

Year 26

Saturday, June 6, 2026

The aratoga

Special

Belmont Stakes Racing Festival 2026

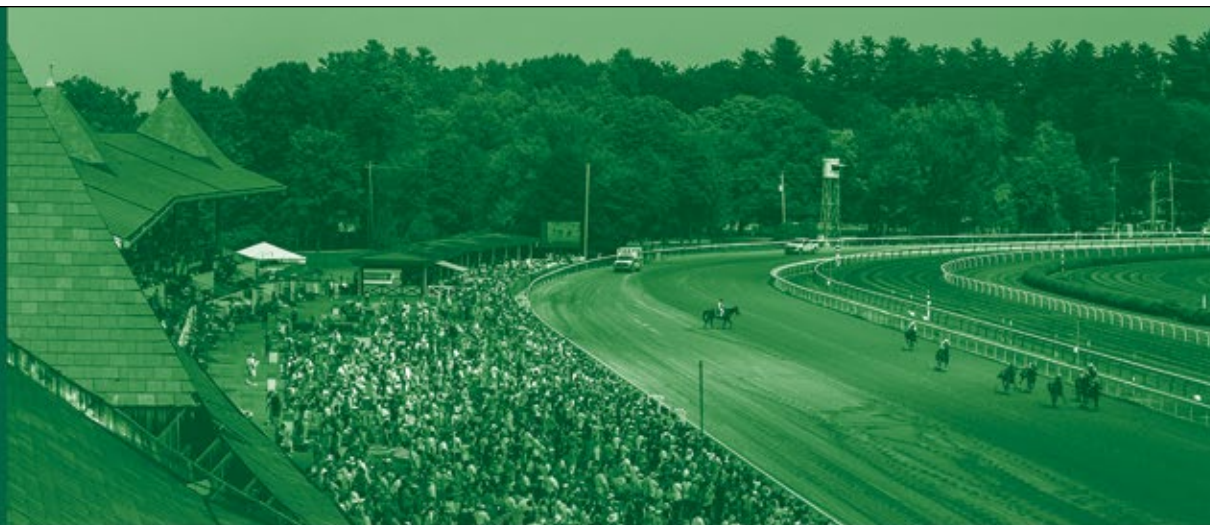
Shine On

Golden Tempo hits town for Belmont Stakes

JOURNALISM BACK FOR MET MILE
BOOK'EM DANNO EYES TRUE NORTH
AG BULLET SEEKS JAIPUR REPEAT
CRUDE VELOCITY, ENGLISHMAN II
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Here&There...in Saratoga

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

License Plates of the Day

22FLAT, New York. (Thanks Frank).

GRAVE YD, New York.

RAMSEY 3, Florida. (By Ken McPeek's barn, of course).

Worth Repeating

"Busy. Really busy."

Trainer Cherie DeVaux when asked about the last five weeks

"Absolutely."

Trainer Amelia Green, about whether riding Journalism in a workout was fun

"It's been a while since I got to do that. Hopefully one day I get that caliber of a horse. The horses are running good, and that's all you can ask for."

Green, who started her training career in December 2024 and has already matched last year's victory total of 18

"I always liked him; I might have been biased because I trained his dam and his granddam and always liked both of them."

Todd Pletcher, about Belmont Stakes favorite Renegade whose dam Spice Is Nice and granddam Dame Dorothy won graded stakes for the trainer

"It was asking a lot. We knew that, and when it kind of went pear-shaped at the start, it gave us an opportunity to regroup."

Pletcher, about running maiden Powershift in the Tampa Bay Derby in March; the colt graduated on the Kentucky Derby undercard and is part of today's Belmont Stakes field

"Only one, sounds like a good day."

The Special's Taylor Barraclough, after co-worker Alec DiConza started a sentence with "One issue . . ."

"I've missed a lot of them. Usually, I'm at Del Mar watching on a Grade 1 couch."

Trainer Bob Baffert on some missed trips to Saratoga over the years

"Pretty much anyone can ride her. The only reason they don't is because she's special, otherwise I could put anyone on her. She's low maintenance. She's kind. She's a sweetheart."

Trainer Graham Motion about Intercontinental winner Roja

"It's an odd couple but it works."

Motion about breezing Roja, a Grade 2 winner at 5 ½ furlongs on the turf, with Laurelin, a Grade 2 winner at 1 3/16 miles on the turf



Samantha Decker

French Wine. Flavien Prat makes a point after winning Thursday's Belmont Gold Cup with Tawny Port.

Quote of the Day



"Hopefully she's on the cover soon."

Trainer Jena Antonucci, picking up Friday's edition to read about her 2-year-old winner Luminous Beauty

"I just look at the pictures. Felix reads to me."

Tim McKinsey, snagging a copy of Friday's paper walking a pony through the barn area

"We've got four horses in Grade 1s this weekend and we've got four good chances. It's pretty special."

Bridlewood Farm's George Isaacs; the farm of John and Leslie Malone owns or co-owns Belmont Festival starters Speed Shopper, Meaning, Sandtrap and Journalism

"It's beautiful."

South African jockey Gavin Lerena on his first trip to Saratoga

"Good horses. Their presence. They let you know."

Lerena about riding horses like Manhattan hopeful One Stripe

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Here&There...in Saratoga

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

Names of the Day

Otello, third race. The 5-year-old out of Isabella Sings is named for an opera written by Gioachino Rossini for his lover and future wife Isabella Colbran in 1816. The Spanish opera singer played the role of Desdemona.



Castle Chaos third race. The 8-year-old gelding is by Palace Malice out of Queen Victoria.

Trust Fund, sixth race. The 5-year-old is out of Mo Savings.

Antiquarian, 11th race. Centennial Farm's 5-year-old is by Preservationist and named for someone who collects old, rare objects such as manuscripts and rare books.

Blown Cover, 14th race. The 5-year-old is by Gun Runner out of Secret No More.

By The Numbers

5: Identical clowns dressed in sports jerseys sprinting (and tumbling) across the finish line before the 14th race Friday.

Worth Repeating

"I watched him beat me three years in a row and I saw he was in that sale. I thought he seemed like a horse that was worth the money just considering what's available in Virginia. I thought he made a lot of sense. Just what I need, another turf sprinter. I'm optimistic about him. Such a cool racehorse. I watched him enough, so to have a chance to buy him at what I thought was a fair price was a good opportunity. I'm excited."

Larry Johnson, about Friday winner Determined Kingdom, in January 2025; Johnson, who bought the Virginia-bred at Keeneland November 2024, died a month after saying that and never saw him race in his silks

"I feel very fortunate to have what I have, to have done what I have done."

Trainer Mark Casse after winning the Acorn

"Jon Green asked me if I was nervous about Nitrogen. I said, no. When I get nervous is when I don't feel like I have done everything that I needed to do. I also know that I count on nothing and it's out of my control."

Casse about sending out favorite Nitrogen in the Ogden Phipps Friday



Samantha Decker

Have Mic Will Ride. Maggie Morley keeps an eye on the action for Fox Friday.

"Might be fun. I'm on it."

Rich Cristiano when told to write a column about convincing Tom Durkin to write a book

"The bottom line is I know I like to have fun and I like to talk a lot of crap and people don't think I know what I'm doing, but I know what I'm doing."

From the archives, trainer Eric Guillot after upsetting the Whitney in 2014. Guillot died Thursday at age 64

"This is our first trip to Saratoga. We've been very pleased. Everyone has been accommodating and friendly. Things like that really count."

Nemone Routh about the Aga Khan Stud's Saratoga venture

"The best kind of warm, wonderful, familiar feeling washed through me as I read yesterday's renewed edition of the Belmont Special."

Loyal reader and guest writer Laura Goodman

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Curtain Callers

Star power arrives for third Spa classic

BY TOM LAW

A historic Triple Crown ends today and brings the curtain down on a historic run at the most historic of places.

The 158th renewal of the Belmont Stakes makes its final run at Saratoga Race Course today, concluding a three-year run in upstate New York while construction of a new Belmont Park on Long Island continues before its scheduled opening in September. The third Belmont Stakes at Saratoga also marks the third year in a row the Kentucky Derby winner made the field, and he's not just any Derby winner.

Golden Tempo made history May 2 when he upset 17 opponents in the 152nd Run for the Roses, making Cherie DeVaux the first female trainer to win a Kentucky Derby. DeVaux tries to make more history today, looking to become the second woman to send out a Belmont winner, all in the last four years.

Golden Tempo takes on eight rivals in the 1 1/4-mile Belmont – shortened again from the traditional 1 1/2 miles due to Saratoga's track configuration. Several are familiar foes, including Derby runner-up Renegade along with Chief Wallabee (fourth), Commandment (seventh) and Emerging Market (10th). The other four are new to the Triple Crown – Peter Pan winner Growth Equity, Blue Grass runner-up Ottinho, Santa Anita Derby third Vitruvian Man and Derby Day maiden winner Powershift.

The Belmont field doesn't include any runners from the Preakness for the first time since 1917 and that probably only happened because the Derby and Preakness were run on the same day. The Belmont also was run before the Preakness 11 times until 1931, when the current order of the Triple Crown series started.

Two of the three races in this year's Triple Crown were contested away from their



Samantha Decker

Kentucky Derby winner Golden Tempo eyes his fourth win from six starts in today's Belmont Stakes.

usual sites, with the Preakness at Laurel Park while Pimlico Race Course undergoes its own reconstruction project.

Most consider Saratoga's hosting of the final jewel of the Triple Crown to be successful, with large and enthusiastic crowds packing the facility and rooting home Dornoch over a field that included Derby winner Mystik Dan and Preakness winner Seize The Grey in 2024 and Derby winner Sovereignty over Preakness winner Journalism and Baeza in 2025.

The 2026 renewal figures to pack plenty of punch with Golden Tempo and Renegade, separated by just a neck after 10 furlongs of the Derby, back for more. Chief Wallabee finished 2 3/4 lengths back in the Derby, his fourth start. Florida Derby winner Commandment, the 6-1 fourth choice in the Derby; and Louisiana Derby winner Emerging Market, the 8-1 sixth choice who lost a shoe going into the first turn in Louisville, also seek to make amends.

