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Looking for Chrome's reflection in Faversham

Jay Hovdey Feb 16, 2018

There are two surefire ingredients of near-certain failure when it comes to the recipe for a Thoroughbred racehorse. First, bring him into this world as a full brother to a champion. Then, name him for a friend.

On Monday at Santa Anita, the 3-year-old colt Faversham will take a serious step toward bucking the trend. The son of Lucky Pulpit, a maiden with only one start under his belt, will run in the \$200,000 California Cup Derby at a mile and one-sixteenth on the main track, with his namesake in the holiday crowd and the specter of big brother looming large.

California Chrome, the full brother in question, romped in the 2014 Cal Cup Derby on his way to victories in the Santa Anita Derby, Kentucky Derby, and Preakness, and the first of his two titles as Horse of the Year. The flashy chestnut with the white stockings and forthright blaze earned \$14.4 million while carving out an everlasting place in the popular canon as the wayward colt

from California's Central Valley, bred by novices who bought the mare for a song.

In one sense, the emergence of Faversham on Monday's modest stage gives the vast and vocal fan club of Chromies reason to celebrate their hero afresh. His near miss in the Triple Crown primed the pump for the reaction to American Pharoah's giddy ascent the following year. And then, when Pharoah bowed out, Chrome returned in 2016 to defy the odds and unfurl a second Horse of the Year campaign.

The fascination of Thoroughbred brotherhood will persist no matter what Faversham achieves in the wake of Chrome's fame. They could end up like the full brothers Tiznow and Budroyale, one a Horse of the Year, the other an earner of \$2.8 million, or they could be a modern version of the full brothers His Majesty and Graustark, both top class racehorses and heady influences on the breed.

Faversham also could be the obscure Unbelievable to his full brother Citation, the winless Americano to his full brother Alydar, or the disappointing Face East to his full brother Native Dancer. But as trainer Art Sherman pointed out, if Faversham is only one-tenth the racehorse his brother was, he'll earn \$1.4 million. Perry and Denise Martin were on the way to Southern California from their home in Alpine, Wyoming, Thursday afternoon, heading westbound on Interstate 80 somewhere in Nevada when they pulled into a Conoco gas station to take a call.

"In conversations I've had with several people on the subject, I've learned that usually with full brothers, even if they're both stakes winners, one is superior and the other less so," Martin said. "I guess the only thing that's yet to be determined is if Faversham is worse or better than his brother."

The Martins bred California Chrome with their former partners, Steve and Carolyn Coburn, who sold their minority share in 2015, at which time a syndicate assembled by Taylor Made Farm became co-owners. Faversham races exclusively for the Martins. “He’s a very smart horse,” Martin said. “He picked up his early lessons real quick, and in a lot of ways he’s better than Chrome was at the same age.”

California Chrome, a February foal, was a minor stakes winner at 2. Faversham was born in April of 2015. “He was scheduled to make his first start last June, but he came up with some heat in a leg,” Martin said. “It was a very slight tear in a tendon that just needed rest, but at the same time you’ve got to keep them moving to promote healing. He came out of that ballet dance one-hundred percent.”

Sherman finally got Faversham to the races on Jan. 15 at Santa Anita. The result was a fast-closing second that encouraged Martin to consider the restricted Cal Cup Derby. “It’s a big jump, I know,” Martin said. “We’ll find out after Monday where to go from here.”

Dr. Jerome “Rommy” Faversham, for whom the colt is named, is a disciple of the late Leon Rasmussen, who for years wrote a bloodstock column for Daily Racing Form. Faversham reached out to Martin as a fan of California Chrome’s bloodlines in the wake of his Kentucky Derby win, and the two men struck up a friendship. Not only did they enjoy the arcane study of pedigrees, they both come from backgrounds of scientific scholarship, Martin in applied physics and Faversham in nuclear medicine. Toward the end of 2015, when California Chrome’s comeback was far from a certainty, Martin asked Faversham’s permission to attach his name to the champ’s full brother.

“I was flabbergasted,” Faversham said. “Honored, of course, and a little bit frightened at the prospect, since expectations for the colt are so high.

“The chance of a horse being a stakes winner is, what, 3 or 4 percent,” Faversham noted. “Then for a full sibling it’s 3 or 4 percent squared, which is a pretty small number. But it does happen, and often when it does it’s with the less-glamorous pedigrees when the sire and the dam click for some reason, and the sum becomes greater than the parts.

“Whether with Faversham lightning strike will again, we’ll have to wait and see,” Faversham added. “I did read in an article recently that lightning very often does strike in the same place twice, although now we’re getting out of my area of expertise.”