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Morning Line (right) takes the Pennsylvania Derby over First Dude (left) and A Little Warm.

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Zito Wins Penn Derby Again With Morning Line

By **Jack Shinar**

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Passed in upper stretch by **A Little Warm**, a gutty **Morning Line** battled back along the rail to get up by a neck in the \$1 million **Pennsylvania Derby** (gr. II) (**VIDEO**) to win his stakes debut for trainer Nick Zito at Parx Racing Sept. 25.

Zito won his third Pennsylvania Derby in the past five renewals of the 1/18-mile test of 3-year-olds at the former Philadelphia Park. His prior victories came with **Sun King** in 2005 and **Anak Nakal** in 2008. There was no race in 2006.

"It's been a tough year," Zito said after matching the great Woody Stephens for most Pennsylvania Derby wins all-time. "We've lost a lot of close photos, but today the Good Lord was kind. I won my first race ever here in Pennsylvania at the old Liberty Bell Park. This was a real sweet win today. I'm truly humbled."

Just six contested the Pennsylvania Derby, which was moved from its Labor Day Labor slot to the final weekend of September this year and went head-to-head with the Super Derby (gr. II) at Louisiana Downs for what's left of a depleted 3-year-old male division.

Morning Line went directly to the front and led 8-5 choice **First Dude** into the first turn while racing well off the rail for John Velazquez. Morning Line carved reserved quarter-mile fractions of :23.44, :47.29 and 1:10.84 while pushed along by close First Dude and **Exhi**, stalking at the rail. A Little Warm, never far off the pace for jockey Garrett Gomez, raced in fourth before advancing into third approaching the final turn.

"We wanted the lead," said Velazquez. "The good part of the track seemed to be a little off the rail, so we wanted to establish our position and let him get comfortable."

A Little Warm went for an early move while four paths wide on the final turn, making an impressive bid on the outside to get past a a shut-off First Dude and



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- First Dude
- Exhi
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RACE PROFILES

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- Pennsylvania Derby 2008
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TAGS

- pennsylvania derby
- nick zito
- john velazquez
- thoroughbred legends racing stable

Morning Line at the top of the lane. But unable to put his foes away, A Little Warm began to labor down the lane, allowing both Morning Line and First Dude to re-rally. Morning Line got his head in front under a heavy drive in the final yards and held on stubbornly. A re-gathered First Dude and Robby Albarado tweaked a Little Warm for second by a nose.

"He (Morning Line) kind of shied a bit from the other two and I had to get into him to get him running again," remarked Velazquez. "He got headed at about the eighth pole but man, did he fight back."

Owned by Thoroughbred Legends Racing Stable, the late-developing colt Morning Line served notice that he was sitting on a big race when he scored an eye-popping 11-length win in a first-level allowance win at nine furlongs on a fast track at Saratoga Aug. 21, earning a 98 Beyer Speed Rating. The dark bay/brown Kentucky-bred son of **Tiznow** —Indian Snow, by **A.P. Indy**, had broken his maiden by eight lengths two races earlier in his career while going 1 1/16 miles at Monmouth Park June 27. His Pennsylvania Derby win, worth \$574,000, improved his career record to 3-2-0 in six starts with earnings \$674,800.

"He hadn't been tested like that in his previous races, certainly not against this caliber of horses, and today we saw what kind of fight he had," remarked Olin Gentry, part of the winning ownership.

Morning Line, a \$700,000 yearling purchase at the Keeneland Association September 2008 sale, was bred in Kentucky by Dell Ridge Farm.

Sent off as the third choice, Morning Line carried 114 pounds and paid \$9.60, \$5.40 and \$3.60, heading a \$37.20 exacta.

Donald Dizney's homebred First Dude, whose previous six starts came in grade I races, now has been second or third in nine of his 11 career starts with just one win for trainer Dale Romans. He returned \$3.20 and \$2.20.

A Little Warm, winner of Saratoga's Jim Dandy Stakes (gr. II) July 31 before finishing fifth in the Travers Stakes (gr. I), was \$2.40 to show while carrying co-top weight of 122.

It was eight lengths to Exhi in fourth. **Afleet Again** ran fifth with **Severe Weather** far behind. **Friend or Foe** scratched.

tiznow

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