

Slow pace hinders Macho Again's bid in Alysheba

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Even as Friday went on, and the main track at Churchill Downs changed from sloppy to muddy to good to fast, one constant remained.

For the most part, closers weren't closing. Horses that won were doing it from on or near the pace.

With his newfound running style, that meant trouble for Macho Again.

Owned in part by Roger and Joyce Locks of Saratoga Springs through West Point Thoroughbreds, the multiple graded-stakes winner was unable to close into a slow pace set by long shot Informal, and wound up sixth of 10 in the Grade III \$170,400 Alysheba.

Bullsbay, second choice in the wagering at 7-2, came from midpack to collar Cool Coal Man in the stretch and win by three-quarters of a length in 1:44.29 for 1 1/16 miles.

Favored at 5-2 and carrying topweight of 124 pounds off his thrilling come-from-behind victory in the Grade II \$500,000 New Orleans Handicap last month, Macho Again was beaten just over four lengths, earning \$1,704.

"We just got beat," Roger Locks said. "Not that he ran badly, but the pace was so slow. They didn't bring themselves out enough for him to run after them and catch them. It's been like that all day."

Under jockey Robby Albarado, Macho Again broke well from post one and ran in the back of the group behind Informal, who loafed through a quarter-mile in :24.55 and a half in :48.72. "There was no pace in the race. I had nothing to run at," Albarado said. "He was gaining a little bit at the end, but he was making a long run at a slow pace, and that makes it harder for him."

As Bullsbay and Cool Coal Man slugged it out down the stretch, Albarado swung Macho Again to the outside after turning for home, needing to steer clear of a fading Prom Shoes.

"I thought he was going around them, and he got in behind them a little bit," trainer Dallas Stewart said. "He just got outrun today. They went pretty even, and I know he needs to go a little further."

Macho Again had two wins and a second in three previous starts at Churchill, including a victory in last year's Derby Trial.

"He's a nice horse," Stewart said. "You just have to take one on the chin; sometimes, you just get whipped. He ran a great race last time. It happens. We're all a little disappointed."

Even so, the outcome didn't completely spoil the Lockses first Kentucky Derby week experience.

"My wife's having a ball," Roger Locks said. "She would have won a hat contest today, no doubt about it. She bought a few hats to bring back to Saratoga."

"His timing could be a lot better, but he's in good shape. He's not hurt; he's doing fine. It would have been nice if we won, but we're living to fight another day."