

Year 26

Thursday, June 4, 2026

The **Saratoga**

Special

Belmont Stakes Racing Festival 2026

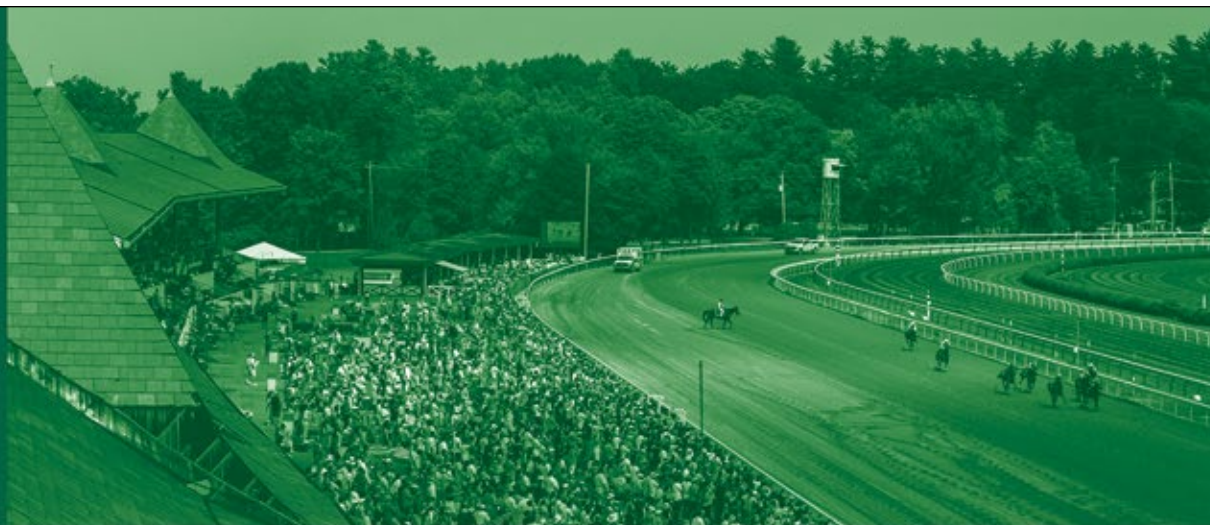
Scene Setting

Saratoga hosts its third Belmont Stakes

**THURSDAY STAKES PREVIEWS
NEW YORK SHOWCASE RECAP
ENTRIES & HANDICAPPING**

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Here&There...in Saratoga

Quips, Quotes, Names, Numbers & Notes found along the way

Worth Repeating

"The goat did not eat the hundred dollars."

Trainer Adrienne DeVaux,
sharing really good news Tuesday morning

"So you're going to edit all this, right?"

Trainer David Duggan, halfway through
an interview (we took out all the good parts)

"That's a good Beyer Number."

Valet Nick Santagata when hearing about Miles Clancy's GPA

"Let me see if I can get a job in there."

Retired valet John Mallano, standing
outside the jocks' room Wednesday afternoon

"Same place. Different year."

Trainer Mark Casse while standing near
the three-eighths pole of the main track

"It's the game we play, as you say."

Longtime reader Mickey Millson to *The Special's*
Sean Clancy after a tough beat Wednesday

"It was so many things."

Assistant Sam Bussanich,
about running the London Marathon

"Trading the two wheels for the four wheels huh?"

Security guard to Tom Law, rolling into the Oklahoma gate
on East Avenue Wednesday morning in *The Special's* golf cart

"Wait, they had a dog and pony show?"

The Special's Alec DiConza to Sean Clancy when he
mentioned "the dog and pony show" at Colgate University

"I'm going to take that Oklahoma track, box it up and take it back to Santa
Anita with me."

Steve Andersen, *Daily Racing Form's* longtime Southern
California-based writer, making his Saratoga debut Wednesday

"He's cocky but he's not arrogant at all."

Trainer Lisa Bartkowski after leading rider **Irado Ortiz Jr.** rode **Being Betty** to victory in Wednesday's **Mount Vernon**

"I've never been in this room, ever. Wow."

Owner Mike Hoffman, walking into the **Carmen Barrera Room** for a toast after **Being Betty's** win

"It's New York Day."

The Special's Joe Clancy, wearing his **Funny Cide T-shirt** at the office Wednesday afternoon



Samantha Decker

Derby Finery. Kentucky Derby winner Golden Tempo and assistant trainer Enrique Miranda step off the van at Saratoga Race Course.

Quote of the Day



"I'm going to take that Oklahoma track, box it up and take it back to Santa
Anita with me."

Steve Andersen, *Daily Racing Form's* longtime Southern
California-based writer, making his Saratoga debut Wednesday

Word Salad Special

Jockey John Velazquez rides 19 horses with one-word names over the first four cards of the Belmont Stakes Racing Festival at Saratoga Race Course. Tuesday afternoon, *The Special's* Joe Clancy took it as a challenge to use all 19 in a paragraph.

The home run **Landed** like it was **Unfair** as the crowd from **Wynstock** stood to cheer the home team in the **Bourboncentric** arena. The **Perpetual** arm of **Glavine** couldn't summon the strength one more time and he succumbed to a general feeling of **Metfardeh**, like a loss on the town field in **Edgerton**. **Gratefully**, the game was only in the eighth inning and despite the **Corruption** of the umpire **Sorrentino**, who instead of **Praying** for better eyesight rung up **Bramito** on a debatable call. Next up was the intrepid **Mentee** of the third-base coach **Gezora**, who set his bat to **Obliteration** after studying the scouting report like an **Antiquarian**, and figuring out the bat/ball **Integration**, responded to the manager's **Commandment** with a game-winning hit.

The Saratoga
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Editors/Publishers/Owners:

Sean Clancy: (302) 545-7713. sean@thisishorseracing.com ♦ **Joe Clancy:** (302) 545-4424. joe@thisishorseracing.com

Managing Editor: Tom Law: (859) 396-9407. tom@thisishorseracing.com

Writers: Paul Halloran, Alec DiConza, Darby O'Brien. **Photographers:** Dave Harmon, Samantha Decker.

Designer: Ruthie Bowen. **Distribution:** Rob Whitlock, Craig Healy. **Marketing/Social Media:** Melissa Bauer-Herzog.

Handicappers: Charles Bedard, Jessica Paquette, John Shapazian, Rob Whitlock.

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Here&There...in Saratoga

Quips, Quotes, Names, Numbers & Notes found along the way

License Plate of the Day

TACK UP, Maryland.

By The Numbers

4: Vehicles (two golf carts, two SUVs) waiting for Belmont Stakes favorite Renegade to cross a street in the Oklahoma stable area Tuesday at 9:48 a.m.

3: Consecutive Belmont Stakes winners with one-word names. Arcangelo, Dornoch, Sovereignty. No pressure Powershift, Renegade, Otinho and Commandment.

38: East-bound cars stopped at the horse crossing on Union Avenue at 9:12 Tuesday morning

57: Horses in the \$25,000 Upperville Thoroughbred Hunter Derby at the Upperville Colt and Horse Show Tuesday evening

Names of the Day

Irish Jig, second race. The 3-year-old filly, a winner at Delaware Park last month and part of the Jersey Girl Stakes field, is by Irish War Cry out of Contradance.

Noble Dynasty, third race. Bred and owned by Besilu Stable, the 3-year-old colt is by Kingman out of Delta's Royalty. Pedigree-wise, he's from a noble family too as his granddam is champion and Hall of Famer Royal Delta. She died 10 days after foaling Noble Dynasty's dam. Fifth dam Proud Delta was also a champion.

Reality Star, fourth race. The Will Farish homebred, a 4-year-old filly who broke her maiden at Keeneland in April, is out of Daily Cast.

Roja, eighth race. The Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners and Madaket Stable filly, part of the Grade 2 Intercontinental field, is out of Redmeansgo.



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Smiling Faces. Outriders Page Spangler (left) and Gio Martinez keep an eye on things at the track in the morning. Samantha Decker

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Saratoga Race Course hosts the Belmont Stakes for the third (and final?) time as construction of the new Belmont Park nears completion. The old place gets a good one as Saturday's field includes the first, second and fourth horses from the Kentucky Derby five weeks ago at Churchill Downs plus the Florida Derby winner and Peter Pan winner in a field of nine.

Post time Saturday is 7:04 p.m. on a 14-race card that starts at 11 a.m.

1. Vitruvian Man, 30-1

B. c., Vino Rosso-Caradini, Bernardini. Breeders: Glenn Sorgenstein, W.C. Racing. Owners: Glenn Sorgenstein, W.C. Racing, Run Fast Racing. Trainer: Doug O'Neill. Jockey: Antonio Fresu. Keeneland maiden winner in October finished third in Santa Anita Derby, his only start of 2026. Will want a fast pace to close into, but should appreciate the 1 1/4 miles.

2. Powershift, 12-1

Dk. b./br. c., Constitution-Free Flying Soul, Quiet American. Breeder: Liberty Road Stable. Owner: Repole Stable. Trainer: Todd Pletcher. Jockey: Luis Saez. Cost \$500,000 as a yearling at Keeneland September, but was unraced at 2. Strong second to Belmont rival Emerging Market in debut at Tampa Bay Downs in February, then a rough sixth in the Tampa Bay Derby. Rebounded with ripper maiden win at Churchill Downs on Derby Day. Gives away experience, but brings talent to the fray.



3. Chief Wallabee, 3-1

B. c., Constitution-A La Lucie, Medaglia d'Oro. Breeders/Owners: Mike and Katherine Ball. Trainer: Bill Mott. Jockey: Junior Alvarado. Debut winner in January at Gulfstream Park has been banging away at graded stakes since with a second in the Fountain of Youth, a third in the Florida Derby and a fourth in the Kentucky Derby when behind Saturday rivals Commandment (twice), Golden Tempo and Renegade. Practically guaranteed a better trip than his Derby run while eyeing Belmont repeat for trainer and jockey.

4. Renegade, 2-1

B. c., Into Mischief-Spice Is Nice, Curlin. Breeders: Robert and Lawana Low. Owners: Repole Stable and Robert and Lawana Low. Trainer: Todd Pletcher. Jockey: Irad Ortiz Jr. Found quirky ways to lose maiden starts last year when third behind runaway winner It's Our Time at Saratoga and disqualified from a score at Aqueduct in October. After closing 2025 with a second in the Remsen, he won the Sam Davis at Tampa in February and shined in the Grade 1 Arkansas Derby in March. Second to Belmont foe Golden Tempo (by a neck) in Kentucky after getting bounced around at the start. Gets a chance for reversal points in Triple Crown finale while looking to give trainer his fifth win in the classic.

