

Continued run of dominance

Valid Expectations leads group that maintains run of excellence in Southwest region

BY MARY SIMON

VALID EXPECTATIONS remained king of Texas, Storm and a Half continued his dominion over Arkansas, and Desert God again exerted a potent influence in New Mexico, but not all was status quo in the Southwest in 2011.

A new generation came to the fore in Louisiana and Oklahoma during the year, and a spate of promising young sires have settled in the region for 2012—among them, Closing Argument, Toccet, Don't Get Mad, Taste of Paradise, Read the Footnotes, and Western Expression.

As he does every year, Storm Cat again left his mark on the Southwest, emphatically and in no uncertain terms. The 2011 leaders in Arkansas and Louisiana were sons of the aging patriarch, as was New Mexico's best freshman and juvenile sire. Grandsons of the great progenitor were also in much evidence on the leading sire lists. No wonder everybody wants a "Storm Cat."

Arkansas

When he brought a final bid of \$1.2-million at the Keeneland September yearling sale in 1998, the sky seemed the limit for **Storm and a Half**. Although Storm Cat's son never made it to the starting gate, he went on to an impressive career as a regional sire, leading Arkansas in each of the past three seasons. Last year was another big one for the McDowell Farm denizen, who was the only in-state stallion to surpass \$1-million in progeny earnings.

McDowell is home as well to leading freshman and juvenile sire **Primary Suspect**, a Grade 3 winner by Hennessy. Classy and fast in his own right, he reproduced those qualities in his unbeaten juvenile Tricky Suspect, an electrifying 9½-length winner of the Razorback Futurity in September—two weeks before succumbing to colitis-X.

Third-crop honors went to **Midway Road**, who finished second by earnings and winners. After five seasons in Texas, he relocated for 2011 to Trophy Club Training and Breeding Center in Royal. The graded stakes winner by Jade Hunter finished second to Funny Cide in the 2003 Preakness Stakes (G1).

Louisiana

Louisiana-based sires have dominated the Southwest since 2006, after the birth of racinos. New and exciting young stallions continue to flow into the state, enhancing Louisiana's sire power with each passing year. The group includes Closing Argument—America's eighth-ranked third crop sire of 2011—for the current season.

Yankee Gentleman may have to contend with Closing Argument in the 2012 battle for supremacy, but for now, he wears the Louisiana crown. The son of Storm Cat moved from Kentucky to LeMesa Stallions for 2010 and by that season's end had topped the state's sire standings, a feat he duplicated in 2011. At age 13, Yankee Gentleman is coming into his own, a fact reflected by his six stakes winners and 14 total stakes horses last year, and the \$2,776,561 banked by his progeny made him the leader in the entire region.

The leader by winners was **Leestown** with 75. The Seattle Slew stallion led the state overall in 2007 but was euthanized in 2008 after breaking a shoulder.

Finishing second by winners and

third by earnings was **Tenpins**, a millionaire by Smart Strike, and the richest Michigan-bred of all time. He stood initially at Walmac Farm in Lexington before moving to Elite Thoroughbreds in 2010.

Outstanding freshman sire in Louisiana and throughout the region was Clear Creek Stud's **Half Ours**, a Grade 2 winner by Unbridled's Song whose 16 winners placed him among the top ten freshman sires in North America. Half Ours was an impressive racehorse, so much so that in 2006 he set a \$6.1-million Keeneland November breeding stock sale record for a horse in training. He stood at Taylor Made Stallions prior to his arrival in Louisiana in 2010.

New Mexico

Favorite Trick may be gone but he is certainly not forgotten in his adopted home of New Mexico. The 1997 Horse of the Year perished in a barn fire in 2006, but half a decade later remains a top-ten sire in New Mexico. Favorite Trick's final Thoroughbred crop included 2011 stakes



Valid Expectations, who stands at Lane's End Texas, maintains his position atop the Texas sire list in 2011 with earnings of more than \$1.44-million

winner Tricky R., but due to the miracle of modern science (artificial insemination), his high-flying Quarter Horse foals keep hitting the ground each spring.


Among the living, 21-year-old **Desert God** reprised his 2010 leading role. The unraced Fappiano horse, best known as sire of the brilliant and unbeatable Peppers Pride, sent out eight stakes winners last season. Desert God's dominance was never so evident as on October 30, when three of the seven stakes run on New Mexico Classic Day were taken by his offspring. Especially notable was Rose's Desert, who was unbeaten in four starts as a three-year-old in 2011, and, appropriately, won the Peppers Pride New Mexico Classic Cup Championship Fillies and Mares Stakes.

