

Sam Francisco Makes Huge Turnaround For Ohio Trainer Virgil Morgan

**By Tom White
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Sam Francisco

Delaware, Ohio--Sam Francisco was 0 for 10 lifetime when he joined the Virgil Morgan Stable following last fall's Delaware Grand Circuit meeting. Now, nine months later, the 3-year-old colt pacer ranks as one of the early contenders for the 2000 Little Brown Jug.

Sam Francisco won the \$176,936 Max Hempt Memorial on May 27th at Pocono Downs to stay unbeaten this season and is headed for the \$1-million North America Cup (June 17 elims) at Woodbine. He has seven wins in nine starts since joining the Morgan Stable. The colt has also earned \$228,098.

"He finished third by more than 12 lengths to Ain't No Stopn Him at Delaware for trainer Joe Holloway. He was a little small and immature but he was a good training colt," said Morgan, a 34-year-old native of Grove City, Ohio.

Morgan sent Sam Francisco to The Meadows on October 2nd where he was impressive in winning the \$49,500 Keystone Classic in 1:55. Sam Francisco returned to The Meadows on October 16th and captured the \$100,000 Pennsylvania Sires Stakes Championship. "He hadn't qualified for the final but moved into the starting field after a couple of others withdrew," said Morgan.

This strong effort earned Sam Francisco a start in the Breeders Crown at Mohawk Raceway. "He raced real well but finished fourth in his elimination," remembers Morgan.

Sam Francisco's late season surge buoyed the hopes of his trainer and owners John Howard and Jay Corey of Morgantown, WVA. However, Sam Francisco was not ranked on the USTA's pre-season Experimental Ratings released in April.

Sam Francisco, a son of 1994 Jug starter Pacific Rocket, was turned out from November 2nd until early in January when he re-joined the Morgan Stable at Northfield Park.

"He put on weight during the offseason," said Morgan, "and he was muscled up, thicker and a little taller.

"He has a super attitude. He loves to train and he likes to beat other horses. He always keeps his composure and he's very easy to drive and maneuver. If he gets a good post and he's in the right spot I think he can race with the good ones. He has a very big heart."

Sam Francisco's 1:52.3 Max Hempt victory was anything but easy. He was parked wide through the first half (:54.3) and did not take over the lead until just before the three-quarters (1:23.2). He and early leader Gallo Blue Chip paced side by side through the stretch with Sam Francisco hanging onto the narrow victory. Ain't No Stopn Him, who defeated Sam Francisco in the last fall's Standardbred at Delaware and was ranked No.1 in the Experimental Ratings, finished fourth in the Hempt Final.

"To a harness racing person like me winning the Little Brown Jug would be like a thoroughbred trainer winning the Kentucky Derby. My job is too keep my colt fresh. We're giving him this week off and then he goes back to The Meadows for a Pennsylvania Sires Stake before heading to Canada."

Walter Case drove Sam Francisco in his two Hempt Memorial wins but Dave Palone will drive at The Meadows. "We have not decided on a driver for the North America Cup."

Morgan has twice raced colts in the Jug. In 1996 Mattropolis won an elimination in 1:52.3 and was fifth in the final standings. Gifted Cowboy was sixth in a 1997 elimination.

For the past two seasons Morgan, who now lives on a farm in Bloomingburg, Ohio, has been the second winningest trainer in North America. He had 364 wins in 1999. Through USTA stats of May 31, Morgan ranks No. 1 this season with 152 wins. He has also been Scioto Downs' leading trainer for the past five seasons and in 1999 won the Northfield Park winter title. Morgan has 60 horses at Scioto Downs, 15 under an assistant's care at The Meadowlands, and 10 turnouts.

Sam Francisco was also bred by John Howard, who owns three automobile agencies in Morgantown. Howard sold an interest to Jay Corey in February of 1999. Both Howard and his business associate Corey have owned Standardbreds for many years including the \$191,645 winner French Ballet.

The 55th Little Brown Jug will be raced Thursday afternoon, September 21st at the Delaware, Ohio County Fair.