5. Otinho, 20-1

B. c., Quality Road-Quiet Giant, Giant's Causeway. Breeder/Owner: Three Chimneys Farm. Trainer: Chad Brown. Jockey: Dylan Davis. Juvenile campaign included a maiden win going 1 1/8 miles at Aqueduct on New Year's Eve while 2026 featured a second in the Grade 1 Blue Grass at Keeneland. Winner of that, Further Ado, finished 11th in the Derby and opts for the Matt Winn at Churchill Downs Sunday instead of a Belmont try. Wins the pedigree race as a half-brother to Gun Runner. Sire and dam represented Virginia-breeder Ned Evans.

6. Growth Equity, 12-1

B. c., Nyquist-My Dear Venezuela, Wildcat Heir. Breeder: Stone Farm. Owner: Klaravich Stable. Trainer: Chad Brown. Jockey: Manny Franco. Second at Saratoga

on debut last summer and an Aqueduct maiden winner in March. Won Grade 3 Peter Pan, producer of Belmont winners Arcangelo, Tonalist, A.P. Indy and Coastal among others.

7. Commandment, 6-1

B. c., Into Mischief-Sippican Harbor, Orb. Breeder: Lee Pokoik. Owner: Wathnan Racing. Trainer: Brad Cox. Jockey: John Velazquez. Sent off at 6-1 in the Derby, he finished seventh after a slow start. Came into that off four consecutive wins – a maiden, the Mucho Macho Man Stakes, the Fountain of Youth and the Florida Derby. Jockey eyes third Belmont win, trainer his second. Dam won the 2018 Spinaway at Saratoga.

8. Emerging Market, 6-1

Ch. c., Candy Ride-Wild Empress, Empire Maker. Breeder: Stoneriggs Farm. Owner: Klaravich Stable. Trainer: Chad Brown. Jockey: Flavien Prat. Tenth in the Derby after losing a shoe in just the third start of his life. Gets back to a normal race (nine runners. vs. 18) in the Belmont after winning February maiden at Tampa and Grade 2 Louisiana Derby, over Kentucky Derby winner Golden Tempo.

9. Golden Tempo, 9-2

B. c., Curlin-Carrumba, Bernardini. Breeders/Owners: Phipps Stable and St. Elias Stable. Trainer: Cherie DeVaux. Jockey: Jose Ortiz. Helped trainer make history as first woman to win the Kentucky Derby as a trainer. Came from last of 18 early while closing into fast pace and fighting past Renegade in the final stages to win by a neck. Came into that off similar late-running thirds in the Risen Star and Louisiana Derby. Will likely have to be closer to pace, but also should have less traffic to navigate. Jockey won 2017 Belmont with Tapwrit and has been second three times. Dam broke her maiden at Saratoga in 2015.

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6/6 **CLASSIC Q**
\$500,000 Just A Game (G1)

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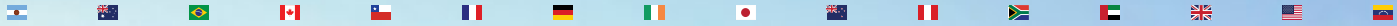
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In his Cups

Tawny Port eyes big chance in 2-mile Melbourne qualifier

BY ALEC DICONZA

A trip to Australia this fall sounds pretty good to trainer Miguel Clement.

“My wife has been dying to go to Australia,” he said. “I don’t know what that means for me. I would love to go.”

Today, Clement – and Acacia – have a good chance to earn a working vacation to the down under when he saddles Peachtree Stable’s Tawny Port in the Grade 2 \$250,000 Belmont Gold Cup. A victory would guarantee the son of Pioneerof The Nile an entry into the prestigious Melbourne Cup, run on the first Tuesday of November at Flemington Racecourse in Melbourne, Australia.

Clement watched his horses return from training Sunday morning and joked with exercise rider Ben Rabillard about the possible opportunity.

“Ben, would you like to go to Australia? . . . If Tawny Port wins the Gold Cup, you might have to go,” he yelled.

“Perfect, I’ll go,” Rabillard, a former rider throughout Europe and Australia, joked back. “I know my way around Melbourne pretty well.”

Tawny Port ran in last year’s Belmont Gold Cup, a 2-mile turf stakes for older horses, but didn’t exactly get a fair shot after heavy rain forced



Samantha Decker

Navy Seal won at Saratoga last summer.

BELMONT GOLD CUP PREVIEW

the race to the main track just before the field entered the paddock. Flavien Prat eased him home in seventh, 81 lengths behind victorious Parchment Party.

“I was devastated because I thought we were sitting on a good race,” Clement said. “That day, we had two good chances, Tawny Port and La Mehana. La Mehana excelled (over soft turf). She won the Glens Falls by 8 3/4 (lengths) on the soft and she would’ve loved soft turf that day. Tawny Port, I’m sure, stays. I thought we had a serious chance.”

It’s easy to excuse Tawny Port’s effort last year and look at today with optimism. After the Gold Cup, he returned to finish second in two long-distance races at Kentucky Downs and come up a nose shy of winning the Grade 1 Canadian International. A ninth in the Breeders’ Cup Turf capped his 2025 and a fourth in the Grade 2 Elkhorn started his 2026.

Between his late father Christophe Clement coming up a head short with Champagne Juan in the 2024 Gold Cup and the washout from last year, Miguel Clement looks for some luck.

“I’m very excited to see him run 2 miles,” he said. “He’s one of the best we have at Saratoga at the moment. He doesn’t win often, but he always runs a great race. I’m expecting an A-plus race from him. He loves training, he’s enthusiastic, he’s a good mover. He’s already run 2 miles at Kentucky Downs, and then we ran him six days later and he nearly won the \$3.5 million race going a mile and a half.”

The 7-year-old, 3-1 second choice on the morning line, hasn’t won since the 2023 John’s Call at Saratoga



Samantha Decker

Tawny Port (right) works with Don’t Jinx It at Belmont Park in May.

ga and aims to end a 17-race losing streak that includes nine top-three finishes. The \$2,187,093 earner will break from post three with Prat aboard for the first time since last year’s Gold Cup.

The Clement barn is familiar with the race’s 7-5 morning-line favorite Corruption, a Mark Casse trainee who twice finished a neck behind Clement stable star Far Bridge in the Grade 3 Pan American at Gulfstream. Tawny Port and Corruption have faced each other twice, each finishing ahead of the other once.

“On paper, Corruption scares me,” Clement said. “We’ve narrowly defeated him several times. He tries hard and he’s been unlucky not to already have a signature win, to be frank . . . He’s actually a hard-hitting horse. I have a lot of respect for that horse.”

John Velazquez rides Corruption and tries to sweep all three Belmont Gold Cups at Saratoga after wins aboard The Grey Wizard and Parchment Party. Corruption has never run beyond 12 furlongs, but boasts three graded stakes placings at that distance.

“As long as he’ll settle for Johnny, which I think he will, he’ll run all day,” Casse said.

Owned by Eclipse Thoroughbred

Partners and Harry Colburn, Corruption has come a long way over the last 17 months, when the son of Medaglia d’Oro won a \$35,000 maiden claimer at Gulfstream by a half-length. That victory started a three-race win streak before his first loss to Far Bridge. Most recently, he finished third in the Grade 1 Turf Classic on the Kentucky Derby card.

“In his first start, he was injured up here,” Casse said, referring to Corruption’s debut in July 2023. “And then we got him six months later and it took us a year to get him to the races. First time, he didn’t run very well. Then we ran him for a claiming price and he won. Irad (Ortiz Jr.) rode him that day and came back and said, ‘Don’t ever run him in another claiming race.’ Luckily, we got away with it and Irad was right.”

The race’s oldest horse, Flashiest ships in for California-based trainer Leonard Powell. The 8-year-old son of Mizzen Mast was Powell’s first Saratoga starter when he finished last of 11 in the 2021 Saratoga Derby and returns with the hopes of making his second cross-country trip more memorable. Powell believes Flashiest is more prepared than he was in 2021.

“After he won the Oceanside at

Continued on Page 10

HISTORY DOESN'T REPEAT ITSELF.

BUT HE DOES.



SEVEN STRAIGHT CHAMPION SIRE TITLES.

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INTO

Mischief



SPENDTHRIFT

Gold Cup -

■ Continued from page 8

Del Mar, he got invited to the Saratoga Derby,” Powell said. “We came here, but he was still very tender in his mind and things didn’t go very well. He came back to Del Mar and ran second in the Del Mar Derby. He’s a bit better in his mind, and he seems to be doing better this year over longer distances. It’s a challenge the owners were keen to take, of running him over 2 miles. Hopefully, he’ll have a good showing on Thursday.”

Like Tawny Port, Flashiest rolls in on a string of close defeats. He hasn’t won since May 26, 2024 but has finished second in five of his last six, including in the Grade 2 Charles Whittingham last out. Powell would be content with another second in a race like the Gold Cup, but hopes the gelding can do one better.

“He’s very trip dependent, so a lot of the time he runs very good races, he just gets nosed at the end,” Powell said. “Hopefully, the 2 miles is the difference maker. It’s a tough field and he’s done well in California, which is



Samantha Decker

Corruption exits a third in the Grade 1 Turf Classic.

not the same standard as back east. He’s a horse that’s doing well. I was very happy with his last work. It’s a challenge we are happy to take.”

Flashiest arrived over the weekend and is stabled in the Clement barn thanks to a friendship with Christophe Clement developed when the latter would ship to the West Coast. Powell helped Miguel Clement school

some of his horses in the Saratoga paddock Tuesday.

“I was good friends with his dad,” Powell said. “His dad was a bit of a mentor to all of us. I’m good friends with Miguel and he was kind enough to host us.”

Powell isn’t sure about whether the Melbourne Cup would come after a possible Belmont Gold Cup victory,

but he’s excited about the prospect of winning at Saratoga for the first time.

“Any win means a lot,” he said, “but Saratoga would be even more special, for sure.”

Owned by Wachtel Stable, Gary Barber and Nicolas Drion, Flashiest will break from the rail under Irad Ortiz Jr. He sits at 5-1 on the morning line.

Navy Seal won an 11-furlong allowance here last summer for trainer Wesley Ward and followed that with a win at Kentucky Downs. He finished third in the Elkhorn last out, ahead of Tawny Port. The Irish-bred is the 9-2 third choice on the morning line.