Desert God stands at A & A Ranch, about 20 miles northwest of El Paso.

Brunacini Farms is home to freshman and juvenile leader **Weather Warning**, a stakes-winning Storm Cat horse who moved in-state last year. The flashy bay with plenty of chrome got seven winners from ten starters, including Woodbine stakes winner Notaloudinthesky.

Like Favorite Trick, **Devon Lane** has enjoyed success in both the Thoroughbred and running Quarter Horse worlds. His Chuchuluc captured the New Mexico Classic Cup Sprint Championship Stakes, and was his leading money winner on the year with \$157,700 in earnings. Yet another son of Storm Cat, Devon Lane resides at TNL Farm.

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Oklahoma

Tactical Cat's three-year reign as the Sooner State's top sire came to an end in 2011 when he deferred to the younger **Omega Code**. The latter came to Oklahoma in 2010 with all the right credentials—he was a blistering-fast graded stakes-winning son of Elusive Quality who scorched six furlongs in

1:07.70 as a two-year-old. Omega Code is in service at Rockin Z Ranch, where he will be joined in 2012 by current third-crop sire **Don't Get Mad**.

Evansville Slew has ranked among the leaders here ever since his arrival in the state in 2007. The 20-year-old, who stands at Diamond G Ranch, has sired 33 career stakes winners and the earners of more than \$18-million to date. His trio

of 2011 stakes winners and eight total stakes performers each represented state highs.

Also at Diamond G is former leader **Tactical Cat**, by Storm Cat, who slipped to third in 2011. He was represented by two Canadian stakes winners and came up just short of the million-dollar mark in purse earnings.

A bittersweet story line of 2011 was that of **Wild Tale**. The stakes-winning son of the Storm Cat stallion Tale of the Cat died of liver disease at Mighty Acres in 2008 after one season at stud. Five of his 20 foals raced in 2011; three won, two of those in stakes company. The combined earnings of his handful of talented runners placed him atop both the freshman and juvenile lists in Oklahoma. On a brighter note for Mighty Acres, multiple Grade 1 winner **Tocet** has joined the roster there for the 2012 season.

Texas

The Lone Star State honored **Valid Expectations** with his ninth title, a record of dominance un-

matched in the region.

One cannot understate the importance of this now-19-year-old to this corner of the Thoroughbred world. The Man o' War-line stallion stands at Lane's End Texas, where he has played a starring role in the building of the state breeding industry in the new millennium. Thirty-five of Valid Expectations' 42 stakes winners to date were conceived within these borders, and he has been represented by nine state champions through 2010.

A career sire of 82% winners and 16% stakes horses from starters, he has a particular affinity for getting fast, early runners; more than half of his stakes winners and eight of his Texas champions were juveniles. His crown, however, does not rest easy. He may well be challenged in 2012 by newcomer Oratory, whose 2011 progeny earnings surpassed those of Valid Expectations.

Apropos of nothing, it is a curious fact that the leading first-, second-, and third-crop sires in Texas are all grays, a coat color that makes up just 10% of the Thoroughbred breed.

Valor Farm's **My Golden Song**, a graded stakes-placed son of Unbridled's Song, generated eight winners from 13 starters to top all freshman sires. His lone stakes winner, Cowgirl N Up, captured the Darby's Daughter Texas Stallion Stakes at Retama Park, and already in 2012 has added another stakes win to her résumé at Sam Houston Race Park. Valor Farm also stands leading third-crop sire **Wimbledon** and **Early Flyer**, ranked third overall.

Too Much Bling relocated from Florida to Lane's End Texas in 2008 and his first state-bred foals hit the track running last year. With eight winners from that crop, including stakes-winning License to Bling and four stakes-placed runners, he was the state's most successful juvenile sire by earnings. Too Much Bling was also first among second-crop sires by a wide money-won margin. ☺

Mary Simon is a contributing editor of THOROUGHBRED TIMES.



Rockin Z Ranch's Omega Code, a blistering fast juvenile and sophomore stakes winner, upends Tactical Cat to lead all sires in Oklahoma in 2011



LeMesa Stallions' Yankee Gentleman leads all sires in the region with earnings of \$2,776,561 in 2011, including a Louisiana-best six stakes winners

MAKING HIS PRESENCE FELT



ORATORY

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#1 Sire in Texas by 2011 Progeny Earnings

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