

## CAKE POP HAS SWEET VICTORY IN THE TALL STACKS STAKES AT BELTERRA PARK

Penny Lauer's 3-year-old colt Cake Pop turned the tables on favored Coincidentally handing him his first defeat of the season in the \$75,000 Tall Stacks Stakes on Derby Day at Belterra Park. Cake Pop is a true "Horse for Course" at the Cincinnati oval and is now 3-for-3, including the Hoover Stakes as a juvenile last season. There were plenty of familiar foes in the nine-horse field including Best of Ohio Juvenile winner Tough It Up; Cleveland Kindergarten victor Jockey Justice and Coincidentally, who put in an authoritative score in wire to wire form in the recent Howard B. Noonan at Mahoning Valley.

Cake Pop matched strides with Coincidentally in the prep for the Noonan and had to settle for the second spot, a comfortable seven lengths ahead of the third-place finisher. Trainer and co-breeder Mike Lauer looked down the road at what could be a long season for the son of Notional. "He had already made three starts this year and won or placed in all of them," spoke Lauer. "The Noonan was only two weeks after the prep and I decided to pass and give him more time and point to this race. He is a great horse to be around and takes care of himself. When Spring came around – so did he."

Lauer's decision proved to be a wise one. Undefeated in 2017, Coincidentally, a product of the new WinStar Farm/ Blazing Meadows partnership, was installed as the favorite. Cake Pop with Marcelino Pedroza up for the first time, rated well in the 6 ½ furlong test in the early going and appeared to rally at will around the turn to draw away by 4 lengths at the wire. Strike Your Light chased the winner through the lane and finished second ahead of the early pacesetter Fireupthe Jet.

"You are only a 3-year-old once and the opportunities are limited so we will probably wheel him back in the Green Carpet at the end of the month, though I wish the race was run a little later in the season," said Lauer. "It will be his first race on the turf, but it probably will be for the entire field. He is out of a Prized mare, so he has grass breeding in his pedigree."

The name Lauer has been associated with Ohio racing for decades. "My father raced horses on this circuit for decades and after attending Ohio State University, my early education as a trainer took place at River Downs. We won the 1 ¼ mile Governor's Buckeye Cup in back-to-back seasons with Mitey J. In those days it was perhaps the top purse in the state and would be on par with the Best of Ohio Endurance now." Lauer, who kept his mares at Poplar Creek Farm, said Cake Pop may be the last of the line.

"It's just a business decision. The rule that makes you have a broodmare in the state by August 15 does not give me the option to buy a nice mare at one of the Fall sales in Kentucky and bring her here, which is something I would do." Lauer continued, "I see the advantages of state-bred programs so I'm foaling in Indiana where I was Breeder of the Year, Pennsylvania, Maryland and in New York where the programs are less restrictive. If they change that rule down the road in Ohio – I'll be back."

For now, Mike Lauer and his wife Penny will enjoy the ride with Cake Pop in Ohio. The win in the Tall Stacks pushed his career earnings to \$148,490 from only 9 lifetime starts.