Concord Green goes out for trainer Shug McGaughey following a second in a 12-furlong Keeneland turf allowance. Ninth in the Elkhorn, Irish-bred Fleetfoot was third in a 2 1/2-mile maiden hurdle May 2, but rebounded to win a 2-mile turf allowance restricted to hurdle starters at Fair Hill 10 days ago. Miztertonic, a two-time winner at Saratoga, and Worthington, third to Fleetfoot in the John Forbes Memorial at Far Hills last year, complete the field with last year’s winner Parchment Party entered for the main track only.



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Return Start

Gratefully puts 5-for-5 record on line in Gr. 2

BY TOM LAW

Rob Falcone Jr. doesn't feel pressure when it comes to training Gratefully.

He might after putting the tack on the 4-year-old daughter of Laoban before today's Grade 2 Intercontinental Stakes at Saratoga Race Course. Or he might not. Such is the way with an undefeated major player in a \$250,000 stakes on Day 2 of the Belmont Stakes Racing Festival.

"Those are the easier ones," Falcone said Wednesday morning in his shedrow on the far turn of the main track. "The good horses are easier to train. You just stay out of their way, keep them happy and run them. The tougher ones are the cheaper horses, the claimers that you've got to give a lot of TLC.

"I always say, the really good horses, they're easy to train but tough to get. It's harder to get owners to give you them, but once you get them, they're easier to deal with."

Gratefully proved a good one to get after she arrived in Falcone's barn at Belmont Park with one start under her belt – a 6-length victory in an off-the-turf maiden claiming race last summer at Saratoga for trainer Ray Handal. She won that day for Adelphi Racing Club and then added a second victory about a month later, again in an off-the-turf race, for the same connections.

Shelly and Russell Hume came on board with Adelphi after that and Gratefully won her first start for that team in a 6-furlong turf optional claimer in late October at Aqueduct.

Falcone sent a string to Southern California for the winter, including Gratefully, who won another optional claimer at 6 furlongs in early January before a gritty victory over the well-regarded European import Saratoga Special in the \$102,000 Wishing Well Stakes in February, both at Santa Anita Park.

"She's been great for us," Falcone said. "She won nicely for us first time out, even though it was for a tag. She loves to train, likes to run, carries herself well and has a good mind. I liked her when she first came in. When we started running her she



Benoit Photo

Gratefully jets in from California for the Intercontinental Stakes.

showed the grit she has and the heart and determination when she battled back to beat Wesley Ward's horse (Di Natale) over at Aqueduct on the grass. Then she did it again in California when she battled back and won the stake last time."

Falcone tried to run Gratefully in the Grade 2 Giant's Causeway in mid-April at Keeneland but had to scratch when the filly came up with a foot



Coady Media

In Our Time comes off a Keeneland stakes win.

bruise. Four of the Giant's Causeway runners – including winner In Our Time and runner-up Creed's Gold – are back for the 5 1/2-furlong Intercontinental.

Gratefully comes into today's turf stakes off a more than three-month break, which Falcone doesn't necessarily see as a positive.

"Well, it's never a good time when you're the favorite in a \$250,000 race and you have to scratch," Falcone said. "Could be everything happens for a reason so you've got to take it as it is, move on from there and put it in the past and keep going. We're here now, she's ready and doing great."

John Velazquez takes the mount on Gratefully, the 4-1 third choice on the morning line behind 3-1 pick In Our Time and 7-2 second choice Shoot It True. Twirling Queen, Ready To Jam, Love Cervere, Time To Dazzle, Italian Soiree and Roja are also entered for the grass, while Bam's Bliss Kiss is entered for the main track.

The Intercontinental goes as the eighth race on today's 11-race card with post time of 4:27 p.m.

Carmel Coast heads to Jersey Girl

Carmel Coast proved sweet as can be at 2. Much to trainer Whit Beckman's delight, not much has changed on that front.

"She's very consistent and she's got a great mind

Continued on Page 14

WHERE GENERATIONS OF CHAMPIONS PREPARE FOR WHAT'S NEXT

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Steven Wood served as Del Mar's facilities and track manager until May 2025 when he relocated to Florida with his family to become Oak Ridge Training Center's Track Superintendent.

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Previews -

■ Continued from page 12

on her,” he said Wednesday. “No variation from who she was to who she is now.”

Carmel Coast returns to Saratoga for today’s \$175,000 Jersey Girl Stakes, coming off an impressive allowance win in her seasonal debut May 1 at Churchill Downs.

“There were a couple of sprints, one-turn races, that we looked at,” Beckman said, “There was one in Kentucky, the Leslie’s Lady, that was 7 [furlongs] and this one is 6 1/2. We think she’s a really high-quality filly and will eventually end up in her division in graded stakes. The Leslie’s Lady looked like a graded stakes already. It came up really tough, with Explora and On Time Girl. It was just really quality, really fast fillies running down there and we just decided that this race came up a little lighter. And since we already have horses here anyway, we just decided to bring her up and give her another start at 6 1/2 rather than stretching her out just yet.”

Carmel Coast debuted at Saratoga last summer, dominating a 6 1/2-furlong maiden by 5 1/2 lengths. Following that effort, she entered the Grade 1 Fризette at 1 mile on Aqueduct’s main track. She fin-



Dave Harmon

A debut winner at Saratoga last summer, Carmel Coast looks for her first stakes win.

ished sixth as the favorite.

“We knew that at the end of the year we would give her a break through the winter,” Beckman said. “Just like any 2-year-old, she was going through some changes and we felt the time off would benefit her. Turns out we were right.”

The filly returned off her 7-month layoff in ex-

cellent form, winning by 2 lengths in a 6 1/2-furlong optional claimer at Churchill Downs on Kentucky Oaks Day.

“We were really happy with her 3-year-old debut,” Beckman said. “She came back from her time off. She’s doing great, she’s done everything she’s supposed to do.”

Carmel Coast faces a field of six in pursuit of her first stakes victory. Morning-line favorite Mythical returns to Saratoga for trainer Jorge Delgado, coming off back-to-back stakes victories at Gulfstream Park. The St. Patrick’s Day filly displayed an affinity for Saratoga last summer with triumphs in the Tremont Stakes and Grade 3 Adirondack Stakes. Cherie DeVaux enters Paige Turner, who finished second to Carmel Coast in that May 1 allowance. Goodall enters off a fifth in the Grade 2 Eight Belles Stakes for trainer Steve Asmussen. The daughter of Yaupon scored her first stakes victory in the Purple Martin Stakes at Oaklawn Park in March. Oscar Bound and Irish Jig complete the field.

— Darby O’Brien

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Strike Thrower

Glavine makes pitch in Grade 3 turf stakes

BY ALEC DICONZA

Tom Morley went to sleep at 8:30 Sunday night, woke up around 2 the next morning and immediately jumped in the car to drive from New York City to Saratoga. His mission was to make it in time to watch his first set train on the main track, and he succeeded.

Morley will have plenty more missions throughout the week, but perhaps none more pressing than when he sends out Glavine in today's Grade 3 \$300,000 Pennine Ridge Stakes. Owned by West Paces Racing, Rainbow's End Racing Stable and Michael Lyden, Glavine has only raced twice – making him the co-least experienced horse in the field – but has made his limited time on the race-track count. He finished second by a head in his debut at Saratoga last August, then went to the shelf for eight months but returned with a 3 1/2-length score over a maiden field at Aqueduct just under four weeks ago.

"He's a really nice horse who was a bit unlucky to lose up here last year," Morley said. "He came out of the race with a bit of a shin, so we gave him the winter off and brought him back. He has trained very, very well. I was hopeful but nervous about the first start this year because you always think that if they're as good as you hope they are, then they're going to get the job done, but there were horses in that maiden with some fairly decent credentials. So to win and win like he did . . . just hoping he can do it again on Thursday."

Morley has always felt Glavine had ability, but acknowledges the difficulty of overcoming a lack of experience in a race like the Pennine Ridge. The 1 1/16-mile turf affair for 3-year-olds is often a steppingstone to the Grade 1 Belmont Derby in early July.

"You want them to fulfill the expectations that you have of them, but to do this on his third career start, we've seen how easy it is for horses who are lightly raced against seasoned opposition to come unstuck," Morley said.

Glavine drew post eight in the nine-horse field and will be ridden by Hall of Famer John Velazquez



Coglianesse Photo

Glavine eyes his repeat of his maiden score at Aqueduct May 10.

for the second straight time. These two factors add to Morley's confidence.

"I do like the draw," he said. "That gives him a real chance to put himself in whatever position Johnny and he want to be in. Around these turf tracks here with a slightly inexperienced horse, you probably don't want to be down inside and then the hustle and bustle. He's a big, strong horse who should get himself into good position. He's taken a step forward from his first run this year. It's a very good race, it's a graded stakes on Belmont week. But, I think he belongs in there and I'm looking forward to it."

Glavine's name comes with its share of irony.



Coady Media

West End Kid has won two in a row.

West Paces Racing, an ownership group based in Atlanta, Ga., named the son of Not This Time after Hall of Fame pitcher Tom Glavine, who pitched for the Atlanta Braves for the majority of his 21-year Major League Baseball career. Rainbow's End Racing, on the other hand, is a syndicate based in New York. Glavine played for the New York Mets after signing a \$42.5 million contract in 2003, and did not match the standard he set while playing for the Braves. Morley laughed as he hinted that Rainbow's End Racing's owners were among the disappointed Mets fans.

The equine Glavine sits as the 4-1 third choice on the morning line. The 9-5 favorite is Mo Speed Racing's West End Kid, who comes off two open-length victories in Kentucky over the 1 1/16-mile distance. Trainer Will Walden is no stranger to success with male turf horses – he'll send out likely favorite Rhetorical in Saturday's Grade 1 Manhattan – and likes what he sees from the bay son of Twirling Candy.

"It's like comparing kids, you don't want to do it, but it reminds me of the way Rhetorical's first couple of wins against state-bred company were," Walden said about West End Kid's last two performances. "I can't speak highly enough about the horse. He's just a good horse and we're excited to get him out there and take the next step into stakes company."

Purchased for \$350,000 at the OBS April sale last spring, West End Kid finished a closing fourth

Continued on Page 18



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Pennine Ridge -

■ Continued from page 16

in a maiden at Gulfstream before getting the job done by 3 1/2 lengths at Keeneland at second asking and winning an allowance-optional at Aqueduct by 3 3/4 lengths a month later. Walden said that the West End Kid of today is the result of immense patience from both himself and the colt's owner.

