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Trainer Brown doesn't clown around at Charles Town

by LARRY YANOS

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Despite winning his fourth straight trainers' title in 2004, Charles Town-based conditioner Ronney Brown isn't about to take life easy.

"I've been very fortunate to be the leading trainer at Charles Town four straight years and I realize it will be extremely difficult to make it five in a row," Brown said. "The competition here is tremendous. You really have to work hard to succeed."

Entering Friday's final 2004 program at Charles Town Races & Slots, Brown had won 130 races and finished second on 117 other occasions.

The total includes 12 wins against allowance company and two stakes triumphs.

"I don't know of any trainer in the country having that many second-place finishes," Brown said. "I had a great year but I lost a lot of close races."

Over the years, Brown has been successful with a variety of horses (sprinters, distance, claimers and allowance), but the claimers have provided the most input and most appearances in the winner's circle.

In fact one \$5,000 claimer, Great Commander, actually won the Spring Time Stakes.

"There's a lot of horses claimed at Charles Town and I'm right in the middle of things," Brown said. "I've probably had 300 claims in 2004. I've also lost a bundle of horses."

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Over the years, Brown has used different strategies to get to the top of the trainers' standings and says he will try to get more involved with West Virginia-breds in 2005.

"There are some nice West Virginia-breds here at Charles Town," Brown said. "I'll be paying more attention to them."

Brown said the key to the 2004 title was a hot streak early in the year.

"There was a four-month period early in the year where we couldn't do anything wrong," Brown said. "Everything we claimed turned to gold. It was incredible."

As usual, Brown raced mostly at Charles Town in 2004 - shipping to the Maryland racetracks, Penn National and Delaware Park on very few occasions.

The 2001 overall title at Charles Town was Brown's first since entering the thoroughbred horse racing business. He has now put together three more championships in a row.

Brown was born and raised in Frederick County and started in the thoroughbred horse racing industry in 1983 at Charles Town. He has stabled horses there throughout, with the exception of 1992 through 1999, when he took his horses to the Penn National Race Course in Grantville, Pa.

"I had some good years at Penn National, usually was in the trainers' standings, but I'm happy to be back here," he said. "The purse structure is great."

Brown's best horse in 2004?

"I'd have to say Original Gold," Brown said. "She's the top West Virginia-bred in money earned."

Among her victories in 2004 was the \$250,000 Jefferson Security Bank "Cavada" West Virginia Breeders Classic. It was worth \$112,500.

Jockey Ramon Dominguez handled the assignment on the 4-year-old filly and won the 7-furlong race by three lengths over fast-closing Marthamountainmama. The winning time was 1:29.1.

It was only the fourth race of the year for Original Gold.

Despite a very successful training career at Charles Town, Brown had never won either of the two signature races of the West Virginia Breeders Classics: The featured Classic or the



Cavada Classic.

"I think Me No Sissy finished third two different times in the Classic and Landing Mate finished fourth in the filly race in 1992." Brown said.

Brown currently has 60 horses in training.

· Brown agrees with the decision made last week to conduct live thoroughbred racing 12 months a year in 2005 at Charles Town.

"It was the right decision (to make)," Brown said of the contract signed between management and the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association.

"I think management, at one time, was considering shutting the track down in January and February but the horsemen want to run their horses," Brown said. "The four-day-a-week schedule is limited, but at least the horsemen can run their horses. It's tough now getting horses in."

Another day of live thoroughbred horse racing will be added to the schedule in February. It will remain for the rest of the year.

Pony Tales

Charles Town and the Maryland Jockey Club will offer live racing today as the 2005 campaign kicks off.

Pimlico Race Course will offer live thoroughbred horse racing today with post time at 12:35 p.m., while Charles Town will offer live racing tonight with post time at 7:15 p.m.

· Two Group 1 fixtures from Uruguay's Maroas National Racetrack will be simulcast into North America this Thursday with Pimlico Race Course serving as the North American wagering hub for the stakes.

The highlight of the South American stakes is the Group 1 Gran Premio Jose Pedro Ramirez, a 1 1/2-mile race that traditionally attracts some of the best horses from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay.

There will be separate North American wagering pools, featuring win, place, show, exacta, trifecta and superfecta wagering.

Post time for The Ramirez is 4:20 p.m. The Pieyrua will be run at 5:10 p.m.

· Azeri, North America's all-time leading female earner, has been retired from racing.

The late Allen Paulson, campaigned by the Paulson Living Trust and run by his son Michale, bred the 6-year-old mare. In her first three years of racing, Laura de Seroux trained Azeri. In 2004, her final racing year, Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas guided her career.

Azeri started 24 times and won 17 races, with earnings of \$4,079,820. In 2002, Azeri became the third female bestowed with the honor of Horse of the Year (All Along, 1983 and Lady's Secret, 1986) and was named Champion Older Filly or Mare in 2002 and 2003.

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