The Belmont goes as the 13th of 14 races today with post time set for 7:04 p.m.

DeVaux, who spent some of her childhood in Saratoga Springs before growing up in Florida, skipped the Preakness with Golden Tempo with designs on the Belmont. She's anxious to get the Phipps Stable and St Elias Stable homebred son of Curlin back on track while still relishing the popular milestone score in the Derby.

"It still hasn't set in. None of it," DeVaux said Friday morning outside her barn on the Oklahoma Training Track after Golden Tempo turned in his final gallop on the main track. "It's exciting to have something like that and for people who I share it with to be excited about it."

Golden Tempo took a step forward in the five weeks leading up to the Belmont, not unlike his big move up between his close third in the Louisiana Derby to the Kentucky Derby. He turned in two strong



Samantha Decker

Fourth in the Derby, Chief Wallabee seeks his second win.

Continued on Page 8

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Belmont -

■ Continued from page 6

works at Keeneland before his Derby win and added three more before the Belmont, including a half-mile tightener in :48.20 last Saturday.

“He’s really good. He moved forward in his training. He finally looks like a fit racehorse,” DeVaux said. “He always carried a lot of extra condition, but he finally looks like a fit racehorse and not like we’re trying to get anything off him.”

Golden Tempo was pegged as the 9-2 third choice on the Belmont morning line behind 2-1 favorite Renegade and the 3-1 Chief Wallabee.

“It’s cliché, but he touts himself, he acts confident,” DeVaux said. “He was always a little aloof and immature, not in a bad way. I don’t know if he knows what he did, but I know he knows he did something really cool to have a lot of people paying attention to him. For a race to go like that, he acts like he grew two inches taller. He’s big and puffed up. I do think it was a confidence boost and I think he should move forward from that. What that translates into . . . he obviously has a running style that is a bit tricky, but it is what it is.”

Golden Tempo and Jose Ortiz closed from 17 lengths back and last place after a half-mile in the Derby. Renegade and Irad Ortiz Jr. nearly did the same, coming from 12 lengths back and 15th at that same point in the Derby before finishing an agonizing second. The Ortiz brothers return to those mounts today for the rematch.

DeVaux said she’s fortunate to have her rider, who made the move to Kentucky full-time two years ago, on the team to help execute the plans.

“You have to have confidence in yourself and the process, which we did,” she said. “It takes a lot, I can have a plan all day long but number one, we are dealing with an animal, and he has to respond to what we are doing. And then our whole team, everybody has to enact on what we are doing. Everybody did a wonderful job. Golden Tempo won the race, but Jose made it happen. He put a lot of faith in the horse, he understood what we were doing throughout the whole thing. He never lost confidence in the horse.”

Junior Alvarado returns aboard Chief Wallabee for the fifth time for trainer Bill Mott. Mike and Katherine Ball’s homebred raced closer to the Derby’s fast pace than the horses who finished in front of him, then lost some stretch momentum when bumped by Further Ado in the stretch.

“It was a great trip all the way around,” Alvarado said Friday. “I had a good sixteenth of a mile with a good spot to go through, and my horse was still a little green, shy to get into that spot. I think when he decided to go into it, it was a little late.



Ryan Thompson

Florida Derby winner Commandment tries to get back to winning for trainer Brad Cox.

Horses from the outside were coming down, so we got bumped pretty hard.”

In addition to beating 14 horses, Chief Wallabee gained experience in his fourth start.

“He still had some courage after the bump to keep on running,” Alvarado said. “He never got discouraged. He actually kept coming and he was strong enough to finish fourth. His talent is higher than his mentality as a racehorse still. I don’t think he has caught up with his ability, and I think eventually he’ll get there.”

Mott has given Chief Wallabee, a son of Constitution, three works on the Oklahoma since the Derby, including a bullet 5-furlong move May 23.

“I’ve seen him train, and he looks fantastic out there,” said Alvarado, looking for his second straight Belmont after winning with Sovereignty last year. “I’m hoping if he progresses a little bit



Samantha Decker

Louisiana Derby winner Emerging Market.

more, it could probably be enough to put him in the winner’s circle.”

Like Alvarado, Mott seeks a repeat Belmont score while soaking up the Saratoga experience.

“It means a lot,” Mott said at Monday’s post draw. “We love Saratoga and we love the town. We love the racing up here. The atmosphere is great, and it’s probably one of the best venues for racing there is in the entire country, maybe the world.”

Trainer Brad Cox seeks a second Belmont victory, after sending out Essential Quality at the old Belmont Park in 2021. Cox runs Commandment, a son of Into Mischief who vied for Derby favoritism after late-running wins in the Fountain of Youth and Florida Derby to extend a winning streak to four. He finished 5 1/4 lengths back under Luis Saez, who rides Powershift in the Belmont. Hall of Famer and two-time Belmont winner John Velazquez takes the

call today.

Cox said Commandment trained well at Churchill between the Derby and the Belmont and comes in optimistic.

“He came out of the race in good order, that’s why we’re here,” Cox said Friday. “He’s had some good works since. I feel like I’m running him with a lot of confidence just based off what we’ve seen there with him at Churchill.”

“Obviously Johnny knows how to get a horse around the Saratoga oval, so I think we’re in good hands with him. I like how the horse shipped in. I like how he’s trained over the main track all week. He schooled great (Thursday) and his energy level is good. We have him where he needs to be to get a big effort out of him.”

Chad Brown sends out the trio of Emerging Market, Growth Equity and Ottinho in search of his first Belmont. Brown finished second to Triple Crown winner Justify in the 2018 renewal with Gronkowski and third in the 2024 Belmont with Sierra Leone. Brown has won the Preakness twice and hopes there’s a Belmont with his name on it.

Emerging Market wound up 10th in the Derby after racing close to fast early fractions for a mile and losing his left front shoe while making just his third lifetime start.

“It’s a solid field and whoever wins is going to have to run their ‘A’ race, for sure,” Brown said this week. “The pace of the race is a little suspect, which probably means there will be a couple pace horses and a couple mid-pack horses and definitely some horses with no speed. I know I have one of those (Emerging Market). Hopefully the horses will string out and organize, so not only Emerging Market, but all the horses can find their path, not too wide and have a nice fair race for everybody.”

– Additional reporting by Sean Clancy, Paul Halloran and Darby O’Brien.



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Calm Seas

Renegade, Pletcher look to go one better in Triple Crown finale

BY JOE CLANCY

Todd Pletcher said it like someone reading a drama-free weather report. The whole thing might as well have been partly cloudy or maybe partly sunny, but definitely no pending storm front or ideal beach day.

“It was a winning effort,” the trainer said of Renegade’s runner-up finish in the Kentucky Derby. “We just finished second. You dust yourself off and regroup.”

Of course, in the next sentence Pletcher admitted that Derby wins with Super Saver in 2010 and Always Dreaming in 2017 make it a little easier to sound unbothered by losing North America’s most important Thoroughbred race by a neck.

“No doubt, no doubt,” he said. “But you can’t be disappointed in the horse’s effort. You’re disappointed because at the eighth pole you think he might win. It’s one thing, if you’re closing and you finish third, and you’re never sure you’re getting there. He had his nose in front at some stage, so it makes it a little tougher beat.”

Renegade, Pletcher, jockey Irad Ortiz Jr. and owners Repole Stable and Robert and Lawana Low get a chance to avenge that Derby defeat as the 2-1 morning-line favorite in today’s Belmont Stakes at Saratoga Race Course. Derby winner Golden Tempo will be there, along with three others from the first Saturday in May at Churchill Downs.

Bred by the Lows and purchased by Repole at Keeneland September, Renegade will appreciate post four in a nine-horse field as opposed to the always dicey inside stall in a Derby field that went to 18. The son of Into Mischief broke to his right for a stride or two while creating contact with Albus in stall two. Three strides later, Litmus Test leaned in hard from post four – crowding everybody to his inside and knocking Renegade off stride. The bump didn’t last, but

BELMONT STAKES PREVIEW

made an impact. Litmus Test found a spot in the top five along the rail, Intrepido and Albus backed out to 12th and 16th and Renegade found some comfort in 15th after a furlong.

Tactically, it might have helped as the bay colt rated far off a fast early pace, three spots ahead of Golden Tempo – whose start was far smoother from post 16. Renegade was a dozen lengths behind after early fractions of :22.68 and :46.44. By the 6-furlong split of 1:10.90, he’d advanced a little closer but was 16th. Ortiz navigated traffic while inside on the far turn, angled wide into the stretch and – after brushing with Incredibolt – passed Ocelli late but couldn’t hold off Golden Tempo’s even wider, later bid.

Both horses skipped the Preakness in favor of the Belmont, at Saratoga for the third time while construction continues at Belmont Park. Golden Tempo returned to trainer Cherie DeVaux’s base at Keeneland, Renegade to Pletcher’s Saratoga spot on the Oklahoma side of Union Avenue. Renegade looked fresh and happy while training late to catch a fresh racetrack Tuesday morning.

“Happy horse,” Pletcher said afterward. “His energy level’s been good, he’s happy galloping.”

Thirty days in, there was no apparent Derby hangover though that wasn’t always the case.

“It’s the Derby, you know, a different animal altogether,” Pletcher said. “I’ve seen some of them get pretty gutted after it. He handled it pretty well – you could tell though. It was about two weeks before he really started to get his energy level back to where it was.”

Renegade was in Saratoga last year too and had the distinction of finishing third to runaway maiden winner It’s Our Time on the Alabama undercard Aug. 16. Pletcher remembered

Samantha Decker
Second in the Kentucky Derby,
Renegade looks to find a neck
against Golden Tempo.



cautioning Mike Repole about making too much of that lopsided loss.

“It’s going to read where he got beat 17 lengths,” Pletcher told him, “but he didn’t run a bad race.”

Two months later, he won a 1-mile maiden race at Aqueduct, but was disqualified for interfering with Paladin. Pletcher treated that like a win and went to the Remsen in December. Paladin won for real this time with Renegade second. Pletcher wasn’t disappointed. Back to the races in February, Renegade won the Sam Davis at Tampa Bay Downs and made his case for Kentucky with a 4-length triumph in the Arkansas Derby in March.