"We're super grateful to Scott Mawaka of Mo Speed Racing for giving us the opportunity. I was telling somebody this morning, it's tough when people buy out of the 2-year-old sales, it's generally because they don't want to have to wait. Obviously, he didn't get started until February of this year," Walden said. "Just credit to Scott for allowing us to take our time and allowing patience to pay off. He never left the barn, he didn't go home. He was in the barn the whole time and just needed a lot of patience. He had to figure it out on his own. He was really green and really just backward and immature."

Now 2-for-3 with earnings of \$139,954, West End Kid looks to earn his first graded stakes victory in his first try. Like Morley, Walden acknowledged the difficulty while remaining confident against the likes of Grade 2 winner Bottas from the barn of Miguel Clement.

"It's a formidable field, a lot of tough horses," he said. "Miguel's horse hasn't been seen since the



Bottas makes his first start of 2026 in Thursday's turf stakes.

Dave Harmon

Breeders' Cup, you would only imagine he'd move forward from his 2-year-old to his 3-year-old year. Morley's horse, that was an impressive maiden win. Going against winners for the first time is always tough, but with good horses, sometimes it's not as tough. The rest of the field is formidable. He has got to bring his A-game . . . I wanted to wait until the Belmont Derby, honestly, but I didn't think I could hold him on the ground for that long."

West End Kid breaks from the outside with Tyler Gaffalione in the saddle.

The lone graded stakes winner the field, Bottas makes his first start since a ninth in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf last fall. Prior to that, the son of Vekoma proved himself with a debut win on Travers Day and a victory in the Grade 2 Pilgrim at Aqueduct. He'll break from the rail with Manny Franco.

"He's doing very well," Clement said. "It's just a question of if he's quite tight enough. But, he loves Saratoga, he has settled in well. The first race off a long layoff is always a bit of a concern. Nevertheless, it's all positive signs coming back home."

Gary Barber's Blackmail made a big step up last out to win the Woodhaven for trainer Mark Casse. The gelding ended a three-race losing streak when rushing up the rail to finish with a neck advantage under Javier Castellano, who returns for the mount.

"He was gelded and I thought Javier did a great job with him," Casse said. "That was a big race. You want to see if he can repeat it. Looks great."

Noble Dynasty finished fifth behind Bottas in the Pilgrim and exits a second in a Keeneland allowance. Blinging It Back has raced on turf for each of his last four starts and added a turf stakes-placing to his resume when third in the Cutler Bay at Gulfstream. Longshots Chips And Fish, Time For America and Asked And Answered complete the field with Talk To Me Jimmy entered for the main track only. The Pennine Ridge will go as the third race with a post time of 1:40 p.m.

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Blackmail (Javier Castellano) tries to repeat their Woodhaven score.

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:21

SULTANA

Orchid S. (G3)
Maple Leaf S. (G3)



BREEZED IN
:09 ⁴/₅

SOLITUDE DUDE

Bay Shore Stakes



BREEZED IN
:20 ³/₅

QUEEN MAXIMA

Las Cienegas S. (G3)
Unbridled Sidney S. (G3)
Monrovia S. (G3)



BREEZED IN
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Kelly's Landing S. (G3)
Palos Verdes S. (G3)



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Seaway S. (G3)

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SARATOGA ENTRIES

Thursday, June 4.

1ST (12:35PM). \$115,000, MSW, 2 YO, F, 5 1/2F

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Pic 5, Daily Double

1	.....1	.....Perpetual	.....J. Velazquez	.....T. Pletcher	.....7-2
2	.....2	.....Mel Went Home	.....T. Gaffalione	.....R. Medina	.....15-1
3	.....3	.....Luminous Beauty	.....F. Prat	.....J. Antonucci	.....4-1
4	.....4	.....Dinner Party	.....I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....T. Pletcher	.....6-1
5	.....5	.....Mindee's World	.....K. Carmouche	.....J. Englehart	.....5-1
6	.....6	.....Margie's Girl	.....J. Ortiz	.....K. McPeck	.....3-1
7	.....7	.....Biblical Justice	.....D. Davis	.....C. Summers	.....6-1
8	.....8	.....So Angelina	.....D. Rivera	.....A. Arriaga	.....30-1
9	.....9	.....Saysomethingnice	.....S. Bridgmohan	.....M. Giddings	.....15-1

2ND (1:07PM). \$175,000, STK - THE JERSEY GIRL, 3 YO, F, 6F

Exacta, Quinella, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Pic 4, Daily Double

1	.....1	.....Carmel Coast	.....T. Gaffalione	.....D. Beckman	.....5-2
2	.....2	.....Oscar Bound	.....S. Bridgmohan	.....M. Giddings	.....30-1
3	.....3	.....Goodall	.....F. Prat	.....S. Asmussen	.....9-2
4	.....4	.....Paige Turner	.....J. Ortiz	.....C. DeVaux	.....4-1
5	.....5	.....Irish Jig	.....C. Cedeno	.....K. Deiter	.....12-1
6	.....6	.....Mythical	.....E. Zayas	.....J. Delgado	.....1-1

3RD (1:40PM). \$300,000, STK - THE PENNINE RIDGE, 3 YO, 11/16M (INNER TURF)

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Daily Double, Pic 5

1	.....1	.....Bottas	.....M. Franco	.....M. Clement	.....7-2
2	.....2	.....Chips and Fish	.....C. Elliott	.....A. Arriaga	.....50-1
3	.....3	.....Time for America	.....K. Carmouche	.....M. Nihei	.....15-1
4	.....4	.....Noble Dynasty	.....J. Alvarado	.....W. Mott	.....6-1
5	.....5	.....Blackmail	.....J. Castellano	.....M. Casse	.....8-1
6	.....6	.....Blinging It Back	.....J. Ortiz	.....M. Casse	.....6-1
7	.....7	.....Asked and Answered	.....R. Silvera	.....A. Arriaga	.....50-1
8	.....8	.....Glavine	.....J. Velazquez	.....T. Morley	.....4-1
9	.....9	.....West End Kid	.....T. Gaffalione	.....W. Walden	.....9-5
10	.....AE-MTO	.....Talk to Me Jimmy	.....Rider TBA	.....R. Rodriguez	.....6-5

4TH (2:13PM). \$120,000, AOC \$55,000, 3 YO'S & UP, F & M, 11/8M

Exacta, Quinella, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Daily Double, Pic 4

1	.....1	.....Bernieandtherose	.....K. Davis	.....D. Schettino	.....12-1
2	.....2	.....Pure Joy	.....T. Gaffalione	.....S. Asmussen	.....5-1
3	.....3	.....U Lite Up My Life	.....D. Davis	.....S. Joseph, Jr.	.....10-1
4	.....4	.....Chit Chat	.....J. Alvarado	.....W. Mott	.....20-1
5	.....5	.....Measure	.....J. Ortiz	.....M. Casse	.....10-1
6	.....6	.....Directive	.....F. Prat	.....C. Brown	.....4-5
7	.....7	.....Metfardeh	.....J. Velazquez	.....T. Pletcher	.....6-1
8	.....8	.....Reality Star	.....I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....C. McGaughey III	.....8-1

5TH (2:46PM). \$115,000, MSW, 3 YO'S & UP, F & M, 5 1/2F (TURF)

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Daily Double, Pic 5

1	.....1	.....My Divine Spirit (GB)	.....J. Ortiz	.....J. Abreu	.....5-1
2	.....2	.....Dance Class	.....J. Alvarado	.....W. Mott	.....10-1
3	.....3	.....Immortal Poet (GB)	.....D. Davis	.....R. Falcone, Jr.	.....12-1
4	.....4	.....Bourbon Milk Punch	.....I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....H. De Paz	.....4-1
5	.....5	.....Chart the Course	.....J. Castellano	.....M. Casse	.....8-1
6	.....6	.....Red Beach	.....C. Elliott	.....G. Sacco	.....30-1
7	.....7	.....I'm Very Sweet	.....F. Prat	.....C. Brown	.....6-1
8	.....8	.....Medici Road	.....M. Franco	.....M. Clement	.....8-1
9	.....9	.....Miel Et Citron	.....S. Civaci	.....D. Seyler	.....50-1
10	.....10	.....Clearly Sophia	.....J. Rodriguez	.....M. Gorham	.....20-1
11	.....11	.....Florida Patriot	.....R. Santana, Jr.	.....T. Morley	.....5-2
12	.....AE-MTO	.....Nakoma	.....J. Morelos	.....J. Antonucci	.....3-1

6TH (3:19PM). \$100,000, MSW, 3 YO'S & UP, F & M, 7F

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Pic 6, Daily Double

1	.....1	.....Lake Ariel	.....J. Velazquez	.....D. Donk	.....10-1
2	.....2	.....Suited Connectors	.....R. Santana, Jr.	.....M. Clement	.....12-1
3	.....3	.....Careless Whisper	.....M. Franco	.....G. Weaver	.....7-2
4	.....4	.....Rizz	.....T. Gaffalione	.....A. Rice	.....8-1
5	.....5	.....Enterprisingly	.....J. Ortiz	.....D. Duggan	.....15-1
6	.....6	.....Ready Rosie Jane	.....K. Davis	.....N. Zito	.....50-1
7	.....7	.....Axis Point	.....J. Rodriguez	.....L. Bartkowski	.....20-1
8	.....8	.....Liberty's Advance	.....J. Alvarado	.....W. Mott	.....9-2
9	.....9	.....Chaumet	.....E. Zayas	.....J. Terranova II	.....20-1
10	.....10	.....Beau's Bella	.....K. Carmouche	.....J. Englehart	.....10-1
11	.....11	.....Gotta Gun Runner	.....I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....J. Abreu	.....8-1
12	.....12	.....Tuthilltown	.....F. Prat	.....R. Brisset	.....9-2
13	.....13	.....Into the Unknown	.....C. Elliott	.....R. Sells	.....20-1

7TH (3:53PM). \$120,000, AOC \$55,000, 3 YO'S & UP, 13/8M (INNER TURF)

