes winner. Including 13 2-year-olds who have yet to hit the racetrack, Sea Wizard has 34 foals of racing age; 9 percent of his foals are stakes winners. If you take away the current crop of 2-year-olds, he has 14 percent stakes winners.

The other two are Great Navigator, winner of the 2023 Charles J. Hesse III Handicap for Jersey-breds, and Ship to Shore, winner of the Limehouse Stakes at Gulfstream in January. All three are Holly Crest Farm homebreds. Sea Wizard stands for \$5,000 at Pegasus Stud in Colts Neck.



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Speaking returns from layoff to win John J. Reilly Handicap

Monmouth Park Press Release

The most dominant sprinter in the New Jersey-bred ranks couldn't be slowed by a nearly eight-month layoff, with trainer Eddie Owens Jr. now left to plot what his next move is with the talented Speaking.

Speaking, a 5-year-old gelded son of Mr. Speaker bred and owned by Holly Crest Farm, shook off some early challenges on the backside before pulling away in the final furlong for a 3½-length victory in the \$85,000 John J. Reilly Handicap May 19 at Monmouth Park.

It marked the second straight year Speaking has won the John J. Reilly and extended his state-bred stakes-winning streak to three.

The winning time for the 6 furlongs was 1:11.43.

"He ran big. I'm pleased," said Owens, whose horse had been on the shelf since winning the New Jersey Breeders Handicap Aug. 27. "He didn't win the way I wanted him to win but he won. I thought he would win easier. It looked like they were ganging up on him early on the backside but he was just much the best against this group."

Sent off as the odds-on favorite in the field of six Jersey-breds, Speaking broke alertly and on the lead before being passed on the inside on the backstretch by Running Right by U and then on the outside by No Cents.

Jockey Jairo Rendon was having none of it, sending Speaking to the lead again. After engaging in a head-to-head duel with No Cents and Paco Lopez both entering and coming out of the final turn, Speaking surged late to win easily. No Cents held for second, 1 length ahead of Kaz Sweet Heist.

Speaking's statistics both sprinting and at Monmouth Park became a touch more impressive with his latest victory. He has a 7-1-1 line from 10 career starts at Monmouth and is 6-for-9 at 6 furlongs. His lifetime earnings increased to \$450,840 from 15 starts.

"I was not worried about the layoff," said Rendon, who has been aboard for the three straight stakes wins. "This horse is always fast. [Owens] is very good at getting these horses to run off layoffs. I was a little bit concerned about some of the horses



coming from behind because we went into the turn really fast. The guys were putting pressure on us.

"I didn't want to be on the lead but the race turned out like that and I had to go. He's just a good horse. He is very consistent. He does not run a lot but when he does he is usually good."

The dilemma for Owens is where to go next. He said the only realistic option is the New Jersey Breeders Handicap Aug. 25, which Speaking would be seeking to win a third straight time.

Because of bleeding issues, Owens said, he struggles to find stakes races since Lasix is no longer permitted in them.

Speaking ran just three times last year, twice at Monmouth Park, because of the Lasix stakes ban. Facing Jersey-breds mitigates some of that issue, Owens said.

"Right now all there is for him is the New Jersey Breeders Handicap," said Owens. "It's tough to run him in open stakes company, which I would do, but he can't be on Lasix in those races. So he may only run twice at Monmouth Park this year, like he did last year. It's very frustrating.

"This is the best run we've had with him, winning three stakes races in a row. I think he is one of the best sprinters in the country. I really do. But I have to follow these Lasix rules like everybody else."



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Mia's Crusade wins second consecutive Spruce Fir Handicap

Monmouth Park Press Release



After seven months off, Mia's Crusade picked up where she left off, proving her gameness and determination with yet another win against New Jersey-breds.

The 5-year-old daughter of Greenpointcrusader had to dig in through the late stages of the stretch, finally sticking her neck in front of a stubborn Bel Pensiero to capture the 28th running of the \$85,000 Spruce Fir Handicap May 18.

The winning time for the 6 furlongs was 1:11.55.

Owned by Prancing Horse Farm (Joseph and Gayle Ioia) and trained by Chuck Spina, Mia's Crusade earned her third straight win in a state-bred stakes company and fourth overall. She now has a 6-2-2 line from 15 career starts at Monmouth Park and is 5-for-10 at the 6-furlong distance.

She had not raced since winning the Pinot Grigio Handicap on the grass at The Meadowlands Oct. 6.

"Bel Pensiero gave us a heck of a challenge," said Spina. "She runs great fresh. She's won off a layoff three different times now. The layoff didn't affect her at all. I was afraid of Bel Pensiero.

"I don't think I've ever won three stakes in a row with the same horse. I was pleased with her effort."

Ridden by Jomar Torres, who has been aboard her for her past 14 starts, Mia's Crusade was fifth in a bunched-up group

down the backside. Torres had her three-wide coming out of the turn with Bel Pensiero and Sadie Baby dueling in the mix before Mia's Crusader and Bel Pensiero separated from the five other fillies and mares.

Those two dueled nose-to-nose for the final sixteenth before Mia's Crusade surged in front.

She paid \$4 to win as the favorite.

"It set up really well for her," said Torres. "She always gets up for me. I just waited for the moment and she responded very well. She always tries and just keeps fighting. I was not worried about getting by. I knew she would get her head in front. That's the type of horse she is. She always tries hard, like she did today."

Mia's Crusade also won the Spruce Fir a year ago, one of four state-bred stakes wins she now has.

"If it was sloppy she would go wire-to-wire," said Spina. "Otherwise she stalks. This is the way she races.

"She was never more than 3 lengths out of it. She's just so honest. . . It's amazing."

Spina started her next in the 1-mile Smart N Classy for Jersey-bred fillies and mares June 2 at Monmouth Park. She gave way late after pressing the pace and finished sixth.



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