“I always thought he would improve going longer, because he was one of those that was always kind of doing just what his workmate would do,” Pletcher said of the colt’s progress in 2025. “You always got the feeling there was a little more there. That was a crazy maiden race he was in . . . we stretched him out, and he won and got disqualified. We ran back in the Remsen, he had kind of a rough trip, and I thought finished very well. Then we kind of pinpointed those two races as what we wanted to

do, and everything fell into place this spring. He just came up one short in the Derby.”

- Pletcher and Repole also run Powershift, whose three starts include two on the same day as Renegade. On Sam Davis Day at Tampa, the Constitution colt finished second to Belmont starter Emerging Market in a maiden. After a sixth in the Tampa Bay Derby in March, Powershift won the first race on the Kentucky Derby card at Churchill Downs May 2 – defeating older horses while going 1 1/16 miles.

Like Renegade, the dark bay was in Saratoga last year and showed promise without making a start.

“I thought he was one of our best 2-year-olds here last summer, and we had a little setback, but he came back and trained really well, he’s solid,” Pletcher said. “He just got beat by Emerging Market in his debut, and we took an aggressive shot at the Tampa Derby. He didn’t get away well and then found himself in behind a bunch of horses. It just never unfolded, so at that point we regrouped, and I thought he ran the way we expected him to Derby Day.”

Darley

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Easy Ride

With help from Green, 4-year-old Journalism heads to historic Gr. 1

BY JOE CLANCY

Trainer Amelia Green wanted a jockey to breeze horses at Saratoga Race Course, and sent a text to agent John Panagot from her base at Belmont Park.

“Hey, are your jockeys up in Saratoga to breeze my horses?” went the message.

With racing at Aqueduct on pause and the Belmont Stakes Racing Festival still days away, Manny Franco and Jaime Rodriguez were understandably elsewhere. Panagot let Green know and added that trainer Michael McCarthy needed a work rider for Grade 1 winner Journalism too.

Green didn’t hesitate.

“I hear you’re looking for someone to breeze Journalism,” she texted McCarthy, with a cowboy-hat emoji for good measure.

McCarthy said she was the perfect woman for the job.

And that’s how Green, former jockey, former assistant trainer and exercise rider for Henry Cecil, George Papaprodromou and Todd Pletcher got to ride Journalism in his final serious prep for today’s Metropolitan Handicap. The 4-year-old, winner of last year’s Preakness Stakes and runner-up in the Kentucky Derby and Belmont, covered a half-mile on the main track in :49.27.

Green loved it.

“He just floats over the ground, he does it so effortlessly,” she said. “He looks a lot more aggressive galloping than he felt breezing. He’s, at least to breeze, a pure professional. I just put my hands down, stayed out of his way, and he just reeled off :12 and change (furlongs). Even in the gallop out. Honestly, he felt like he quickened in the gallop out – just kept going :12 and change, :12 and change until I said, ‘OK, that’s enough.’ And that was it. As soon as I said that was enough, he said OK too. He’s just a pure professional that just knows what to do.”

Racing for Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners, Bridlewood Farm, Don Alberto Stable, Bob LaPenta, Elayne Stables Five and the Magnier-Tabor-Smith team of Coolmore Stud, Journalism



Samanta Decker

Journalism and Amelia Green stretch into the turn during a May 30 breeze on the main track.

breaks from the outside for jockey Jose Ortiz in the seven-horse Met, worth \$1 million but carrying as much value with its history dating to 1891 and a list of previous winners peppered with legends. The son of Curlin is 5-2 on the morning line, just behind 9-5 favorite Nysos and just ahead of 7-2 Knightsbridge. The 11th race on the Belmont Stakes card, the Met goes at 5:32 p.m.

In that breeze with Green and while galloping

on the main track Thursday, for regular exercise rider Marc Witkowski, Journalism looks the part of a three-time Grade 1 winner who was one horse (Horse of the Year Sovereignty) away from being a Triple Crown winner in 2025.

“It’s the same thing you’d expect from any 3-year-old turning 4 – he’s bigger, stronger, a little bit more self-assured this year, which might be a good way of putting it,” McCarthy said while crossing Union Avenue behind his charge Thursday. “He’s always been a good-feeling horse, an easy keeper, all the axioms that go along with that kind of stuff.”

McCarthy appreciates the decision to bring the horse back for a 4-year-old campaign, especially after Coolmore bought into the colt. Journalism will stand at the Irish operation’s Ashford Stud in Kentucky.

“The stallion game is so strong, it’s a very sporting decision by Coolmore and everyone else involved with the horse to keep him in training at 4,” said the California-based trainer. “It’s certainly nice to walk in and see his face peering out at me every morning.”

After four wins, three seconds and a fourth (in the Breeders’ Cup Classic) while putting up \$4.19 million in eight



Samanta Decker

Knightsbridge tries to get back to winning after a sixth in the Churchill Downs.

Continued on Page 14

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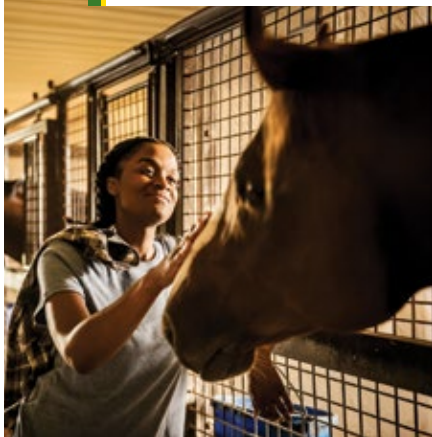
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Met Mile -

■ Continued from page 12

starts last year, Journalism spent time at John and Leslie Malone's Bridlewood in Ocala, Fla. over the winter before re-joining McCarthy at Santa Anita. The bay colt had his first breeze of 2026 in February and went to Oaklawn Park for a showdown with Sovereignty and White Abarrio in the Grade 1 Oaklawn Handicap April 18. In a scenario few envisioned, Irad Ortiz Jr. eased back on White Abarrio into the first turn as Sovereignty and Journalism rolled past. He stalked them – instead of the reverse – before launching off the turn and winning by 2 lengths. Sovereignty held second by 1 1/4 lengths over Journalism, who was 8 clear of Publisher.

"I would have liked to have had the trip that White Abarrio had, it just didn't work out that way," McCarthy said. "We were intent on running into the first turn and we did just that. We were committed, Sovereignty was committed and Irad was able to go ahead and back right on out of there and find himself in a wonderful stalking position."

Fourth in last year's Met Mile, White Abarrio waits for the Stephen Foster at Churchill Downs June 27, as does the Saratoga-based Sovereignty. There's a chance Journalism could join them, but the Met Mile comes first.

Green will be watching. She and McCarthy, a former Pletcher assistant, met in California and he connected her with Pletcher in 2017. With that Hall of Famer, who saddles Vibe and Antiquarian in the Met Mile, Green rode and traveled with stars such as Life Is Good. In 2021, he won the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile, and added three more Grade 1 stakes (including Saratoga's Whitney) in 2022.

Though he seems like a logical comparison to Journalism, Green went in a different direction.

"Life Is Good, you were always trying to stop him doing too much," said Green, who started her training career in December 2024. "With him, it was keeping him under wraps. Journalism felt probably more like (champion 3-year-old filly of 2021 and older female of 2022) Malathaat, where you can feel this power underneath you, but they're not going to do too much. They're kind of waiting for you to tell them when to give it to you. He's a more powerful version, but similar."

• • •

Nyos makes his first start since a second to Japanese star Forever Young in the 1 1/8-mile Saudi Cup in February after winning his previous four including the 2025 Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile at Del Mar. Baoma Corp's 5-year-old son of Nyquist has won seven of nine, with two seconds, lifetime. He'll break from post one for Flavien Prat while aiming to give trainer Bob Baffert his third Met Mile after winning with Mor Spirit in 2017 and National Treasure in 2024.

"I should've won it with McKinzie (in 2019), he had a horrible trip," Baffert said. "That one got away from us.



Samantha Decker

Antiquarian tries to add a Met Mile to his Jockey Club Gold Cup win last year.

It's a very important race. It's sort of weird coming out of that Wilson Chute. I'll be glad when it gets back to Belmont, the one-turn mile."

Third in the 2024 Saudi Cup, Saudi Crown looks for his third win of 2026 for FMQ Stable and trainer Brad Cox. The 6-year-old son of Always Dreaming breaks from post four for Irad Ortiz after wins at Oaklawn in March and Keeneland's Grade 3 Commonwealth in April.

Godolphin's Knightsbridge continues to make up for lost time after starting once in 2023, twice in 2024 and three times last year. His 2026 includes Grade 3 wins at a mile in January and February, the second an 11 1/4-length romp in the Gulfstream Park Mile. Sixth as the favorite in the 7-furlong Churchill Downs on Kentucky Derby Day, the son of Nyquist looks to start another winning streak from post six for trainer Bill Mott and jockey Junior Alvarado.

"We haven't lost any faith in him," said Michael Banahan, Godolphin USA director of bloodstock. "He has trained well, Bill's been very happy with him and maybe the only thing we can do is go back in there and try again . . . It was always the plan to go to Churchill and then the Met Mile. Other than the finishing position, we haven't been given any reason not to try it again. He certainly needs to run back to his numbers that he ran down in Florida."

Antiquarian won the Jockey Club Gold Cup here last summer and just missed in the Suburban for Centennial Farm. He and John Velazquez look to repeat their score in Aqueduct's Grade 3 Westchester at a mile May 3 from post three. Fellow Pletcher trainee Vibe has won three in a row, all at a mile. Luis Saez rides the Into Mischief colt from post two.

Rated By Merit won his first five starts in 2024 and 2025 and was fourth in Aqueduct's Carter April 4 for St. Elias Stable and trainer Chad Brown. Dylan Davis rides from post five.