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Pic 5, Daily Double

1	.....1	.....Likeness	.....F. Prat	.....C. McGaughey III	.....7-2
2	.....2	.....Heathguard	.....J. Alvarado	.....R. Lerman	.....12-1
3	.....3	.....Edgerton	.....J. Velazquez	.....M. Stidham	.....12-1
4	.....4	.....Emergence	.....J. Ortiz	.....B. Cox	.....6-1
5	.....5	.....Greystone	.....J. Hernandez	.....M. Maker	.....12-1
6	.....6	.....Power Seeker	.....R. Silvera	.....R. Rodriguez	.....20-1
7	.....7	.....Right to Vote	.....M. Franco	.....C. Brown	.....4-1
8	.....8	.....Operation Overlord	.....I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....T. Pletcher	.....9-2
9	.....9	.....I Am I Said (GB)	.....T. Gaffalione	.....M. Clement	.....5-1
10	.....10	.....Monterey Bay	.....J. Rodriguez	.....W. Ward	.....10-1
11	.....AE	.....Offlee Naughty	.....J. Ortiz	.....J. Sharp	.....8-1
12AEWar OfficerD. DavisS. Joseph, Jr.12-1
13AE-MTOAmbitionS. GonzalezI. Kantarmaci6-1

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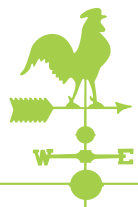
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SARATOGA ENTRIES

8TH (4:27PM). \$250,000, STK - THE INTERCONTINENTAL, 4 YO'S & UP, F & M, 5 1/2F (TURF)

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Pic 4, Daily Double

1	.....1	Twirling Queen.....	R. Santana, Jr.....	J. D'Angelo.....	15-1
2	.....2	Creed's Gold.....	J. Castellano.....	M. Casse.....	8-1
3	.....3	In Our Time.....	F. Prat.....	S. Joseph, Jr.....	3-1
4	.....4	Ready to Jam.....	J. Alvarado.....	B. Cox.....	10-1
5	.....5	Love Cervere.....	M. Franco.....	M. Clement.....	10-1
6	.....6	Time to Dazzle.....	J. Ortiz.....	M. Casse.....	8-1
7	.....7	Gratefully.....	J. Velazquez.....	R. Falcone, Jr.....	4-1
8	.....8	Italian Soiree.....	D. Davis.....	H. Motion.....	15-1
9	.....9	Shoot It True.....	J. Hernandez.....	W. Ward.....	7-2
10	.....10	Roja.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.....	H. Motion.....	10-1
11	.....AE-MTO	Bam's Bliss Kiss.....	Rider TBA.....	J. Abreu.....	5-2

9TH (5:01PM). \$78,000, STR \$55,000, 3 YO'S & UP, 1M

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Daily Double

1	.....1	Miami Frank.....	T. Gaffalione.....	S. Joseph, Jr.....	6-1
2	.....2	Magnanimous Max.....	M. Franco.....	L. Rice.....	9-2
3	.....3	First Blessing.....	J. Ortiz.....	J. Jimenez.....	20-1
4	.....4	Sequential.....	E. Zayas.....	O. Noda.....	8-1
5	.....5	Xcel.....	K. Carmouche.....	T. Pletcher.....	12-1
6	.....6	Apalta.....	S. Gonzalez.....	I. Kantarmaci.....	12-1
7	.....7	Cocktailsnkringle.....	R. Santana, Jr.....	S. Schauer.....	6-1
8	.....8	Georgia Magic.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.....	S. Schauer.....	3-1
9	.....9	Turn and Count.....	J. Rodriguez.....	T. Morley.....	6-1
10	.....10	Norwich.....	F. Prat.....	M. Maker.....	8-1
11	.....AE	Register.....	S. Gonzalez.....	I. Kantarmaci.....	20-1

10TH (5:36PM). \$250,000, STK - THE BELMONT GOLD CUP, 4 YO'S & UP, 2M (INNER TURF)

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Daily Double

1	.....1	Flashiest.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.....	L. Powell.....	5-1
2	.....2	Navy Seal (IRE).....	J. Ortiz.....	W. Ward.....	9-2
3	.....3	Tawny Port.....	F. Prat.....	M. Clement.....	3-1
4	.....4	Miztertonic.....	J. Castellano.....	K. Brion.....	20-1
5	.....5	Worthington.....	C. Elliott.....	K. Brion.....	30-1
6	.....6	Concord Green.....	M. Franco.....	C. McGaughey III.....	8-1
7	.....7	Corruption.....	J. Velazquez.....	M. Casse.....	7-5
8	.....8	Fleetfoot (IRE).....	K. Carmouche.....	B. Foley.....	12-1
9	.....AE-MTO	Parchment Party.....	J. Velazquez.....	W. Mott.....	3-5

11TH (6:16PM). \$78,000, SOC \$45,000-\$55,000, 3 YO'S & UP, F & M, 1 1/16M (TURF)

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta

1	.....1	Pretty Lavish (IRE).....	I. Ortiz, Jr.....	R. Atras.....	6-1
2	.....2	River Tay (IRE).....	K. Davis.....	B. Brown.....	8-1
3	.....3	Heavenly Light.....	J. Rodriguez.....	H. De Paz.....	12-1
4	.....4	Mo Complex.....	T. Gaffalione.....	L. Schultz.....	10-1
5	.....5	Hauntress.....	R. Silvera.....	A. Arriaga.....	20-1
6	.....6	Dividend Recap.....	M. Franco.....	M. Clement.....	8-5
7	.....7	Bobby Jean.....	K. Carmouche.....	M. Hennig.....	10-1
8	.....8	Racing Colors.....	D. Rivera.....	N. Follett.....	15-1
9	.....9	Princess Summer.....	R. Santana, Jr.....	M. Maker.....	15-1
10	.....10	Lady River Lily.....	S. Civaci.....	D. Seyler.....	30-1
11	.....11	Lotus Petal.....	E. Zayas.....	J. Antonucci.....	12-1
12	.....12	Autonome.....	G. Lerena.....	H. Motion.....	8-1
13	.....AE	Planet Clare.....	M. Chuan.....	K. Brion.....	8-1
14	.....AE-MTO	Big Air.....	F. Prat.....	L. Rice.....	2-1
15AE-MTO	That's Funny.....	S. Gonzalez.....	I. Kantarmaci.....	6-1
16AE-MTO	Adrian.....	M. Franco.....	L. Rice.....	5-2

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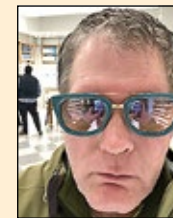
Tom Law



John Shapazian



Charles Bedard



Rob Whitlock



Jessica Paquette

Race	Tom Law	John Shapazian	Charles Bedard	Rob Whitlock	Jessica Paquette
1	Dinner Party Mindee's World Margie's Girl Carmel Coast	Luminous Beauty Margie's Girl Mindee's World Mythical	Margie's Girl Mindee's World Dinner Party Goodall	Mel Went Home Biblical Justice Dinner Party Goodall	Perpetual Dinner Party Luminous Beauty Goodall
2	Mythical Goodall West End Kid	Carmel Coast Goodall Glavine	Mythical Carmel Coast West End Kid	Mythical Carmel Coast West End Kid	Paige Turner Carmel Coast Noble Dynasty
3	Bottas Blackmail Directive Metfardeh	West End Kid Bottas Directive Pure Joy	Talk To Me Jimmy Bottas Directive Pure Joy	Glavine Noble Dynasty Directive Metfardeh	Glavine Bottas Metfardeh Directive
4	Pure Joy Florida Patriot My Divine Spirit Chart The Course	Chit Chat Florida Patriot Medici Road I'm Very Sweet	U Lite Up My Life I'm Very Sweet Florida Patriot Nakoma	Reality Star Florida Patriot Bourbon Milk Punch Medici Road	Reality Star Chart The Course Florida Patriot Dance Class
5	Careless Whisper Liberty's Advance Tuthilltown	Careless Whisper Tuthilltown Gotta Gun Runner	Liberty's Advance Careless Whisper Into The Unknown	Axis Point Enterprisingly Gotta Gun Runner	Careless Whisper Lake Ariel Liberty's Advance
6	Likeness Operation Overlord Right To Vote	Right To Vote Operation Overlord I Am I Said	Right To Vote Emergence Monterey Bay	Likeness Right To Vote I am I Said	Likeness Edgerton Emergence
7	Gratefully In Our Time Ready To Jam	In Our Time Gratefully Creed's Gold	Shoot It True Gratefully Bam's Bliss Kiss	Ready To Jam Shoot It True In Our Time	Roja In Our Time Time To Dazzle
8	Georgia Magic Magnanimous Max Norwich	Georgia Magic Miami Frank Magnanimous Max	Apalta Georgia Magic Cocktailsnkringle	Cocktailsnkringle Xcel Miami Frank	Magnanimous Max Apalta Xcel
9	Corruption Flashiest Tawny Port	Corruption Navy Seal Flashiest	Parchment Party Flashiest Corruption	Miztertonic Fleetfoot Navy Seal	Concord Green Miztertonic Tawney Port
10	Dividend Recap River Tay Mo Complex	Dividend Recap Pretty Lavish Heavenly Light	Adrian Pretty Lavish Dividend Recap	River Tay Pretty Lavish Dividend Recap	Mo Complex Dividend Recap Heavenly Light
11					
2026 Records	1/10 (-\$11.68)	2/10 (-\$3.10)	2/10 (-\$1.36)	1/10 (-\$8.34)	0/10 (-\$20)

Figure in parentheses is the total return on a \$2 win bet on each top selection. Race totals vary if all three selections scratch.



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Crack The Code

Commentator winner
Alan Turing shines
on N.Y. Showcase Day

BY PAUL HALLORAN

Marlene Brody took a bad step and fell in the winner's circle after the Commentator Stakes Wednesday at Saratoga Race Course. Undaunted, the 94-year-old showed the resilience one would expect of someone who has been breeding horses for a half-century, promptly regaining verticality with the help of her farm manager, Mallory Mort.

There was no inquiry – either in the winner's circle or on the track, where Alan Turing, bred and owned by Brody's Gallagher's Stud, won the \$200,000 Commentator under a heady ride from Junior Alvarado.

"I'm fine," Brody said, almost dismissive of a question about her well-being after the fall.

She was all smiles after watching Alan Turing – whom she named for the English mathematician credited with breaking the Nazi Enigma code in World War II, helping the Allies win the war in Europe – capture a stakes race on his first attempt in his 15th start. The gelding is by Omaha Beach, so the name made perfect sense to Brody, if not The Jockey Club at first.

"In the beginning they said no, so I sent them a letter and said, 'please explain why,' " she said. "This is what Alan Turing did. So, then they said OK."

Alvarado took Alan Turing to the rail on the first turn and stayed there. He was a joint third as they straightened out on the backstretch of the 1 1/8-mile race, but dropped back to fifth, albeit only 2 lengths behind frontrunning Dr. Kraft and his closest pursuer, Drake's Passage.

