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DiVito's first-timers all were ready to win

By [Marcus Hersh](#) ([news/marcus-hersh](#))

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, Ill. – During the past decade, Chicago-based trainer Jim DiVito has gotten better and better at preparing 2-year-olds to win their first start at Arlington. So far this summer, he has been perfect.

DiVito has sent out three debuting 2-year-olds at this Arlington meet. All won, and the trio ran fast, according to the Beyer Speed Figure scale. Recount, who scored July 20, got an 86 Beyer, the ninth-fastest figure of 2014. Tulira's Star – subsequently sold by owner-breeder Curtis Green to Team Valor, and third last weekend in the Schuylerville Stakes– got an 88 winning her June 8 debut. And A.P.'s Glory's victory July 10 produced a 92 Beyer, the third highest figure so far this year.

A.P.'s Glory, another Green homebred, is the juvenile for whom DiVito has the highest hopes. She won her debut, at 5 1/2 furlongs on Polytrack, by more than seven lengths, and worked a snappy half-mile Sunday in 47.80 seconds.

"She galloped out really good, so I'm pleased with that work," DiVito said.

DiVito toyed with the idea of pointing A.P.'s Glory to the Del Mar Debutante, but said Monday the filly would make her next start Aug. 2 in the \$100,000 Mountaineer Juvenile Fillies.

DiVito, 64, is the son of a trainer who came up around the Chicago tracks. About 44 years ago, he had a six-month career as a jockey before getting too heavy.

DiVito's training career began in 1973 with a tiny string at Atlantic City Race Course. For years, he galloped his own stock and just kept his head above water: DiVito's first 20-win year didn't come until 1983, and stable earnings didn't surpass a half-million dollars until 1998. Claimers comprised the bulk of his outfit, and it wasn't until about 10 years ago that DiVito began firing with the 2-year-olds.

Between 1991 and 2004, DiVito went 10 for 118 with 2-year-old Arlington starters, but since 2005, his Arlington juvenile record is 46-24-12 from 133 starters, a win rate of 34 percent and a \$2 return on investment of \$3.57.

The numbers with Arlington first-time-starting 2-year-olds the last 10 years are even more dramatic: 25-16-4 from 68 starters, a 37 percent win rate and a \$4.42 ROI.

DiVito has produced those numbers with a small annual pool of juveniles: This summer, for instance, he has nine 2-year-olds at Arlington. Some are homebreds, others come from sales, where DiVito's clients never compete at the high end. A stakes-winning 2-year-old of 2011 was called Twelve Hundred, so named because of his auction price.

The 2-year-olds are broken and trained before coming to the track at Crupi's New Castle Farm in Florida. In May and June at Arlington, DiVito begins the sorting process, determining which young horses will be ready first, which ones want what distance. The focus, clearly, is on early development.

"We do a lot of schooling," DiVito said. "They go in the paddock, go in the gate, all the things they need to go through to race. Working in company is very important. I'll work them in threes sometimes. If I had 25 or 30, I'd take them out in fives. You don't race the horse by itself."

Skeptics would accurately point out many of DiVito's early winners don't develop significantly after their first couple races, but it's difficult to say whether that's due to their inherent characteristics or the way they're guided through the early phase of their career.

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"Some get better, some don't. You get injuries. So many things happen," DiVito said. "Sometimes you look back and see the numbers they ran and the competition they ran against at 2, and you can see why they might not run on."

And it's not like DiVito can't steer the right horse through a multi-season career. Third Chance, one of the better Illinois-bred fillies of recent seasons, had three strong campaigns. DiVito's best horse, the millionaire sprinter Coach Jimi Lee, made his first start in July 2002 and his last in July 2011.

Coach Jimi Lee finished second at Arlington making his career debut at odds of 51-1. These days he would win, but at a fraction of the price.

• The feature on Friday's nine-race late-afternoon card is race 4, a second-level allowance for Illinois-breds going seven furlongs on Polytrack.

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