*Additional reporting
by Alec DiConza and Paul Halloran.*

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New Plan

Turf star Rhetorical returns running off Walden's winter break

BY ALEC DICONZA

Exiting a five-start, four-win campaign with New York-bred turf horse Rhetorical last year, trainer Will Walden pondered how to approach a winter of rest for the Grade 1 winner. And sought advice from one of the most accomplished trainers in racing history.

"I called Aidan O'Brien after the Breeders' Cup because I didn't want to put the horse back out in the field when the weather was turning in Kentucky," Walden said. "I asked him what the winter looked like for a couple of his horses. He explained to me in a lot of detail what his program was and we just tried to emulate it the best we could given the facilities we were able to use over the winter. A lot of dressage, a lot of flat work, no shoes. He spent about three hours a morning outside, from training all the way to the round pen. He put on a lot of weight and muscle. He's a bigger, stronger, better version of himself."

The Irish input paid off.

The 5-year-old began 2026 with a fast-closing third in the Grade 1 Maker's Mark Mile at Keeneland and followed with a 3 1/4-length score in the Grade 1 Turf Classic on Kentucky Derby Day going 9 furlongs. Today, he'll stretch out to 1 3/16 miles for the first time in the Grade 1 Resorts World Casino Manhattan, a \$1 million affair for older horses on the turf.

"He's doing well," Walden said Tuesday morning. "Since Keeneland, we've increased the distance on him each start. It worked out well last time, we'll hope it works well this time. He's training well, he's super happy. He trained awesome this morning. It's another solid group of colts and geldings. Just excited that we have the opportunity to come out and compete on these big days."

Rhetorical has provided plenty of opportunities to compete on racing's biggest days for owners Gary Barber, Cheyenne Stable and Wachtel Stable. After his horse won last summer's West Point against state-breds at Saratoga,



Samantha Decker

New York-bred Rhetorical looks for his third Grade 1 win.

Walden dove into an open-company Grade 1 at Keeneland and Rhetorical responded. The son of Not This Time won Keeneland's Grade 1 Coolmore Turf Mile, becoming the first New York-bred to win the race in its 40-year history.

"He had shown he was ready for that kind of step up," Walden said. "Coming out of Saratoga, we were looking at it, but it wasn't necessarily definite. It wasn't until his four breezes at Churchill leading up to that spot, post-Saratoga, that we were

like, 'OK, if we're going to try it, now is as good of a time as any.' He was training so well and he totally tipped his hand. It paid off."

Rhetorical went from Keeneland to Del Mar and finished fourth in the Breeders' Cup Mile, won by Godolphin's Notable Speech, after leading with a furlong to go.

"No love lost there," Walden said. "He had never been run down before. I had never seen a horse pass him. But those boys in blue, they're tough to

beat and Notable Speech is such a good horse and a consistent horse . . . But that's what the Breeders' Cup is about. There are no freebies. You get one there, you've earned it. We'll hope to be back there this year."

Rhetorical provided Walden with his first and second Grade 1 victories as a trainer so the gelding will always have a special place in Walden's heart.

"This barn right now, this is the house that Rhetorical built. I owe him everything – him and Bless The Broken (third in 2025 Kentucky Oaks) last year," Walden said. "Just an immense amount of gratitude for the horse and who he is as an individual. Just that we get to participate in his career, it's an honor. We try and soak it in and treasure every day we have him and just



Samantha Decker

Deterministic bids for a second consecutive Manhattan win.

Continued on Page 18

2025-'26 STAKES-WINNING JUNE SALE GRADUATES



BREEZED IN
:20 ¹/₅

CRUDE VELOCITY

Pat Day Mile (G2)



BREEZED IN
: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
:10 ¹/₅

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'25 & '26 Thunder Road S. (G3)



BREEZED IN
:10

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



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:21 ³/₅

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Manhattan -

■ Continued from page 16

enjoy the ride.”

Rhetorical will wear an aluminum pad on his left hind foot in the Manhattan after coming out of the Turf Classic with a minor issue.

“He’s just got a little fungal deal out of the last race, so we put it on for support,” Walden said. “It’s not a big deal.”

Bred by Mallory and Karen Mort, Rhetorical breaks from post seven at 2-1 on the morning line and with Irad Ortiz Jr. on for the ninth time.

Shug McGaughey enters two in search of his fourth Manhattan and first since 2013.

Integration will try to make up for a head loss to Deterministic in last year’s race after closing nearly 5 lengths in the final furlong.

“That was a heartbreaker, but maybe we’ll make up for it,” McGaughey said.

Owned by West Point Thoroughbreds and Woodford Racing, Integration finished third in the Grade 1 Arlington Million two months after the Manhattan, then missed the rest of 2025. He returned to finish third in a Keeneland allowance April 8 before a win at Aqueduct May 7.

“I was disappointed in his race at Keeneland, but I thought he ran pretty well the other day,” McGaughey said. “He came out of it well and has trained really well, so I think the race helped him.”



Samantha Decker

Tiz Dashing breaks from the rail for trainer Barclay Tagg.

Battle Of Normandy exits a second in the Grade 3 Fort Marcy for the same owners. He won four in a row in 2024, finished 11th in the 2025 Pegasus World Cup Turf and then missed almost a year before his return this winter in Florida. Third in January, he was second in his next two.

“He always runs his race,” McGaughey said. “In the Pegasus, he had the outside post and he didn’t get beat that far but he was wide the whole way. In his last race, he was just second best.”

Integration breaks from post four with John Velazquez and Battle Of Normandy will start in

post nine under Dylan Davis.

Deterministic proved a popular winner of last year’s Manhattan when providing Miguel Clement with his first Grade 1 victory as a trainer just weeks after his father’s passing. The 5-year-old son of Liam’s Map rolled on to win the Grade 1 Fourstar-dave before a setback kept him out of Breeders’ Cup consideration. He made his 2026 debut a winning one in the Fort Marcy, wiring the field by three-quarters of a length. He’ll start from post five while looking for his fifth consecutive win, all with Kendrick Carmouche aboard.

Wertheimer and Frere’s Bright Picture ships in from France for trainer Andre Fabre. He exits a second in the Group 1 Prix Ganay behind reigning Prix de l’Arc de Triomphe winner Daryz. The French-bred son of Intello boasts seven wins in 12 starts and is the 3-1 second choice on the morning line from post six. Flavien Prat takes the mount.

Fellow French-bred Make Me King finished second behind Rhetorical in the Turf Classic in his first U.S. start for trainer H.A. Al Jehani. One Stripe has been knocking on the door this year with two close seconds in Grade 1 races, including the Maker’s Mark Mile – ahead of Rhetorical – for trainer Graham Motion. The Motion barn will also be represented by Test Score, who won the Pegasus Turf over One Stripe in January but was eighth in the Turf Classic. Tiz Dashing, most recently seventh in the Maker’s Mark, after winning a Grade 3 in Florida for Barclay Tagg completes the field from the rail.

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Round 2

Crude Velocity, Englishman meet again in Grade 1 sprint

BY DARBY O'BRIEN

Crude Velocity and Englishman put on a show last month in the Grade 2 Pat Day Mile on the Kentucky Derby undercard at Churchill Downs.

Englishman broke from the rail, zipping to the lead with Crude Velocity stalking on the outside after recovering from an awkward break. Englishman set fractions of :22.06 for the opening quarter and :44.20 for the half and looked ready for more at the top of the stretch, but Crude Velocity brought the smoke. He reeled in Englishman in the final furlong to score by 3 ¾ lengths, earning his third victory in as many starts.

Call today's Woody Stephens, at 7 furlongs, the rematch.

"Crude is good," said trainer Bob Baffert Friday morning, standing along the rail as his trio of California shippers wrapped up training. "He's 3-for-3. He's so talented, and I think he's still a little green. He's still learning how to run. He didn't break

WOODY STEPHENS STAKES PREVIEW

too well, but I think he should break much better."

The Beau Liam colt broke his maiden first out at Santa Anita in March, going 6 1/2 furlongs and dominated allowance foes at the same distance a month later before the stakes breakthrough at Churchill Downs. The 3-year-old stayed at Churchill through May and arrived in Saratoga off three breezes at the Kentucky track.

"He's easy on himself," Baffert said. "He's a light horse, he's not a big, heavy horse so he can handle a lot. But you never know how much that last race takes out of them until you run them. He ran really, really hard but it seems like he came back well. Hopefully he keeps it going."

This time around, Crude Velocity breaks inside of Englishman, drawing the six hole to his rival's seven in a field of nine for the \$500,000 Grade 1.



Samantha Decker

Englishman clashes with Crude Velocity again.



Coady Media/John Rowland

Crude Velocity looks to repeat his victory in the Pat Day Mile.

"I'd rather be on the outside. I would have loved the nine hole," said Baffert. "He always breaks a step slow. But you can't worry about that. It's one of those things . . . He can get to the spot real quick. He's just extremely talented."

Englishman's trainer Cherie DeVaux couldn't be happier with the draw and hopes to see her horse stalk the pace and press as opposed to being pressed while up front.

"We were being pressed the whole way, so now we have the more ideal post," said DeVaux. "We won't be pressed the whole way now, so we can sit off. When you're on the inside, you're committed to being the one that's ahead and you don't get a break."

The son of Maxfield debuted at Churchill Downs in September and was much the best in a 7-furlong maiden while scoring by 7 1/4 lengths. Off for six months, he returned to win his 3-year-old debut in a first-level allowance going 6 furlongs by 7 1/2 lengths at the Fair Grounds. DeVaux likes the return to 7 furlongs after the 1-mile effort last month.

"He's been training really well," she said. "[The Pat Day] was probably just a touch too far, so we're getting back to a distance he's already proven at. He's a fast horse. He can carry it pretty far, but a mile is too far."

DeVaux is not the only trainer looking forward to a cutback, as George Weaver entered Six Speed in

his first start since setting the pace and fading to 13th in the Kentucky Derby at 1 1/4 miles. Shifted to Weaver's barn from Dubai-based Bhupat Seemar, the Not This Time colt won going 6 furlongs in December and 7 furlongs in January before a Group 3 win going a mile and a second in the UAE Derby going 1 3/16 miles.