Around the turn, Dr. Kraft held the advantage, but got off the rail just enough for Alvarado to get through the opening. Those two battled for the last furlong, with Alan Turing gaining the advantage at the sixteenth pole and winning the duel by a half length in a 1:48.39.

"He put himself in a good spot, a good position right on the rail," Alvarado said. "Today, I thought



Dave Harmon

Alan Turing (right) scores in Wednesday's Commentator Stakes.

about going to the outside, but one time I put him outside and he kind of got a little lost out there, so I didn't have a choice but to stay inside with him today. I took my chances and dove to the rail, and he fought hard for me."

Alan Turing, one of five winning foals out of the Sadler's Wells mare Honoria, a group led by 11-time winner Energy Town and the multiple-graded-stakes placed Maximova, improved his record to 4-5-1 in 15 starts with \$341,828 in earnings. He's just \$71 shy of Energy Town's career mark.

The Commentator was the fourth win in 23 starts in 2026 for trainer Patrick Quick, who was not surprised by his horse's effort, despite the 11-1 odds.

"It was a great effort. It wasn't surprising. He's been training great, he looks great," Quick said. "Everything was going his way. We had to take a shot. I felt great coming into this race, just the way he was doing. He deserved the chance."

Quick got the opportunity to train for Brody thanks to the late Christophe Clement.

"Christophe Clement sent me to Pat Quick," she said.

And why was that?

"He didn't like my horses, so he said, 'Why don't you try Pat?' Pat and I get along famously," Brody quipped.

While Clement is going into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame this year, Brody and the Morts, Mallory and Karen, have enjoyed a Hall of Fame year themselves. The Morts bred 2025 New York-bred Horse of the Year Rhetorical

and were recently honored by the New York Thoroughbred Breeders as Breeder of the Year. They also bred champion New York-bred female sprinter Sterling Silver.

At the same awards dinner, Brody was presented a Lifetime Achievement Award, in recognition for her 50 years at Gallagher's Stud in Ghent, which she started with her late husband, Jerry in 1978.

She doesn't get to the track as much as she used to, but picked a good day to come north Wednesday.

"We had two today," she said. "One came in last (Hello Beauty in the Critical Eye) and one came in first. When you see them born and see them grow up, they're your babies. I wanted six children and I didn't get one, but at least I have a lot of horses. Those are my babies."

- Paul Halloran

- Danny Gargan figured good omens were in play when Becky Thomas sent him a 2-year-old filly by Yaupon last summer at Saratoga.

"I've bought a lot of horses off of her and done really well; Dakota Gold and those," Gargan said. "This is the first horse I've trained for her. ... It's one of those things, I've bought a lot of nice horses off of her."

Venetta didn't come out of a sale – although she did RNA out of Thomas' Sequel New York consignment for \$25,000 at Keeneland September in 2024 – before returning to the Empire State and

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can now be added to a few of Gargan's tallies.

"She's probably the fourth or fifth one that Becky's bred that we've won a stakes with here," Gargan said. "We've been lucky with winning stakes at Saratoga overall. It's hard. I think this is like the fifth year in a row."

The victory – yes, the fifth year in a row for the barn – came in the opening flat race of the Belmont Stakes Racing Festival and the first of six New York Showcase Day stakes when Venetta came from off the pace to take the \$200,000 Bouwerie for 3-year-old fillies. Kendrick Carmouche rode Venetta for Gargan and Thomas' Sequel Racing. Venetta won the 7-furlong Bouwerie by 1 1/4 lengths over 3-5 favorite Hot Currency in 1:22.63 over the fast track. Galinda finished third in the field of six.

Venetta improved to 2-for-3 in the Bouwerie, adding her stakes score to a narrow maiden win April 30 at Aqueduct. She finished second in her debut a month before, and she went to post as the odds-on favorite in those first two starts.

"Once we got her to the races, we knew she could run before she ever ran, just look at her odds, she was heavily bet," Gargan said. "It was one of things, it took a little while and now we've got her there."

"She's got a lot of talent. She has more than we've seen, still. The further she goes the better she's going to

be. I know a lot of people want to criticize Yaupons going long but this one wants to go long. She's a big, strong filly and the further she goes the better she's going to get. She wants to set and relax and then make that move. Going seven-eighths you have to let her get in that a little bit and we were lucky she got around to the outside where she wants to be."

Thomas, who bred the filly out of the Silver Train mare Gypsy Angel, wanted her to be with Gargan.

"I have a filly that would be good for you," Thomas said last summer. "She's going to take a little time, she's a New York-bred and I want you to bring her along."

Venetta shipped from Sequel's training center in Ocala to Gargan's team in Saratoga. She went through "a few things," according to Gargan, who opted for that slow approach. Venetta didn't breeze until late October, turning in a 3-furlong move on the Oklahoma Training Track, before joining his string at Belmont in November. She made her debut March 27, closing from a dozen lengths back early to finish 1 1/4 lengths back in a 6 1/2-furlong New York-bred maiden.

Carmouche rode Venetta in that start and in her next out, a victory by a head when she raced closer to the lead and outlasted the well-regarded Careless Whisper.

"Her last race was not a good race because we got in her way," Gargan said. "We put her up in the race and Kendrick said she resented it. He said,

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Dave Harmon

Venetta (1) scores in the Bouwerie for trainer Danny Gargan.



Dave Harmon

Mi Bago cruises to win the Kingston Stakes.

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'I had a lot of horse the whole way, but she wanted to get out of there, she didn't want to be down in there.' That was kind of a throw-out; this race is more like her first race where she was pretty impressive."

After a bit of an awkward break, Venetta settled into third behind Galinda and Hot Currency early in the Bouwerie. The two leaders battled through strong early fractions of :22.98 and :45.40.

Carmouche, 2 lengths back through that split and into the far turn, loved his position.

"This filly wants to stretch out big time," he said. "First time she broke really bad and the next time I just figured I was on the best horse. I sent her to the lead and she ran a little spotty but went on to win. Today I just wanted to break her sharp and put her behind the two speed horses. She was traveling behind those horses just the way I wanted."

Carmouche tipped out midway on the far turn and Venetta surged toward Galinda and Hot Currency battling for the lead. Hot Currency reached the front at the eighth pole while Galinda hung tough at the rail and Venetta gained on the outside. Venetta continued her run inside the sixteenth pole and edged clear just before the finish.

"They ran fast," Gargan said. "They weren't walking around there. They were hauling ass. She had to run to beat them."

- Tom Law

- Lisa Bartkowski shuffled, slid and skipped just a smidge watching the final strides of the Mount Vernon Stakes unfold on a television in front of the Jim Dandy Bar in the clubhouse early on the Showcase Day card.

Bartkowski, a racetracker's racetracker training on her own since last summer, didn't show a bit of nervous energy or anxiousness as Midnight Concerto, Five G and National Archive tried to cut into Being Betty's advantage. She stayed that way to the shadow of the wire before accepting plenty of congratulations when the daughter of Weekend Hideaway hit the finish a half-length in front. The win gave Bartkowski and the 5-year-



Dave Harmon

Being Betty streaks to victory in the Mount Vernon for trainer Lisa Bartkowski

old mare their first stakes wins, at the immediate expense of Midnight Concerto with graded stakes winner Five G another half-length back.

"You know her, somebody could run by her but nobody is going to ease by her," Bartkowski said of her confidence on her way to the winner's circle after the 1 1/16-mile turf stakes for fillies and mares. "And they weren't gaining fast enough. They weren't going to catch her."

Bartkowski would know. She's been Being Betty's exercise rider throughout her career, when the sometimes quirky and cantankerous Hilly Fields Stable homebred started with Phil Serpe before running in her name for the first time last August. Bartkowski also rode Being Betty's sire, multiple stakes-winning millionaire New York-bred Weekend Hideaway, and her dam, the stakes-winning Courageous Cat New York-bred mare Lady Joan. And she played a role in developing Being Betty's granddam Ladywell Court and great granddam Commander's Lady.

Being Betty won for the third time in her last four starts in the Mount Vernon, adding her first stakes to a dead-head optional win April 24 at Aqueduct and a nose victory in another optional January 24 at Gulfstream Park. Those victories came at 1 mile, which Bartkowski said might be a more ideal trip than the 1 1/16 miles of the Mount Vernon.

"We couldn't really tell," Bartkowski said when asked if sprints or routes were more ideal. "It was a little too fast of a pace in a sprint even

though she won a couple sprints, then it seemed like the distance was a little too much but she wouldn't settle like she does now.

"Now, three different riders (for her wins), they all followed instructions perfectly, send her out of the gate so that she gets running, then sit back... She'll settle back if you don't get her running and she would be nowhere and get rank behind horses. If you send her (too much) she would get rank and run off on the front end. Now she'll just settle nicely and has something left for the end."

Irad Ortiz Jr., aboard Being Betty for the first since she finished off the board in an April 2024 allowance race 11 starts back at Aqueduct, let the bay mare settle in second behind Spinning Colors after the break and through soft opening splits of :24.85 and :49.75.

Spinning Colors, the winner of last year's Mount Vernon with her patented front-running style, clung to a narrow lead through 6 furlongs in 1:13.59 before Ortiz made a run approaching the five-sixteenths pole.

"She switched off very nice," Ortiz said. "I knew (Spinning Colors) always shows speed. My filly came from off the pace last time, so I didn't worry as long as I had a clean break, which I did. I had a beautiful trip. I tried to get her to relax. She did. After that, I bide my time. By the three-eighths pole, she made up ground. That was really nice. I just had to wait for the time to go."

Being Betty took over from there, drawing clear of the early leader and

opening up while the closers made runs. Being Betty held them off to win in 1:41.74, improving to 6-for-15 and picking up \$110,000 to pad her bankroll to \$372,652. Midnight Concerto finished second in her second start off a layoff with 4-5 favorite Five G third and National Archive fourth.

The win proved especially satisfying for Mike Hoffman, who campaigned Weekend Hideaway throughout his 13-win campaign before standing the \$1,144,922-earner at Irish Hill and Dutchess Views Stallions in Stillwater for four seasons. Weekend Hideaway was pensioned following the 2022 season and currently lives at Old Friends in Kentucky.

"We stood the stallion, we own the mare and Tony Smith is our managing partner. He's in London right now," said Hoffman, a partner in Hilly Fields Stable. "He didn't put me in charge but he said if they ask you a question be careful what you say. ... This is extraordinary. Winning those races back then with Weekend Hideaway was great and this is, too. That was a different time. I had my children here and everything back then. Now I'm 67 and you realize that these moments are rare."

