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Boogie All Night

Daring Dancer gets there in Lake George

TWO UNBEATENS TRY QUICK CALL STAKES • ENTRIES & HANDICAPPING

Weather Watcher

Daring Dancer scores as rain stays away just long enough

BY TOM LAW

LAKE GEORGE RECAP

The ride from the Fair Hill Training Center to Saratoga Race Course on a horse van takes about five hours. It feels a lot longer when you're worried about the weather, even when you're riding in the cab.

Graham Motion knows this as well as anyone at the moment. The trainer lived it Wednesday as he made the trek back to Saratoga in the front of the horse van. The trusty Keith Cooper was at the wheel and Motion made it back with a couple hours to spare before saddling Sagamore Farm homebred Daring Dancer in the \$200,000 Lake George Stakes.

Daring Dancer won the Lake George by a short head over A Little Bit Sassy. The Maryland-bred did it with a powerful stretch rally that might not have materialized if the inner turf course was softened up and wouldn't have happened at all if the Empire Maker filly were scratched.

Motion kept tabs on the weather most of the way and Cooper's radio kept tabs when he didn't.

"Funny enough he has a CB and it sounded off an alarm about weather alerts," Motion said "It went off and I was like, 'oh boy.' So yes, I was wor-



Dave Harmon

Daring Dancer (2) nails A Little Bit Sassy at the wire in the Lake George.

ried and even in the paddock I was worried. It would have been tough to run her if it was really soft."

The storm that ripped through the area – so severe that lightning blasted a tree in the backyard near one of the Union Avenue gates shortly after the finale – arrived subtly with about 13 minutes to post for the Lake George. The seven fillies were already saddled as large raindrops fell from the sky. The rain lightened a bit after the

initial downpour forced many in the paddock under the cover of the saddling-area awnings or the mutuel area behind the clubhouse.

The field stayed in the paddock until seven minutes to post, but by then the rain was so light it didn't stand a chance to soften up the turf course that had been hardened up by a lack of any significant moisture in more than a week.

See **LAKE GEORGE** page 10 ►

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Lake George —

■ Continued from page 8

The firm turf, or maybe just the lack of a soft turf, was an advantage for Daring Dancer in Motion's opinion. He watched Sagamore Farm's homebred struggle home fifth of six in her last start, the \$200,000 Wonder Again Stakes over Memorial Day weekend on a softened-up course rated good at Belmont Park. She'd won her previous three starts, including the Grade 3 Appalachian Stakes at Keeneland on far firmer turf.

The turf didn't hurt A Little Bit Sassy or Florida shipper Daring Kathy, either, and those two and the winner put on a good show in front of a weekday crowd of 8,044. Daring Kathy did what her connections expected her to, going to the front and setting a strong pace with John Velazquez keeping her relaxed.

A Little Bit Sassy, disqualified from first last time in the Grade 3 Regret at Churchill Downs, was the first to pounce after tracking in second the entire way. Romona Bass' daughter of More Than Ready looked home in deep stretch, poised to give trainer Michael Matz and jockey Luis Saez a second graded stakes win on the turf in the meeting's first five days.



Daring Dancer (left) rallies in the stretch of the Lake George.

Tod Marks

Daring Dancer denied that and rebounded from the Wonder Again. Alan Garcia, all over the stable area in the mornings yet riding his first race of the meet, stayed patient, saved ground and angled out in the stretch. She just edged A Little Bit Sassy, with Daring Kathy another 1 1/4 lengths back in third. The time for the 1 1/16 miles was a quick 1:40.92.

"She's so classy," said Sagamore General Manager Tom Mullikin, subbing for owner Kevin Plank. "You saw how she came back, just so professional. We couldn't be any more proud of everyone at the farm."

"Everybody wants to jump off and jump on the bandwagon of horses, athletes, everybody. Graham was confident and we were like, 'yeah, let's go for it. Her first three starts she was a monster. You're

allowed to leave some guys on the bases every once in a while. She hit the ball out of the park today."

Matz felt like A Little Bit Sassy might have been the one to hit the home run until the final jumps. She did everything right this time, unlike in the Regret when she veered out in the stretch and was disqualified to fourth place.

Matz and Saez offered no excuses and the former was one of the first to congratulate the winners.

"The winner's a nice horse," Matz said as he made his way down from the box seats. "They're both nice horses."

Daring Dancer improved to 4-for-5 with the win and padded her earnings to \$230,580. She's the second stakes winner from as many foals to race out of the English-bred Red Ransom mare Vienna Affair, who is also the dam of the Sky Mesa gelding and 2014 Henry Clark Stakes winner Hamp.

Vienna Affair joined the Sagamore broodmare band when agent Bob Feld purchased her for Sagamore in foal with Hamp for \$380,000 at the 2009 Keeneland November breeding stock sale.

"That was tremendous for Sagamore," Motion said. "It's a great achievement, breeding a homebred graded stakes winner. Let's face it, they haven't been doing it that long to be breeding quality horses like this. We were really high on her after Keeneland and we were really conservative over the winter. We didn't take her to Florida, so it was huge to come out and win that race at Keeneland. Then her last race was so disappointing. It was great to see her bounce back. This showed again that she's the kind of filly that won at Keeneland."

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