"We wanted to cut him back," said Weaver Friday morning. "It's a salty race, and it's a lot different from what he was facing over in Dubai, but it makes sense that he would appreciate a turnback in distance."

Bred by KatieRich Farm, Six Speed brought \$50,000 as a Keeneland September yearling, then went to Seemar for \$304,680 at the Tattersalls Craven 2-year-old sale. The Kentucky-bred made his first three starts for Blue Blood Racing Syndicate, then moved to Brunetti Dugan Stable, Black Type Thoroughbreds and partners.

"Jake Ballis with Blacktype Thoroughbreds put together the group to buy the horse," said Weaver. "The plan was always to bring him to the States and run in the Derby, then continue to campaign him. He's training very well. He's a nice, forward horse. A high-energy horse, likes his job. We really like him a lot."

Six Speed isn't the only Triple Crown contender pivoting to the Woody Stephens.

Preakness favorite Taj Mahal enters off a 10th in the 1 3/16-mile race.

Continued on Page 22

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Stephens -

■ Continued from page 20

The Brittany Russell trainee won his first three starts including the Federico Tesio Stakes at his home track Laurel Park.

"He's had a great week training back home in Maryland," said assistant trainer Dom Boccia, who shipped up to Saratoga with the son of Nyquist. "We're really looking forward to seeing him run. All the hard work has been done back in Maryland, so we're really just trying to keep him content up here. We're keeping it simple."

Boccia hopes the \$525,000 Keeneland September purchase likes the shorter distance and a switch from post one in the Preakness to the 11 today. At 15-1, Taj Mahal breaks from post nine with Manny Franco.

Obliteration seeks his second graded stakes victory at Saratoga after taking last year's Grade 3 Sanford. The Steve Asmussen trainee opened 2026 with a sprint stakes win at Oaklawn Park, then finished second in the

Saudi Derby going a mile in February. Shortened up to 6 furlongs again in the Lang, he won by 3 1/2 lengths as the favorite.

Stradale, a \$1.3 million purchase at OBS April, also represents the Asmussen barn. The Yaupon colt eyes his first stakes win while coming off a second in the Bachelor at Oaklawn May 1 for owner Kaleem Shah.

Saffie Joseph Jr. enters Solitude Dude, last out the winner of the Bay Shore at Aqueduct April 18. The Yaupon colt finished third behind Belmont Stakes starters Commandment and Chief Wallabee in the Fountain of Youth Feb. 28 and won the 7-furlong Swale at Gulfstream Park in January. A winner in four of his five starts, he breaks from post five with Flavien Prat.

Pin Oak Stud's Gilded Bandit delves into stakes company for the first time for trainer Bill Mott off back-to-back wins in Kentucky while California trainer Doug O'Neill ships in Civil Liberty off a 3-length maiden score at Keeneland. One start before that, he finished a neck behind Crude Velocity in a Santa Anita maiden race.

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2026 JAPAN GROUP 1 RACES

Date	Race		Racecourse	Distance	Purse	Nomination Close
7 Jun	Yasuda Kinen		Tokyo/Turf	1600m	\$ 2,520,000	Closed
14 Jun	Takarazuka Kinen		Hanshin/Turf	2200m	\$ 4,200,000	Closed
27 Sep	Sprinters Stakes		Nakayama/Turf	1200m	\$ 2,387,000	11 Aug
1 Nov	Tenno Sho (Autumn)		Tokyo/Turf	2000m	\$ 4,200,000	8 Sep
15 Nov	Queen Elizabeth II Cup		Kyoto/Turf	2200m	\$ 2,107,000	22 Sep
22 Nov	Mile Championship		Kyoto/Turf	1600m	\$ 2,520,000	22 Sep
29 Nov	Japan Cup		Tokyo/Turf	2400m	\$ 7,034,000	6 Oct
6 Dec	Champions Cup		Chukyo/Dirt	1800m	\$ 2,107,000	6 Oct
27 Dec	Arima kinen		Nakayama/Turf	2500m	\$ 7,034,000	3 Nov

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Trip Notes

French-based filly Mandanaba aims high in Saratoga Grade 1

BY SEAN CLANCY

Nemone Routh watched Cankoura walk down the long Saratoga stretch back to the test barn, moments after the Aga Khan Studs' homebred and jockey Clement Lecoivre missed by a head in the Grade 1 New York.

"Oh my God. She ran so well. What a filly," the French racing manager said. "That gives me a lot of hope. Clement now has some experience here, he's ridden brilliantly. The two fillies have been working together. They're in great form. It was worth coming. It was worth coming."

And they're not finished.

Cankoura's traveling mate Mandanaba tries to make it really worth it in today's Grade 1 Just A Game. The mile turf stakes attracted eight runners, including the Chad Brown pair Segesta and Sandtrap. Mandanaba is 9-2 third choice behind those two on the morning line. For context, Cankoura was the 10-1 seventh choice on the morning line and went off as the 8-1 fifth choice.

Trainer Francis-Henri Graffard, who won the Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare turf with Gezora last year, picked out the Grade 1 spots for Cankoura and Mandanaba. Routh liked the idea, presented it to Princess Zahra Aga Khan and here they were a head away from starting with a bang.

"It was Francis who was keen. He loves American racing. He highlighted about four races for different horses and the two that seemed the most logical for us were these two we are running," Routh said Friday morning as Cankoura and Mandanaba galloped over the main track. "These are fillies who have won stakes races and they're both Grade 1 placed. The reason we kept them in training was to try and go a bit better with them. Their alternatives in Europe weren't as interesting. It falls well in the program for them, they're both

JUST A GAME STAKES PREVIEW

fillies who go on good, fast ground, they both break well, they have high cruising speeds."

Cankoura got outrun going into the first turn, angled to the rail, settled in seventh, saved ground around the second turn, swung out in the stretch and couldn't run down the front-running Portfolio Duration.

"Everyone is a just little bit sad to get beat on the day," Routh said. "She's so genuine. What a filly. What a filly."

Mandanaba won her 2-year-old debut in November 2024. She returned to win the Group 3 Prix Vanteaux in her 3-year-old bow and then finished third in the Group 1 French 1000 Guineas and fourth in the Group 1 Prix de Diane. Put away after a dull effort in the Group 1 Prix Rothschild, the daughter of Ghaiyyath returned



Susie Raisher

Mandanaba trains on the Oklahoma track Tuesday.

with a win in the Prix Maurice Zilber at Longchamp in her only start this season. Graffard was already thinking Saratoga.

"Francis loves doing these kinds of things. He has a real internation-

al mindset. We've always thought Mandanaba would suit American racing," Routh said Friday morning. "We'll have to see, they need to adapt to the track, they've got to adapt to the whole difference. They're both experienced fillies, their temperaments, very honest."

And friends. Yes, friends. The duo live next to each other at Graffard's yard in Chantilly, they went home together for a winter break at the Aga Khans Stud, they returned to training together. They ran against each other once, Cankoura finishing third and Mandanaba finishing fourth in the Prix de Diane last June. Cankoura is edgy and animated while Mandanaba is steady and soothing. Friday morning, Marion Vaillant gently tempered Cankoura around the paddock while Orlane de Menech simply guided Mandanaba. Assistant Antoine Creton watched.

"They're really good friends, these two fillies. The two riders are friends, and the two fillies are friends. They're kind of best friends. It was nice to travel them together," Routh said from the paddock. "But look, we are



Samantha Decker

Segesta seeks her third consecutive win for trainer Chad Brown.

Continued on Page 26

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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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Just A Game -

■ Continued from page 24

slightly taking a leap into the unknown. But they look very well, we have confidence in them. If you don't try, you never know. We'll be very happy if we finish in the first three."

First box ticked.

Now for the second.

Mandanaba and Lecoivre break from post four, outside Brown's daunting pair.

Favorite Segesta launches into this fresh off Grade 1 scores in the Matriarch in November and the Jenny Wiley in April. The Juddmonte homebred finished in a dead heat with Expensive Queen in the latter. Segesta finished sixth in last year's Just A Game, her only try at Saratoga. Flavien Prat rides the five-time winner.

Second choice Sandtrap won her debut at Salisbury in 2024 and finished second behind Gezora in the Group 3 Prix des Reservoirs at Deauville in 2024. The full-sister to three-time Grade 1 winner Carl Spackler missed the entire 2025 season and returned with a facile score against allowance foes at Aqueduct in April. Manny Franco rides for Bridlewood Farm.

Grade 2 winner Classic Q breaks from the rail for Mark Casse and John Velazquez. And One More Time exits a stakes score in the Plenty Of Grace for Javier Castellano and Casse. Grade 3



winner Fast Market breaks from post six for Dylan Davis and John Terranova. Buttercream Babe seeks her first stakes win for Rusty Arnold and Luis Saez. Two-time stakes winner Deep Satin breaks from the outside for Cherie DeVaux and Jose Ortiz.

• • •

You can't spend 26 minutes with the Aga Khan Studs' racing manager without asking about Calandagan. The 5-year-old gelding puts a five-race win streak (all Grade/Group 1) on the line in today's Coolmore Coronation Cup at Epsom. The homebred son of Gleneagles faces five rivals, including three from Aidan O'Brien. Calandagan hasn't lost since a half-length defeat to today's rival Jan Brueghel in the 2025 edition. The Group 1 goes to post at 9:40 a.m., our time.

"He arrived in Epsom really well. The conditions are not ideal, they've had a lot of rain. He handles soft ground with no problem, he's slightly better on good ground. Soft ground is not a problem for him but it's just that track is a very stiff test," Routh said. "The O'Brien horses are going to make it an absolute test of stamina to try to find him out. It's a tricky track, it cambers like this (severe), it's that last 100 meters, it goes sharply up hill, but he's there to run. We kind of feel like he's a gelding, we are not going to hide him, if he's in good form, you need to stand up and be counted. He's the world's best horse last year, we understand that there is a risk that you can get beaten because it's not ideal. If it was good ground, good to firm, we would be very comfortable.