- Tom Law

- Warm sun, a cool breeze and Mi Bago is happy as can be.

Obvious, considering his dazzling return to the Empire State when he scored for the first time in his native state in his 17th career start. Jose Ortiz guided Mi Bago to win the Kingston Stakes.

"The firm turf (helped)," winning trainer Mark Casse said. "He flew home the last eighth of a mile. Jose said afterward that he'd be tough with anybody, and that's kind of him. He's been unlucky. He's had a lot of soft turf, and this and that, but this was the day. The sun was shining. He likes the inner turf, too."

The New York-bred won for the seventh time, picking up his fifth stakes win.

Gary Barber's 4-year-old Veko-ma gelding exploded out of the gate to claim the lead, rolling through an opening quarter in :23.89 before opening up by 4 lengths as the field travelled along the backstretch. George Briggs, the 8-5 favorite, followed in second with longshots Leon Blue and

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Funny Factor close behind. Mi Bago hit the top of the stretch still loaded and rolled home by 4 ½ lengths over Spirit Of St Louis and George Briggs. Mi Bago finished 1 1/16 miles over the firm turf in 1:39.61.

"I thought it was a fairly tough New York-bred race," Casse said. "There were some tough New York-breds in here. I knew, obviously, the company wasn't as tough as he's been running in. But today was one of his best performances."

Back in 2024, Mi Bago triumphed in his debut on the dirt at Colonial Downs. The performance prompted Barber to purchase him privately. He tried the dirt once more in the Funny Cide, where he finished sixth, but Casse wasn't concerned.

"Gary said, 'I think we made a bad purchase,'" Casse said. "I said, 'This horse will love the grass.'"

Casse's instinct proved correct. Mi Bago won the Algonquin Stakes over the Woodbine turf for his first stakes score and second career victory. He finished fifth in his next start, but followed with a three-race win streak at Gulfstream Park. He won the Pulpit Stakes, Dania Beach Stakes and Colonel Liam Stakes. He suffered a series of tough losses through the rest of 2025, but opened this year with an allowance win at Gulfstream. Mi Bago's two most recent starts – Grade 2 Frank E. Kilroe Stakes at Santa Anita and the Opening Verse Stakes at Churchill Downs – resulted in a pair of eighth-place finishes.

"He broke well and I had to hustle him up to the first turn," Ortiz said. "When I got my position, he relaxed well going into the backside, so I just let him be happy and do his thing. Mark believes he loves the hard ground, which I think he does as well, but obviously he hasn't been running against New York-breds in a while, so I think that helped a lot, too."

- Darby O'Brien

- Score one for keeping it simple.

"That was my Plan A. I want to break and try to be on the lead because every time she's on the lead she wins," jockey Manny Franco said, after a gate-to-wire score aboard Bernietakescharge in the \$200,000 Critical



Dave Harmon

Bernietakescharge scores in the Critical Eye.

Eye Stakes. "I do what she likes and she takes me all the way."

The 5-year-old daughter of Take Charge Indy and the Freud mare Berning Rose was caught in her last two races, but they were against open company. Wednesday she picked up her sixth win against New York-bred company.

Franco hustled the bay mare out of the far outside gate in the field of seven, determined to get to the front, though John Velazquez was also aggressive on Landed and pressed her through an opening quarter in :23.36. Bernietakescharge went even faster the second quarter (:22.90) and continued the brisk pace through 6 furlongs in 1:10.22, causing some angst for trainer Dominick Schettino.

"When I saw :23, then :46, I was a little concerned. When I saw 6 furlongs in 1:10, I was really concerned," Schettino said. "But at the three-eighths pole when (Valtellina) was coming to her, I saw Manny ask her again. When I saw her kick again, I knew she would keep going."

The Robert Rosenthal and Brad Bernstein homebred showed another gear, again gaining separation and winning by 1 ¾ lengths.

"When horses come to her, she grinds it out more," Schettino said. "She keeps fighting. No matter how fast she's going, if she's in front, when they come to her, she wants to accelerate and open up again."

Valtellina was a clear second, 6 lengths in front of Walk With Me over 9 furlongs in 1:47.83. Bernietakescharge improved her career

earnings to \$739,830 in winning her fourth stakes race and second straight Critical Eye.

Foaled at Indigo Farm in Stanfordville, Bernietakescharge is the second of three winning foals and fourth overall out of the stakes-winning mare Berning Rose. Schettino trained Berning Rose to win the 2017 Maid of the Mist Stakes at Belmont Park. Bernieandtherose has won four times in seven starts with \$258,240 heading into an open-company allowance at Saratoga Thursday. Berning Honor, by Honor Code, has won once in 10 starts while 3-year-old Roseberns Dream has a third-place finish in six starts.

- Paul Halloran

- Sculcos Folly knows a thing or two about growth.

In his debut, a 5 1/2-furlong maiden at Saratoga, he lost by 46 ¾ lengths.

"He blew up in Saratoga," owner Michael Dubb said. "First start out, got beat. And I was like, he's no good. So, we brought him down to Monmouth."

That race, a \$25,000 maiden claimer, scratched down to three horses. He won, but Dubb was not convinced of the Redesdale colt's ability. Trainer Richard Dutrow Jr. shipped him to Laurel Park, where he won a \$25,000 claimer by 5 lengths. That win left his connections thinking there might be something more. He followed the effort with a second in allowance company at Laurel and a win in a starter-optional at Aqueduct before making his stakes debut.

"When we brought him to Laurel and he stepped up his number, I said 'we're not going to play around,'" Dubb said. "He's proved himself. Some horses are what they are, some get better. This is the guy that gets better."

Sculcos Folly triumphed by 5 ¾ lengths in the Gander Stakes at Aqueduct. The following month, he clinched an 8 1/2-length victory in the Mind Your Biscuits Stakes. Wednesday, he and jockey Jaime Rodriguez dominated the \$200,000 Mike Lee Stakes going 7 furlongs on the dirt for this third stakes win in a row.

Now that's improvement.

"There are a lot of dark days in the winter, and you really wait for days like this," said Dubb, who also won the day's sixth with Brokealltherules. "A lot of hard work, a lot of planning, a lot of thinking. Places, races. We agonized about where we were going to run the horse. We felt he was good enough for open company, we thought about the Woody Stephens, and based on the performance he put on he might have been competitive there. At the end of the day, this is a 3-year-old and he's got plenty of time to prove how good he is."

Sculcos Folly surged out of the gate, lunging for the early lead. But Bravaro, the 4-5 favorite, wasn't going to give it to him. The pair went stride for stride, Sculcos Folly on the rail with Bravaro on his outside, for an opening quarter in :22.08. They blazed through the half in :44.36 and as they hit the top of the stretch, Bravaro began to fade. Sculcos Folly charged down the stretch as longshots Party In The Army and B Thedonald chased in vain. Sculcos Folly won by 5 1/2 lengths in 1:21.60.

"We wanted to challenge (Bravaro)," said Chip Dutrow, assistant to the winning trainer. "We thought that our horse was versatile. If we wanted, we could've taken back a little, but the pace was good, so I thought our jockey did the right thing by putting pressure on the other horse. ... He keeps getting better. Wow. Now you feel great that you can move forward and maybe stretch him out more. The sky is the limit right now. He's making it look so easy."

Rodriguez agreed.

"I'm pretty happy with him," he said, "The way he's run at any distance, he's proved that he can do it."

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Home Field

Veteran Jimmy P wins third Grade 1 jump stakes at Saratoga

BY SEAN CLANCY

1-5-5-6-1-5-4-8-4-7-1.

A win in the Grade 1 Jonathan Sheppard in 2024. Five consecutive losses. A win in the Sheppard in 2025. Three straight losses. Jimmy P added his latest 1 to his string of Saratoga 1s with late a lunge to win the Grade 1 Beverly R. Steinman Stakes at Saratoga Wednesday. Owned by Madaket Stable and Molly and Paul Willis, the Kentucky-bred son of Slumber notched his third Grade 1 stakes win. All at Saratoga.

Why Saratoga?

"I haven't a clue, I have no idea," jockey Stephen Mulqueen said. "He comes alive here."

"Ask him. I don't know. I don't know," trainer Keri Brion said. "He just loves Saratoga."

The 8-year-old didn't appear to love Saratoga for most of the 2 3/8 miles of a messy opener. Harry Beswick departed from fifth choice McTigue at the first hurdle, Jamie Bargary exited third choice Ziggie Pops at the sixth. Loose horses ran wild,

STEINMAN STAKES RECAP

outriders chased wildly and the rest of the five runners stretched 22 lengths from leader Coutach to lagger Jimmy P. Under pressure from Mulqueen, Jimmy P was the first off the bridle and the last on the bridle, reeling in Rocket One in the final strides to score by a neck. Coutach held on for third.

"Never traveling. I wasn't happy at all," Mulqueen said. "Try to keep him interested. I gave him a belt with a lap to go and pulled him out for a bit of room and the room wasn't working so I tucked him back in and just prayed. I knew when we turned in, I had him rolling. I joked and said I was always going to win but I knew I was going to get close. He's a rogue, he's a character, but he's won three here now."

Bred by Head of Plains Partners and Madaket Stable, Jimmy P made his career debut at Saratoga way back in 2020. He finished third, beaten 2 lengths by future Grade 2 winner



Dave Harmon

Jimmy P (right) gets up in time to defeat Rocket One in Wednesday's Beverly Steinman.

Public Sector in a turf maiden. After one win in nine flat tries, Jimmy P was entered in a digital sale in 2022, scratched and wound up a jumper when the Willises partnered with Madaket. Jimmy P improved his hurdle record to six wins from 22 starts for \$444,100. A cool \$304,500 earned at Saratoga.

"Mental. All mental. We've messed about with the headgear. Blinkers, cheek pieces. He won here without anything, so we took it off again, it just depends on what form he comes up in," Mulqueen said. "Keri texted

me last night and said he got off the van here and was mad in the stable, he was trying to jump out over the door. That's not him. If he keeps saving himself for here, I don't mind."

Brion saw the same energy at a schooling session earlier in the week.

"When he turned to school, he squealed and took off, he's never done that, ever, in the four years of training him, he's never done that," Brion said. "He's very businesslike. Stephen was like, 'I don't know. He could win.'"

At Saratoga, of course.

