

Funny Guy will get nice setup in Empire Classic if Mr. Buff is pressed

By: David Grening



ELMONT, N.Y. – Funny Guy was 11-1 when he upset 4-5 Mr. Buff in the one-mile Commentator Stakes for New York-breds off a 257-day layoff in June.

The two statebreds went their separate ways thereafter, both chasing, but failing to obtain some of the biggest prizes the New York Racing Association has to offer. Saturday, Funny Guy and Mr. Buff will meet again as part of an eight-horse field entered in the \$175,000 Empire Classic, the centerpiece of a New York Showcase Day program at Belmont Park that consists of 11 races – eight stakes – restricted to New York-breds. Total purses for the day are \$1,412,000.

First post is noon.

Trainer John Terranova wasn't sure until entry day that he was going to run Funny Guy in the Empire Classic, pondering other races for the versatile son of Big Brown who has won from six to nine furlongs. The one-turn, 1 1/8-mile configuration of this race makes some sense for Funny Guy as it is only a furlong farther than the Commentator, in which he rallied from seventh to beat Mr. Buff by 1 1/4 lengths. That day, Funny Guy was in receipt of seven pounds from Mr. Buff, who had dominated the winter stakes at Aqueduct, topped by a 20-length score in the Haynesfield in February.

Funny Guy won the John Morrissey going seven furlongs in Saratoga before finishing fourth to Win Win Win in the Grade 1 Forego going seven furlongs over an extremely sloppy Saratoga track and second to Firenze Fire going six furlongs over a fast Belmont Park main track on Sept. 26.

Terranova backed off Funny Guy a little bit but was happy with the colt's half-mile breeze here Monday.

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"I loved his breeze the other day, I love how he's feeling, and he looks great," Terranova said. "He should be nice and fit. He had four races, boom-boom-boom-boom, and all high-level races."

Terranova also likes the potential setup for Funny Guy. Mr. Buff is a front-running sort, but figures to get some early pressure from Sea Foam and potentially Our Last Buck.

"On paper, it looks fine," Terranova said. "He's able to switch on, switch off, and do whatever you need to do with him."

John Velazquez rides Funny Guy from post 3.

Since December 2018, Mr. Buff has won eight stakes from 15 starts. Five of his seven losses in that time have come in Grade 1 or Grade 2 stakes. He is coming in off a last-place finish in the Grade 1 Whitney on Aug. 1 at Saratoga.

Speed is Mr. Buff's weapon.

"He doesn't have to be committed to the front end, but he does run well when he's there," trainer John Kimmel said.

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If Mr. Buff is softened up by Sea Foam and Funny Guy doesn't fire, then the 3-year-old Chestertown could pick up the pieces. A \$2 million yearling purchase, Chestertown is coming off a victory in the Albany Stakes going 1 1/8 miles on Sept. 4 at Saratoga.

Bankit, who finished third behind Funny Guy and Mr. Buff in the Commentator in May, is back with statebreds after a seventh-place finish behind Mr. Money in the Grade 3 Ack Ack on Sept. 26 at Churchill Downs.