"He's a great horse, he's got such personality. They said he understood that he was off again yesterday. He's a very intelligent horse. Clement rode him for the first and only time in his second-to-last gallop. He was telling me yesterday that he is an incredible horse, you feel like you're flying when you're riding him. It's almost like he's not touching the ground. He said he never felt that on a horse before. He's really light on his feet. He's got this incredible stride. He was like, 'Wow, this is amazing.'

"We have this lovely horse Daryz. He is a very different sort than Calandagan. He is a very strong horse, he would be the heaviest horse in the yard. He is all about power. They're pretty amazing. Francis has really found the tune to them because you really have to get to know our horses."

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Playing Defense

Fast California mare Ag Bullet, Baltas return for turf sprint

BY TOM LAW

Richard Baltas knows the signs.

He's seen them plenty – all the way back to late 2023 when he took over training the then listed stakes winner Ag Bullet. The 6-year-old mare has since climbed the ladder to Grade 1 winner. During her four graded stakes wins – and even in some of her defeats – Baltas saw signs that the big, gray mare would be ready.

“When she's tough to saddle that's usually a good sign,” Baltas said Friday morning outside Ag Bullet's stall at Saratoga Race Course, where she'll defend her title against males in today's Grade 1 Jaipur Stakes. “The two times she won at Kentucky Downs she was tough. Really tough. Here she was tough last year. Really tough. Whew. Tough.”

Baltas chalked some of those signs to the mare's curiosity and intelligence.

“It's like she micromanages,” he said. “She hears everything, listens, rears up . . . She knows what's up. Last year I had her in the back (in a barn closer to Clare Court) and it was a little better. It wasn't as hectic where she sees the track. I had her there in that first stall and said I can't have her there. Now she's good here more in the back.”

Baltas hopes the positive signs he's seeing since Ag Bullet returned to Saratoga from his base at Santa Anita Park translate into another win in the 5 1/2-furlong Jaipur. She won last year the day after the Belmont Stakes, when the New York Racing Association moved the race to Sunday after morning rain saturated the turf courses.

Ag Bullet won by 2 lengths as the 5-2 second choice under John Velazquez, who picked up the mount when Flavien Prat kept a commitment to ride in Kentucky. Velazquez returns on the 3-1 morning-line favorite, who hasn't been out since finishing her 2025 campaign with a second in the Grade 1 Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint at Del Mar, a trip through the sales ring at the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky November sale in Lexington and a third in

Samantha Decker
Ag Bullet looks to repeat in the Jaipur for trainer Richard Baltas.



the Grade 1 Matriarch back at Del Mar.

“She's not much different this year than she was last year here,” Baltas said. “She's been on fire since she's been here. On. Fire. . . . She's ready. She runs well fresh. I could have run her somewhere else of course, in a prep, but she didn't need it.”

Ag Bullet, who drew post six in the field of 10 just to the outside of 4-1 second choice and multiple graded stakes winner Reef Runner, won the Jaipur and the Grade 2 Never Say Die Ladies Turf Sprint in late August at Kentucky Downs. Off for two months, Ag Bullet finished second behind Shisospicy in the Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint – and ahead of Reef Runner in fourth – before heading to the auction ring for the third time.

A \$30,000 weanling in 2020 at Keeneland November and a \$220,000 yearling purchase by her owners Calvin Nguyen and Joey Tran at the 2021 Keeneland September sale, Ag Bullet was entered in the November catalog but didn't sell on a final bid of \$2.9 million two days after the Breeders' Cup. Ag Bullet's connections hope to do the same this year, with the Jaipur, Kentucky Downs, the Breeders' Cup at Keeneland and the Fasig-Tipton sale all in play.

“They wanted \$3 million last year,” Baltas said. “She got like 2.3 or 2.4, live money, and it wasn't enough. If they don't want to pay, we'll keep her. My guys, they don't have to sell.”

Alex and JoAnn Lieblong's homebred gelding Reef Runner, a veteran with 24 starts at seven tracks in three counties, makes a return to Saratoga. He enjoys the travel, trainer David Fawkes said, and the Jaipur marks his first start since a fourth in the Group 1 Al Quoz Sprint in late March at Meydan. He won the Group 2 1351 Turf Sprint in Saudi Arabia prior to that under Irad Ortiz Jr.

“He travels so fantastic,” said Fawkes, watching

the 5-year-old return to his stall Thursday morning. “When he got off the plane from Dubai, he looked as good as when he left. He really travels well. He's very, very kind. He's easy going, never does anything wrong.”

Fawkes said Reef Runner's fourth in Dubai was likely due to less than firm turf. He hopes for continued dry conditions and firm turf today.

“We went to the track, checked out the paddock and he was perfect,” Fawkes said of a schooling session this week. “He's been here before, but hopefully the weather stays good and he can run on a good surface.”

Reef Runner's only visit to Saratoga saw him finish eighth in the 2024 Mahony Stakes on a good turf course. He's won four stakes since, including the Grade 2 Eddie D. at Santa Anita. He crossed the finish first in the Grade 3 Green Flash at Del Mar but was disqualified and placed second for interference with runner-up Motorious in the early stages.

The Jaipur offers an automatic berth in the Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint and Fawkes hopes to lock that down for a trip to Kentucky, where the Florida-bred has yet to run.

“That's the year-end goal,” he said. “It's time for him to run. Weather permitting, he'll run really well. I expect him to run really well.”

Other major players in the Jaipur include Kentucky shipper and 7-2 second choice Litigation, a two-time stakes winner at Gulfstream Park this winter and a close third in the Grade 2 Twin Spires Turf Sprint on Kentucky Derby Day for trainer Brian Lynch; Grade 2 Shakertown winner My Boy Prince and the stakes-winning New York-bred Works For Me. Governor Sam, Bold Journey, Clock Tower, John The Beer Man and Twenty Six Black complete the field.

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Showdown

Sprint stars show up in Grade 3

BY ALEC DICONZA

Grade 3 in name only.

Today's \$400,000 True North Stakes might be lumped in with the 182 races at the Grade 3 level, but the depth and quality in the field for the 6 1/2-length affair for older horses says otherwise. The True North drew nine runners that include last year's Eclipse Award champion male sprinter, the top two finishers in the 2025 Breeders' Cup Sprint and five other graded stakes-placed contenders.

Bentornato, the 8-5 morning-line favorite for trainer Jose D'Angelo, headlines the field off a runner-up finish in the Dubai Golden Shaheen that came after his win in the Breeders' Cup at Del Mar.

"He came back very well after the race in Dubai," D'Angelo said. "It was a long trip. He was a little unlucky there with the post position inside of horses, but he ran pretty well. He loves it here in Saratoga. We prepped him here last year for the Breeders' Cup and he likes it here."

After finishing second in the 2024 Breeders' Cup Sprint at 28-1, Bentornato took 10 months away from action before a 5 1/4-length victory in the Louisville Thoroughbred Society at Churchill. That win propelled the 5-year-old son of Valiant Minister to favoritism in the Breeders' Cup, which he won by 2 1/4 lengths. The extended vacation wasn't exactly intentional, but the wait proved to be well worth it.

"We gave time off, but he got a splint," D'Angelo said. "He also gained so much weight, too. You have to be patient with him because you don't want to push the gas when they're heavy. That's why we lost so much time."

Bentornato and fellow True North contender Book'em Danno were sep-

TRUE NORTH STAKES PREVIEW

arated by just 33 votes in the race for the sprint division's Eclipse Award, with the latter getting the better on the strength of his 4-for-5 season that ended before the Breeders' Cup. The two meet today in their second match-up. In the 2024 Saudi Derby, Book'em Danno finished a narrowly beaten second behind global superstar Forever Young while Bentornato finished 6 lengths back in third.

"It's a strong field," D'Angelo said. "I know Book'em Danno ran here before, but Bentornato has trained here before, too. We know he likes the track. I'm excited about it."

Bentornato, owned by Leon King Stable and TCC Stable, will break from post three under Irad Ortiz Jr.

Atlantic Six Racing's Book'em Danno has made his mark on Saratoga and the Belmont Stakes Racing Festival over the last couple years. He swept the True North, Grade 2 Alfred G. Vanderbilt and Grade 1 Forego in 2025.

"That was a good summer," trainer Derek Ryan said. "I don't know that we'll ever have another one like it. ...It will be a different schedule this year. We won't run in all three this year, that's for sure."

The 5-year-old New Jersey-bred won the Grade 1 Woody Stephens on the 2024 Belmont Stakes undercard. If he were to win today, he'd become the first three-time stakes winner on Belmont Day since at least 1991. Disco Partner is the closest horse to this achievement – he won two editions of the Grade 1 Jaipur on Belmont Day in 2017 and 2018, but came up a neck short in 2016 when second to stablemate Pure Sensation and 2 1/2 lengths short in 2019 when third.

Book'em Danno started his 2026



Samantha Decker

Champion Book'em Danno returns to Saratoga for Saturday's True North.

season with a second in the Grade 2 Carter, losing by a neck under Paco Lopez as the 4-5 choice, but Ryan said that the effort only functioned as a tune-up.

"He wasn't 100 percent," Ryan said. "We were aiming for summer. Paco probably figured the outside horse would go with the other speed, but that didn't happen. He came out of it well and we're ready for this one."

Ryan acknowledged that the race is much deeper than its Grade 3 status suggests.

"Bob Baffert has got another horse in there, who's no slouch either," he said of 2025 Breeders' Cup Sprint runner-up and Grade 2 winner Imagination. "Every one of them is a nice horse in there. For a Grade 3, it's tough as hell. It's way tougher than the Grade 2 he ran in."

Lopez takes the return call on Book'em Danno, who breaks from post six at 2-1.

Imagination ships in for trainer Baffert off a fourth in the Grade 1 Churchill Downs on Derby Day. He started his 5-year-old campaign with a win overseas in the Grade 2 Riyadh Dirt Sprint.

