



Rubley can continue big week with Dalarna, Papa Zulu

Story by Jennie Rees, Eclipse Award winning turf writer



Photos by Jennie Rees after horses had just arrived at Indiana Grand from Maryland. Dalarna (left) and Papa Zulu (right).

SHELBYVILLE, Ind.: July 12, 2018 — Kelly Rubley is hoping to back up the biggest day yet in her young training career a week later with a big night Saturday on Indiana Grand's stakes-laden Indiana Derby card.

Rubley, a former exercise rider and assistant trainer for Barclay Tagg, earned her first graded-stakes triumph last Saturday when Divisidero won the Grade 3, \$100,000 Arlington Handicap in Chicago. A week later she's saddling 8-1 Dalarna in the \$100,000 Warrior Veterans on grass and 12-1 Papa Zulu in the \$100,000 Michael G. Schaefer Memorial on dirt.

"Certainly, I think it's gotten me a lot of publicity," Rubley said by phone from Maryland, where she is based at the Fair Hill training center. "It's kind of put me on the radar where before I was lying just below it. Hopefully it's earned me a little bit of respect, and I hope to continue doing good things."

For starters, maybe it will help the racing world know that this Kelly is a she, not a he, as some have assumed. But Rubley, her stable having mushroomed from 15 horses to 50 the last couple of years, figures to be heard from more. Since starting out in 2014, she's already won 87 races and \$3.5 million in purses.

The 4-year-old Dalarna comes into the Warrior Veterans Stakes off a third — missing the win by a half-length — in Monmouth Park's \$75,000 Cliff Hanger. Last fall the colt captured Belmont Park's \$100,000 English Channel Stakes, his third win in a row in a streak including a maiden and allowance race. He was a disappointing eighth, while racing wide on both turns, in his 2018 debut before his sharp effort in the Cliff Hanger.

"I think he's a very, very nice horse, and I've had a lot of confidence in him throughout the years," Rubley said. "He proved me right by winning the English Channel in New York last fall. His first start this year was kind of mediocre, but he was coming off a break and I give him a lot of excuses for that. I thought he ran a heck of a race in the Cliff Hanger. He was by far the fastest-closing horse in that race and just missed — a bit of a timing issue.

"I've been looking for that ungraded next step for him. This looked like the most likely. However, it did come up a pretty salty race with a fairly large field, so we'll see if I made the right choice. But we're just trying to build his resume a little bit and let people see that he's as nice as I think he is. We're confident going into the race that he'll try; hopefully we'll get lucky."

The late-running 5-year-old Papa Zulu has ground out \$148,899 with three wins, a second and six thirds in 18 starts. This spring he won a second-level allowance at Philadelphia's Parx Racing then was fifth in Monmouth Park's Grade 3 Salvatore Mile. But 1 1/2 years ago he was fourth, beaten less than five lengths against top-class company, in Gulfstream Park's \$400,000 Poseidon on the \$16 million Pegasus World Cup card.

"Papa Zulu has been a hard-knocking, always-right-there type of horse," Rubley said. "This race, though it's a small field, it's a pretty strong field. It may not have been my best choice, but it's certainly worth giving him a shot. If you go back in his form to where he ran in the Poseidon, he ran some very, very nice numbers and we've been working very hard to get him back to that form."

Rubley grew up in competing in hunter-jumper shows and eventing, the latter sport introducing her to the area now serving as her base.

She earned a pair of master's degrees and settled into teaching science to middle-school students when her love affair with horses took over in 2009. After working for Tagg and Jimmy Toner, she started her own small stable. One of her main clients is Gunpowder Farms' Tom Keithley, owner of Dalarna and Papa Zulu, as well as Divisidero, who previously was trained by Buff Bradley, a span during which the horse twice won Churchill Downs' Grade 1 Woodford Reserve Turf Classic.

Rubley sees parallels in teaching pre-teens and horses.

"Every horse is different, just like every child is different," she said. "And they're all experimenting, especially the middle-school age. They're trying to figure out what their boundaries are and what they can get away with, what their strengths and weaknesses are. It's the same thing with a racehorse.

"I think racehorses do extremely well in a structured environment, just as children do. Everybody likes to know their expectations and their limits, and I think that translates very well to racehorses, in the fact that they like to know what they're doing, they like to know what's expected of them, and they're willing to learn if they're asked properly."

Rubley added: "It's much easier to work with parents of racehorses than it is with parents of kids. The parents of the racehorses aren't making excuses for why their kid did something wrong. I'm the one making excuses for the horses!"

The 16th season of Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing continues through Wednesday, Nov. 7. Racing is conducted Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 2:05 p.m. EST with Saturday racing beginning at 6:05 p.m. EST. Thursday racing will be held July 19 and Sept. 6 at 2:05 p.m. EST.

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