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Friday, August 07, 2009

SARATOGA RACE COURSE NOTES: Friday, August 7, 2009

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. -- Belmont Stakes winner Summer Bird took his first tour of Saratoga Race Course's main track on Friday morning, jogging an easy mile under exercise rider Liandro Atempa. Trainer Tim Ice said the son of 2004 Belmont winner Birdstone would gallop 1½ miles Saturday morning as he prepares for his next start, the Grade 1, \$1 million Shadwell Travers on Saturday, August 29.

"The rider said he looked around a little bit and that he was feeling good," said Ice. "He was on his toes, and feeling high-spirited. We wanted him to get loosened up and get a feel for the track. Tomorrow, when he gallops, he'll have blinkers on."

Summer Bird, who will be making his seventh career start in the Shadwell Travers, finished second to Rachel Alexandra in his most recent race, the Haskell Invitational.

"I think his performance in the Haskell validated he's a Grade 1 horse," said Ice. "I didn't think his Belmont win was a fluke. He's bred to go a mile and a half, but he can go a mile and an eighth as well."

Along with Summer Bird, Ice has brought with him a pair of unraced 2-year-olds, Explosive War and Catlettsburg, and 4-year-old Independence War, all belonging to Kalarikkal and Vilasini Jayaraman.

* * *

Indian Blessing, the champion female sprinter of 2008, is set to breeze Saturday morning as she points towards a return to the races in the Grade 1, \$300,000 Ballerina on Shadwell Travers Day.

The 4-year-old daughter of Indian Charlie has started just twice this year, finishing second in the Grade 1 Dubai Golden Shaheen on March 28 and fourth on June 14 in the Desert Stormer Handicap at Hollywood Park, the first time she had been worse than second in 14 starts.

"She's been here a couple of weeks, and she's doing great," said John Terranova, whose wife, Tonja, supervises trainer Bob Baffert's horses in New York. "She loves it up here."

Indian Blessing, owned by Hal Earnhardt, is 2-for-2 at the Spa, having broken her maiden at first asking on August 20, 2007 by 5¼ lengths en route to her first Eclipse Award as champion 2-year-old filly, and returning last year to run off to a seven-length score in the Grade 1 Test.

This week Baffert shipped in a pair of 2-year-olds, including maiden winner Tiny Woods. The son of Roman Ruler will be pointed toward the Grade 2, \$150,000 Saratoga Special on August 18, said Terranova.

Baffert himself is set to arrive Monday. On Friday, he will be inducted into racing's Hall of Fame.

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