"That was really fun, winning that sprint," Baffert said Friday morning

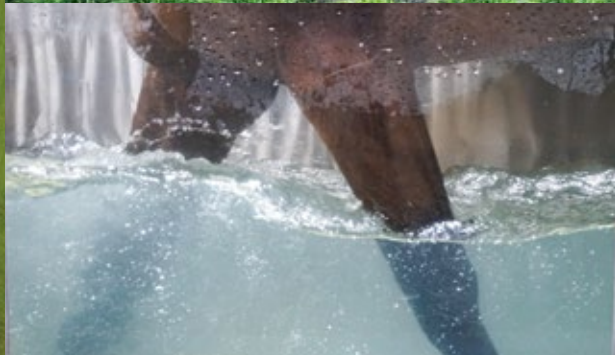
on the Saratoga backstretch. "It's a different kind of feel. I like challenges. It's a good challenge and they run for so much money. They put on a really good show. I enjoyed it."

In the Churchill Downs, Imagination and jockey Flavien Prat made the lead briefly at the top of the stretch before fading 5 1/4 lengths behind runaway winner T O Elvis.

"Prat thought maybe he had him a little too close because he broke so well, but he's a funny horse," Baffert said. "It looked like he was going to win, but he gets mad when horses run by him. I don't know why he does that, but he'll quit running. He's just a quirky horse like that. No one was going to beat that horse, just crazy fast. Our horse ran well, but that horse just freaked."

Be You, only 1 1/2 lengths behind Book'em Danno in the Carter, will try to upset the field for owner Repole Stable and trainer Todd Pletcher. Pletcher also sends out recent optional-claiming winner Illuminare. Pentathlon, third in the Grade 3 Westchester at Aqueduct, tries to win on Belmont Day for the second year in a row after winning an optional-claimer last year for trainer Shug McGaughey. Longshots Acoustic Ave, Listenupshance and Faust complete the field.

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SARATOGA ENTRIES

Saturday, June 6.

1ST (11:00AM). \$115,000, MSW, 3 YO'S & UP, F & M, 7F

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

1	.....1	.....Three Shot Sheryl.....	J. Rodriguez	.....A. Green	.....15-1
2	.....2	.....My Gun's Loaded.....	M. Franco	.....C. Brown	.....15-1
3	.....3	.....Pippa Adds.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....T. Pletcher	.....6-1
4	.....4	.....Cold Spell.....	J. Velazquez	.....W. Ward	.....3-5
5	.....5	.....Fusion.....	F. Prat	.....C. Brown	.....10-1
6	.....6	.....Nakoma.....	E. Zayas	.....J. Antonucci	.....10-1
7	.....7	.....Crowning Glory.....	J. Alvarado	.....W. Mott	.....8-1
8	.....8	.....My Sherrona.....	L. Saez	.....W. Mott	.....10-1

2ND (11:37AM). \$125,000, AOC \$80,000, 3 YO'S & UP, 7F

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

1	.....1	.....Paradise Valley.....	S. Gonzalez	.....I. Kantarmaci	.....30-1
2	.....2	.....Unlimitedpotential.....	D. Davis	.....O. Noda	.....30-1
3	.....3	.....Life and Times.....	F. Prat	.....T. Pletcher	.....9-5
4	.....4	.....Incentive Pay.....	M. Franco	.....C. Brown	.....5-1
5	.....5	.....Resilience.....	J. Lezcano	.....W. Mott	.....15-1
6	.....6	.....Awesome Native.....	C. Elliott	.....T. Farone	.....20-1
7	.....7	.....Contrary Thinking.....	J. Rodriguez	.....A. Green	.....8-1
8	.....8	.....Commuted.....	R. Santana, Jr.	.....L. Rice	.....6-1
9	.....9	.....Senior Officer.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....B. Cox	.....2-1

3RD (12:15PM). \$125,000, AOC \$80,000, 3 YO'S & UP, 11/16M (INNER TURF)

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

1	.....1	.....Ejtimaa.....	J. Ortiz	.....M. Dini	.....12-1
2	.....2	.....Signator.....	M. Franco	.....B. Cox	.....10-1
3	.....3	.....Ciao Chuck.....	L. Saez	.....F. Abreu	.....20-1
4	.....4	.....Two's a Crowd.....	J. Lezcano	.....D. Ryan	.....10-1
5	.....5	.....Bonus Move.....	P. Lopez	.....M. Hennig	.....15-1
6	.....6	.....Tenacious Leader.....	J. Velazquez	.....T. Pletcher	.....5-1
7	.....7	.....Son of a Birch.....	K. Carmouche	.....R. Falcone, Jr.	.....10-1
8	.....8	.....Intellect (FR).....	F. Prat	.....C. Brown	.....6-5
9	.....9	.....Candytown.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....T. Pletcher	.....4-1
10	.....AE-MTO	.....Ranger Battalion.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....L. Rice	.....5-2
11	.....AE-MTO	.....Le Gris.....	Rider TBA	.....R. Rodriguez	.....3-1
12	.....AE-MTO	.....Otello.....	M. Franco	.....R. Atras	.....5-1
13	.....AE-MTO	.....Sara's Shaman.....	S. Gonzalez	.....I. Kantarmaci	.....20-1
14	.....AE-MTO	.....Big Blue Line.....	Rider TBA	.....F. Abreu	.....6-1
15	.....AE-MTO	.....Castle Chaos.....	Rider TBA	.....I. Kantarmaci	.....8-1

4TH (12:53PM). \$120,000, AOC \$55,000, 3 YO'S & UP, F & M, 6 1/2F

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

1	.....1	.....P Mutter Pickle.....	M. Franco	.....A. Green	.....8-1
2	.....2	.....Naive Melody.....	D. Davis	.....W. Ward	.....3-1
3	.....3	.....Steer Clear.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....T. Pletcher	.....7-2
4	.....4	.....Speightful Lily.....	F. Prat	.....J. Abreu	.....6-1
5	.....5	.....I'm a Cutie Pie.....	J. Rodriguez	.....M. Gorham	.....30-1
6	.....6	.....Chatter.....	J. Ortiz	.....S. Joseph, Jr.	.....4-1
7	.....7	.....Helen's Revenge.....	J. Lezcano	.....L. Rice	.....8-1
8	.....8	.....Coach Albert Lady.....	J. Castellano	.....R. Brisset	.....8-1
9	.....9	.....Mila Candy.....	S. Gonzalez	.....I. Kantarmaci	.....30-1
10	.....10	.....Spectacular Grey.....	L. Saez	.....T. Pletcher	.....12-1

5TH (1:31PM). \$120,000, ALW, 3 YO'S & UP, F & M, 11/16M (TURF)

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

1	.....1	.....Etawa (IRE).....	J. Castellano	.....M. Casse	.....8-1
2	.....2	.....Eponine (IRE).....	J. Ortiz	.....K. Attard	.....3-1
3	.....3	.....Carmensita (ARG).....	R. Santana, Jr.	.....H. De Paz	.....15-1
4	.....4	.....Sonja Henie.....	J. Lezcano	.....T. Proctor	.....10-1
5	.....5	.....Starship Athena.....	J. Alvarado	.....M. Nevin	.....20-1
6	.....6	.....Curlin's Angel.....	E. Zayas	.....J. Abreu	.....5-1
7	.....7	.....Tiznow Mama.....	F. Geroux	.....C. Summers	.....20-1
8	.....8	.....Scarlett's Halo.....	F. Prat	.....C. Brown	.....6-1
9	.....9	.....Marketplaceofideas (GB).....	D. Davis	.....C. Brown	.....9-2

10	.....10	.....Imperatrice.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....T. Pletcher	.....5-1
11	.....11	.....Y'allreadyforthis.....	D. Rivera	.....A. Arriaga	.....50-1
12	.....AE-MTO	.....Kadena.....	Rider TBA	.....F. Abreu	.....8-1
13	.....AE-MTO	.....Brunch With Amy.....	K. Carmouche	.....L. Rice	.....4-1
14	.....AE-MTO	.....Sparkling Mama.....	M. Franco	.....D. Schettino	.....10-1
15	.....AE-MTO	.....Soundbite.....	Rider TBA	.....M. Nevin	.....6-1

6TH (2:09PM). \$120,000, ALW, 3 YO'S & UP, 6 1/2F

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Pic 4

1	.....1	.....Playa Del Mar.....	M. Franco	.....L. Rice	.....6-1
2	.....2	.....Village Person.....	K. Carmouche	.....S. Klesaris	.....20-1
3	.....3	.....Buttah.....	J. Castellano	.....I. Kantarmaci	.....15-1
4	.....4	.....Yo Banana Boy.....	R. Santana, Jr.	.....M. Maker	.....20-1
5	.....5	.....Local Knowledge.....	J. Velazquez	.....T. Pletcher	.....5-2
6	.....6	.....Caldo Candy.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....J. Abreu	.....10-1
7	.....7	.....Brightline Bullet.....	J. Rodriguez	.....M. Clement	.....10-1
8	.....8	.....Sea Strike.....	F. Prat	.....C. Brown	.....4-1
9	.....9	.....Mary's Lad (IRE).....	J. Ortiz	.....D. Beckman	.....15-1
10	.....10	.....Imagine John.....	E. Zayas	.....J. Antonucci	.....30-1
11	.....11	.....Brazenly.....	J. Lezcano	.....C. Englehart	.....15-1
12	.....12	.....Trust Fund.....	D. Davis	.....A. Arriaga	.....30-1
13	.....13	.....Strategicoperation.....	D. Rivera	.....A. Arriaga	.....50-1
14	.....14	.....Gun Range.....	L. Saez	.....W. Ward	.....8-1

7TH (2:47PM). \$500,000, STK - THE JUST A GAME PRESENTED BY RESOLUTE RACING, 4 YO'S & UP, F & M, 1M (INNER TURF)

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

1	.....1	.....Classic Q.....	J. Velazquez	.....M. Casse	.....6-1
2	.....2	.....Sandtrap (IRE).....	M. Franco	.....C. Brown	.....3-1
3	.....3	.....Segesta.....	F. Prat	.....C. Brown	.....7-5
4	.....4	.....Mandanaba (FR).....	C. Lecoeuvre	.....F. Graffard	.....9-2
5	.....5	.....And One More Time.....	J. Castellano	.....M. Casse	.....8-1
6	.....6	.....Fast Market.....	D. Davis	.....J. Terranova II	.....20-1
7	.....7	.....Buttercream Babe.....	L. Saez	.....G. Arnold II	.....15-1
8	.....8	.....Deep Satin.....	J. Ortiz	.....C. DeVaux	.....12-1