Wednesday -

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I said if he breaks and somebody goes crazy, I'm going to sit and wait, but if nobody goes I'm going to let him go and take the shot. He's better when he's in the game. I don't know how good he is from the pack. We got the one hole and we had to go. It was different from the last time. I had the chance to sit with him and he ran impressively. He's the type of horse that he doesn't run enough. He does everything easy but when you ask him, that's when he takes off. He's just waiting for you to ask him."

Agent Chad Schumer purchased Sculcos Folly for \$70,000 for Dubb at the 2025 OBS April sale. He improved to 6-for-8 in the Mike Lee and boosted his bankroll to \$369,150.

"Rick Dutrow has done a sensational job nurs-

ing this horse along," Dubb said. "We'll go big game hunting later, but this was a very salty field and this was a class test. We knew he could run fast, but he had to run fast against good, proven horses. And he did it under the toughest of conditions: from the rail, pressed the whole way through fractions of :44 and 1. I'm over the moon."

- Darby O'Brien

• Trainer Dave Duggan was in the clouds after Wednesday's finale.

"So good. So good," Duggan said. "These are what you're after. It's fantastic."

Blame It On K J finessed his way from the back to clinch the New York-bred maiden claimer on the turf. The Kitten's Joy gelding found himself with a lot of run and a lot of traffic at the top of the stretch. Jockey Jaime Rodriguez angled the gelding four-wide, splitting rivals in the final sixteenth to win by a nose over Lobbyist.

"It was like driving into California traffic," Duggan said on the stretch run. "I didn't know how he was going to get through. How is he going to get out the other side? But he did it. We changed up the blinkers on him, put a bigger blinker on and it seemed to make a difference."

The victory improved Blame It On K J's record to a win, three seconds and a third in seven starts and boosted his bankroll to \$67,375.

Brokealltherules triumphed in the sixth, a 5 1/2-furlong turf allowance to provide Rick Dutrow and Michael Dubb with their first win on the card. The Frosted filly broke alertly and took command, leading from gate to wire in 1:01.56.

A Little At First won the seventh, a 9-furlong turf allowance, for trainer Horacio De Paz. The 3-year-old sat just off the pace before rallying to triumph by 1 1/4 lengths over Willpowered. Roger Cimbora Jr.'s son of War Dancer won for the second time in five starts and boosted his earnings to \$114,580.

Sing it with me

*These are the good old days.
Someday we'll look back on this and it will all seem funny.*

Read those in a singing voice and they sound a little more sensible, or something, because there will come a time where someone will look up Belmont Stakes historical records, and shout across a crowded room, "They ran the Belmont at Saratoga and not Belmont Park?!"

"Yes they did," will come the reply from some seasoned human at a desk. "In 2024, 2025 and 2026."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"So we shouldn't get all crazy about running the 2098 and 2099 ones there?"

"No, we shouldn't."

Remember all the hoopla about NYRA moving the Belmont Stakes Racing Festival to Saratoga two years ago?

The hand-wringing about using the Wilson Chute for the Metropolitan Handicap?

The inconceivability ("Inconceivable!") of changing the Belmont distance from 1 1/2 miles to 1 1/4 miles?

The burden on local residents and businesses?

The lack of hotel rooms and the ticket prices and the cost of concessions and the complete upside-downness of it all?

The threat that NYRA would abandon Long Island entirely and run the Belmont at Saratoga forever?

And race at Saratoga through October?

I do. People went somewhat goofy over the whole thing.

I took calls and read emails about the holiness and absolute unchangeability of the race's classic distance. No matter what, they said while banging a fist on a table or smashing the exclamation-point

THE OUTSIDE RAIL *By Joe Clancy*



key, the race had to be 1 1/2 miles because otherwise it wouldn't be the "test of champions."

And start on the turn? Maybe from Union Avenue? Or do a lap of Clare Court, make the gap and zip on to the main track near the pony barn? No matter how hard I tried, and I tried, the jokes really didn't fly.

Purists scoffed at the Met Mile at Saratoga. Someone asked me about extending the backstretch chute an extra furlong so the historic Grade 1 could be a true, one-turn mile like it was meant to be.

I know nothing about racetrack construction, but did my best to explain about the chain-link fence, the trees, Nelson Avenue, the parking lot at the Horseshoe Inn, city property vs. track property, all of it.

Not sure I made any headway. Still.

I heard from people who said the town would be overwhelmed by the mass hysteria.

There wasn't enough space to hold the hordes of people who would show up. Granted, the Saratoga Belmonts did not come with the added interest of a potential Triple Crown but Saratoga Springs – as it always has – proved to be a gracious host even if that first year was a little discombobulated and

traffic-choked. The jam-ups of 2024 made me think of trainer Bobby Connors' strategy of making four rights instead of one left turn while driving in Saratoga Springs – and he said that when the meet lasted just six weeks.

But we survived.

I'm sure residents of the 12866 will breathe a big sigh and gladly go back to a 40-day meet from mid-July through Labor Day, but maybe they'll miss Saratoga's temporary June moments in the sun too.

I said maybe.

People are going to look back at these three years like they were the good old days the same way we look back at those 1960s races – won by Chateaugay, Quadrangle, Hail To All, Amberoid and Damascus (wow).

No pressure Dornoch, Sovereignty and whoever wins Saturday's race, but some of those dudes are legends. By the way, those five races stayed at 1 1/2 miles by starting on the far turn but that was a different time and nobody much minded taking such risks.

People are going to laugh if they see some of the consternation, hot takes and debates that went along with the move to Saratoga.

I guess there's a future where the new Belmont Park we get to see in September will need to be refurbished and the race will move somewhere.

How about Saratoga again? I know, I know . . .

Or maybe Finger Lakes, Batavia Downs, Tioga Downs, Vernon Downs, Genesee Valley, a state-of-art new track constructed somewhere in Westchester County or out near Montauk, The Meadowlands or Monmouth Park (now that would fire up some people)? Or maybe even some incarnation of Aqueduct (hey, people can dream).

Give it 75 years or so.

With apologies to Carly Simon and Bruce Springsteen, tell everyone it will be OK.



Andrew J. Mollica Attorney at Law

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Barn Chores

It was a throwaway line, a token gesture.
If you need anything, I'm around.

I sent it to Emme Fullilove, who was helping with Jack Fisher's runners for Wednesday's Beverly R. Steinman Stakes at Saratoga. A longtime steeplechase ally, Fullilove has a full-time job galloping flat horses for trainer Tom Proctor. She'll take you up on throwaway lines.

"I have Lorna coming to get on Rocket first thing in the morning to jog him once around the track if you want to help tack/throw her up! (But that's so early so I understand if you don't want to do that).

Without a choice, that was the end of my throwaway lines.

I'll be there.

"Thank you so much!!! I'll have the tack set out."

That was Tuesday night. And not for the first time in Saratoga, an idea hatched at night felt a lot different when played out in the morning.

The texts began to read more like demands.

"Good morning! Tack is hanging on the cross bar of the stall next door to Rocket."

Sent at 4:53 a.m. I read it sometime after that. I was already up. I swear.

The alarm had rattled early. Like old-days early. Back when Mike Hushion wanted – needed – to have the first horse on the track every morning. Rosenose, a white bullet through Oklahoma black. At least my heart wasn't pounding like it did back then. No boots, no helmet, no flak jacket these days. And no time for coffee, no time for idle thought, no time for life-choices regret.

Right on Lake, left on East, right on Union, left on Nelson. The race-tracker's car in the morning, the first self-driving car.

Slip pad, black quilted pad, foam pad, green saddle towel, full-tree exercise saddle, rubber girth and neck strap are indeed hanging on the cross bar of the stall next to Rocket One. The 7-year-old gelding raises his head, pricks his ears like he knows the time of day. I give him a pat, slide the hay-net rope



By Sean Clancy

through a screw eye and look for a hoof pick.

It's 5:16. Time is ticking. Nine minutes before another longtime steeplechase ally, Lorna Chavez, arrives. The former steeplechase jockey and freelance rider of the stars expects the horse to be tacked up and ready to go. I get to work.

Rocket's feet were already picked (thanks, Emme) as I ducked under the webbing with the tack. A couple of handfuls of sweet feed lay untouched in the corner feed tub. By rote, my fingers, stiff from the morning chill, begin to work. Buckling, buttoning. Tightening, tinkering. I try to fold the saddle towel back over the pads and decide it's too short, I lay it flat and long. Not sure Dad, the retired horse trainer, would go for that. Saddle in place, two holes still to go on the right and four on the left billet. Perfect. I grab the ring bit, figure eight and neck strap and wonder where they were when I rode for the 16-time champion trainer. Egg-butt snaffle, an open mouth and a hunk of mane was all I had. Times change. Chavez will be happy.

Her pink and black jeep rolls into a spot in the center of the courtyard, between the receiving barn and Linda Rice's barn. It's 5:25 a.m.

"Who's here?...Sean's here..." Chavez squeals with delight. Surely more for the valet service than the company, but I'll take it.

I grab the left rein and escort Rocket for a cir-

cuit of the long, wide, tall, once-white, old-school barn. My mind wanders for the first time all morning; whose barn was this originally (the Sanfords) . . . which champions made this very walk . . . will Rocket One add his name to the storied list?

"Whoa, look at him. He's a giant," Chavez says as I slow the \$600,000 yearling purchase from six years ago to a stop.

Chavez enlists a groom of another horse to hold the big bay gelding while I give her a leg up. It's a long way up there. She launches like a toddler in a bouncy house.

"I've got him," Chavez says as Rocket walks on cue.

Rocket and Chavez loop once around the barn while I wait. We start the long, slow, circuitous walk to the main track. Across Nelson Avenue, security guards scurrying into place, stopping traffic that doesn't exist. We cross Clare Court, angle left, cut through the trees. There is chill in the air.

"Like the old days at Saratoga," I reminisce.

"Morning, my lovelies," Chavez says to guards and grooms.

Rocket One holds his head high, the white rim of his left eye looking down at me and ahead at others all at the same time. I remember how hard it is to keep up with a horse's walk. We walk along the horse path, past the empty Morning Line Kitchen and past a few lifers. Austin Trites, Bob Giordano, Robin Smullen. Rocket is composed, alert, all class on his first trip to Saratoga. We stop a few strides inside the gap. Chavez is as patient as a newborn's mother. They stand, breathe, chill.

Chavez and Rocket melt into a trot behind a Brad Cox trainee. I watch. Straight and true. I catch glimpses, in between the trees, the tote board before they come back into view. A mile and an eighth, done and dusted. The final preparation. I meet them at the gap. Chavez squeals again.

"He feels like a million dollars."

On a million-dollar morning.

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