



## BREEDERS' CUP FOCUS: DIRT MILE

BY JASON SHANDLER

### Gottcha Gold

Owner	Centaur Farms (Vernon Heath)
Breeder	Centaur Farms (Vernon Heath)
Trainer	Edward Plesa, Jr.

When the Breeders' Cup hits Monmouth Park Oct. 26-27, most of the horses entered in the 11 World Championships races will come from ownership operations based in Kentucky, California, New York and Florida. One of the states that won't be well-represented is Minnesota, which isn't considered horse country when compared with some other locations.

But with Centaur Farms' Gottcha Gold expected to be entered in the inaugural \$1-million Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile (to be run at one mile and 70 yards) Oct. 26, the Gopher State will have at least one representative.

Centaur Farms is managed in Minneapolis by its president and founder Vernon Heath, and his son, Brad. The family operation has been in existence since 1986, when the elder Heath bought his first group of broodmares. Since that time, the small but successful farm has earned a reputation as an operation that breeds homebred stallions to homebred mares and races the offspring.

Many of broodmares are kept at Three Chimneys Farm near Midway, Ky, while others are at Dudley Farm and Ocala Stud near Ocala, Fla, which is where Gottcha Gold was bred.

"I would say we keep about 85% of our horses," said Brad Heath, 47, who entered the business in 1991. "We're a fully integrated operation. We breed, race, and sell. But we've been very successful with our homebred racing program. We don't buy that often."

One of those homebreds is Gottcha Gold, by Coronado's Quest out of Pleasant Tap mare Gottcha Last. As a 2-year-old, Gottcha Gold was sent to trainer Eddie Plesa Jr., who along with Todd Pletcher gets the majority of the Centaur Farms horses. The bay colt was far from an immediate success, losing four of his first five starts. It prompted a drop into the \$75,000 claiming ranks.

"Luckily, nobody claimed him," Heath said. "Good thing for us. Eddie has done a great job with him."

Gottcha Gold, who is seven-for-22 lifetime, was zero-for-three and going nowhere in 2007 before Plesa decided to ship the 4-

year-old colt to Monmouth. As it was in 2006, the track was to his liking; he took second in a stakes in May, then came back a month later and beat Lawyer Ron by a neck in the Salvator Mile Handicap (gr. III).

After his connections saw Gottcha Gold take the Philip H. Iselin Handicap (gr. II) at Monmouth Aug. 18, they knew the Breeders'

Cup was possible—especially since it is at Monmouth, where five of his seven victories have come.

"He's one of those horses where a lot of his success is determined by the track," Heath said. "Gottcha Last was the first ticket I ever signed (for a horse at auction), so it's nice to see him do well."

This will be the third Breeders' Cup for Centaur Farms, which currently has about 15 2-year-olds in training. In 2001, Centaur

had homebred Exogenous, who was favored for the Distaff (gr. I) at Belmont Park before flipping en route to the track. She suffered a head injury that required her to be scratched and later euthanized. Last year, Adhrhythm ran seventh in the Juvenile Fillies (gr. I) at Churchill Downs for Centaur Farms.



Gottcha Gold

EQUIPHOTO: BILL DENVER

CORONADO'S QUEST, ch, 1995	Forty Niner, 1985	Mr. Prospector, 1970	Raise a Native Gold Digger
	Laughing Look, 1986	File, 1976	Tom Rolfe Continue
GOTTCHA GOLD, b, c, May 29, 2003		Damascus, 1964	Sword Dancer Kerala
		Laughter, 1970	Bold Ruler Shenanigans
GOTTCHA LAST, b, 1997	Pleasant Tap, 1987	Pleasant Colony, 1978	His Majesty Sun Colony
		Never Knock, 1979	Stage Door Johnny Never Hula
	Temper the Wind, 1980	Elocutionist, 1973	Gallant Romeo Strictly Speaking
		Race the Tide, 1974	Cyane Rum Bottle Bay



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