

V is for Vindication...

Perhaps no other freshman sire in Keeneland September history has had the two days that Vindication has had. The winner of the 2002 GI Breeders' Cup Juvenile and that year's two-year-old champion, Vindication was represented on Monday by a \$2.8-million yearling out of Serena's Tune who was purchased by John Ferguson. The Seattle Slew stallion wasn't done yet, though. Yesterday, a striking dark bay half-brother to Grade I winners Roman Ruler and El Corredor by Vindication was knocked down to Zayat Stables for \$4.6 million. It was the highest price ever paid for a yearling by a freshman sire in the sale's history. John Ferguson, who purchased the Danzig/Sharp Minister colt for \$9.2 million as hip 312, stayed around to vie for hip 318, a son of the Silver Deputy mare Silvery Swan. Ferguson was handed the rare defeat, however, as Ahmed Zayat, with conditioner Bob Baffert sitting to his left inside the sales pavilion, outlasted Team Darley with steady series of \$100,000 bids. Baffert, who trains several Zayat runners, knows something about the colt's pedigree. The silver-haired conditioner trained both El Corredor and Roman Ruler, and was also at the helm during Vindication's championship season. Vindication was retired to John Sikura's Hill 'n' Dale Farm to stand stud, and the sale of hip 318 represented a double-barreled score for Sikura. He not only stands Vindication, but also owns Silvery Swan in partnership with Liberation Farm and Needham/Betz Thoroughbreds. Coming into the sale, Sikura knew he had a star. The only question was, how much would he bring? "I knew that he was the kind of horse where anything could happen," said Sikura.

Sikura continued, "But you really just don't know what's going to happen. It's wealthy, strong-willed people buying what they want. It's nice to have more than one group think that much of your horse." Asked if hip 318 looked like his famous siblings, Sikura said, "Well, he's got similar attributes, but he's his own individual. Every foal out of the mare is spectacular." As for Vindication, there's no doubt that his strong showing at the sale will help keep him popular during next year's breeding season. "It's a credit to the horse and a credit to the people who supported him with their mares," said Sikura when asked what two multi-million dollar yearlings said about Vindication. "We're optimistic about his future. We're glad they've sold well and hope they race well." Silvery Swan, who also produced graded-stakes winner Silver Tornado (Maria's Mon) and a \$2.7-million Mr. Greeley filly at last year's September sale, has a Grand Slam weanling filly on the ground, but is not currently in foal. *L.M.*

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