

Awesome Gem spotted for win

By Steve Andersen

INGLEWOOD, Calif. - The \$700,000 Hollywood Gold Cup on July 11 remains on the summertime agenda for Awesome Gem, a millionaire 6-year-old.

First, Awesome Gem will start in a \$58,000 allowance race on Saturday, a race that trainer Craig Dollase and the West Point Thoroughbreds partnership hope will be the gelding's first win in two years.

"It's a springboard into the Hollywood Gold Cup and a confidence-booster," Dollase said. "He's a sound older gelding that needs to get back in the game."

Awesome Gem is part of a field of six in Saturday's ninth race, run over 1 1/16 miles on turf. In his last start, Awesome Gem finished fifth in the Grade 2 Californian on June 13. Last of 10 to the end of the backstretch, he closed well in the final furlong to finish 1 1/2 lengths behind upset winner Informed.

On May 25, Awesome Gem had a similar trip in the Grade 3 Berkeley Handicap at Golden Gate Fields, closing from eighth in a field of nine to finish third, beaten just a neck.

The five horses Awesome Gem faces on Saturday are stakes winners - Becrux, Crafty Power, Tiz West, Unusual Suspect, and Yankee Bravo.

They are not considered Gold Cup hopefuls, since most specialize in racing on turf or at distances shorter than the Gold Cup trip of 1 1/4 miles. Becrux, a 7-year-old gelding, had the best recent run, a second-place finish to the Dollase-trained Monterey Jazz in an allowance race over a mile on turf on May 24.

The Gold Cup field will not include Ball Four, the winner of the Grade 2 Mervyn LeRoy Handicap on May 9 and second to Informed in the Californian. "A mile and a quarter is not his trip," trainer Patrick Biancone said on Thursday.

Biancone said that Ball Four will be pointed for the \$150,000 San Diego Handicap at Del Mar on Aug. 2.



Benoit & Associates

Awesome Gem hasn't won a race in two years, but has a good chance to break that streak in an allowance race on Saturday.