8TH (3:25PM). \$400,000, STK - THE TRUE NORTH, 4 YO'S & UP, 6 1/2F

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

1	.....1	.....Acoustic Ave.....	J. Lezcano	.....L. Rice	.....30-1
2	.....2	.....Imagination.....	F. Prat	.....B. Baffert	.....4-1
3	.....3	.....Bentornato.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....J. D'Angelo	.....8-5
4	.....4	.....Listenupshance.....	A. Fresu	.....D. O'Neill	.....30-1
5	.....5	.....Faust.....	J. Ortiz	.....S. Asmussen	.....15-1
6	.....6	.....Book'em Danno.....	P. Lopez	.....D. Ryan	.....2-1
7	.....7	.....Be You.....	J. Velazquez	.....T. Pletcher	.....12-1
8	.....8	.....Illuminare.....	M. Franco	.....T. Pletcher	.....10-1
9	.....9	.....Pentathlon.....	D. Davis	.....C. McGaughey III	.....12-1

9TH (4:13PM). \$500,000, STK - THE JAIPUR, 3 YO'S & UP, 5 1/2F (TURF)

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Daily Double, Pic 4, Pic 6

1	.....1	.....Governor Sam.....	P. Lopez	.....G. Weaver	.....15-1
2	.....2	.....Bold Journey.....	J. Alvarado	.....W. Mott	.....30-1
3	.....3	.....Litigation.....	F. Geroux	.....B. Lynch	.....7-2
4	.....4	.....Works for Me.....	F. Prat	.....J. Lee	.....6-1
5	.....5	.....Reef Runner.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.	.....D. Fawkes	.....4-1
6	.....6	.....Ag Bullet.....	J. Velazquez	.....R. Baltas	.....3-1
7	.....7	.....Clock Tower.....	D. Davis	.....W. Ward	.....20-1
8	.....8	.....John the Beer Man.....	K. Carmouche	.....R. Atras	.....10-1
99Twenty Six Black.....	M. FrancoH. De Paz12-1
1010My Boy Prince.....	J. OrtizM. Casse5-1

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SARATOGA ENTRIES

10TH (4:52PM). \$500,000, STK - THE WOODY STEPHENS PRESENTED BY MOHEGAN SUN, 3 YO, 7F

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Pic 5, Daily Double, Pic 4

1	.....1	.....Gilded Bandit.....	J. Alvarado.....	W. Mott.....	8-1
2	.....2	.....Obliteration.....	J. Velazquez.....	S. Asmussen.....	8-1
3	.....3	.....Six Speed.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.....	G. Weaver.....	10-1
4	.....4	.....Stradale.....	R. Santana, Jr.....	S. Asmussen.....	15-1
5	.....5	.....Solitude Dude.....	F. Prat.....	S. Joseph, Jr.....	6-1
6	.....6	.....Crude Velocity.....	F. Geroux.....	B. Baffert.....	9-5
7	.....7	.....Englishman.....	J. Ortiz.....	C. DeVaux.....	3-1
8	.....8	.....Civil Liberty.....	A. Fresu.....	D. O'Neill.....	10-1
9	.....9	.....Taj Mahal.....	M. Franco.....	B. Russell.....	15-1

11TH (5:32PM). \$1,000,000, STK - THE HILL 'N' DALE METROPOLITAN HANDICAP, 3 YO'S & UP, 1M

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

1	.....1	.....Nysos.....	F. Prat.....	B. Baffert.....	9-5
2	.....2	.....Vibe.....	L. Saez.....	T. Pletcher.....	15-1
3	.....3	.....Antiquarian.....	J. Velazquez.....	T. Pletcher.....	6-1
4	.....4	.....Saudi Crown.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.....	B. Cox.....	8-1
5	.....5	.....Rated by Merit.....	D. Davis.....	C. Brown.....	10-1
6	.....6	.....Knightsbridge.....	J. Alvarado.....	W. Mott.....	7-2
7	.....7	.....Journalism.....	J. Ortiz.....	M. McCarthy.....	5-2

12TH (6:11PM). \$1,000,000, STK - THE RESORTS WORLD CASINO MANHATTAN, 4 YO'S & UP, 1 3/16M (TURF)

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Pic 3, Daily Double

1	.....1	.....Tiz Dashing.....	J. Castellano.....	B. Tagg.....	30-1
2	.....2	.....Test Score.....	M. Franco.....	H. Motion.....	12-1
3	.....3	.....Make Me King (FR).....	J. Ortiz.....	H. Al Jehani.....	8-1
4	.....4	.....Integration.....	J. Velazquez.....	C. McGaughey III.....	12-1
5	.....5	.....Deterministic.....	K. Carmouche.....	M. Clement.....	7-2
6	.....6	.....Bright Picture (FR).....	F. Prat.....	A. Fabre.....	3-1
7	.....7	.....Rhetorical.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.....	W. Walden.....	2-1
8	.....8	.....One Stripe (SAF).....	G. Lerena.....	H. Motion.....	6-1
9	.....9	.....Battle of Normandy.....	D. Davis.....	C. McGaughey III.....	20-1

13TH (7:04PM). \$2,000,000, STK - THE BELMONT STAKES PRESENTED BY NYRA BETS, 3 YO, 1 1/4M

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta, Daily Double

1	.....1	.....Vitruvian Man.....	A. Fresu.....	D. O'Neill.....	30-1
2	.....2	.....Powershift.....	L. Saez.....	T. Pletcher.....	12-1
3	.....3	.....Chief Wallabee.....	J. Alvarado.....	W. Mott.....	3-1
4	.....4	.....Renegade.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.....	T. Pletcher.....	2-1
5	.....5	.....Ottinho.....	D. Davis.....	C. Brown.....	20-1
6	.....6	.....Growth Equity.....	M. Franco.....	C. Brown.....	12-1
7	.....7	.....Commandment.....	J. Velazquez.....	B. Cox.....	6-1
8	.....8	.....Emerging Market.....	F. Prat.....	C. Brown.....	6-1
9	.....9	.....Golden Tempo.....	J. Ortiz.....	C. DeVaux.....	9-2

14TH (8:02PM). \$120,000, ALW, 3 YO'S & UP, 1M (INNER TURF)

Exacta, Trifecta, Superfecta

1	.....1	.....Double Act.....	J. Lezcano.....	W. Mott.....	15-1
2	.....2	.....Noble Factor.....	L. Saez.....	K. Brion.....	20-1
3	.....3	.....Winnebago (IRE).....	M. Franco.....	M. Clement.....	10-1
4	.....4	.....First Call Bob.....	J. Ortiz.....	C. Brown.....	12-1
5	.....5	.....Favorable Scenario.....	F. Prat.....	C. Brown.....	4-1
6	.....6	.....Blown Cover.....	J. Rodriguez.....	R. Rodriguez.....	15-1
7	.....7	.....Tiz Trouble.....	J. Alvarado.....	L. Lewis.....	12-1
8	.....8	.....Elnajd.....	I. Ortiz, Jr.....	B. Cox.....	5-1
9	.....9	.....Griffin's Wharf.....	J. Velazquez.....	T. Morley.....	12-1
10	.....10	.....Outrunner.....	P. Lopez.....	J. Duarte, Jr.....	5-1
11	.....11	.....Ramblin' Wreck.....	K. Carmouche.....	D. Gargan.....	12-1
12	.....12	.....Sounds Like a Plan.....	R. Santana, Jr.....	H. De Paz.....	9-2
13	.....AE	.....Fortune Seller.....	J. Ortiz.....	K. Rice.....	30-1
14	.....AE-MTO	.....Fort Nelson.....	K. Carmouche.....	L. Rice.....	6-1
15AE-MTOPagode.....	Rider TBA.....	B. Cox.....	2-1
16AE-MTOAmbition.....	S. Gonzalez.....	I. Kantarmaci.....	15-1

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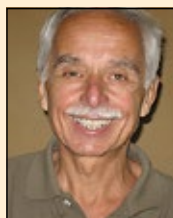


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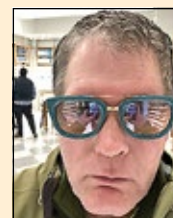
Tom Law



John Shapazian



Charles Bedard



Rob Whitlock



Jessica Paquette

Race	Tom Law	John Shapazian	Charles Bedard	Rob Whitlock	Jessica Paquette
1	Crowning Glory Cold Spell Fusion	Cold Spell Fusion Pippa Adds	Cold Spell Pippa Adds Nakoma	Cold Spell Nakoma Three Shot Sheryl	Crowning Glory Cold Spell Fusion
2	Senior Officer Life And Times Resilience	Senior Officer Life and Times Incentive Pay	Senior Officer Life And Times Incentive Pay	Life And Times Contrary Thinking Incentive Pay	Life And Times Incentive Pay Paradise Valley
3	Intellect Tenacious Leader Two's A Crowd	Intellect Candytown Tenacious Leader	Le Gris Two's A Crowd Ejtimaa	Intellect Tenacious Leader Ciao Chuck	Tenacious Leader Signator Bonus Move
4	Steer Clear Chatter Speightful Lily	Naive Melody Chatter Steer Clear	Steer Clear Speightful Lily P Mutter Pickle	Coach Albert Lady Spectacular Grey Helen's Revenge	Naive Melody Steer Clear Chatter
5	Carmensita Eponine Etawa	Eponine Curlin's Angel Etawa	Brunch With Amy Scarlett's Halo Marketplaceofideas	Sonja Henie Eponine Scarlett's Halo	Carmensita Eponine Marketplaceofideas
6	Local Knowledge Playa Del Mar Caldo Candy	Sea Strike Local Knowledge Brightline Bullet	Caldo Candy Brazenly Playa Del Mar	Local Knowledge Sea Strike Playa Del Mar	Local Knowledge Brightline Bullet Sea Strike
7	Mandanaba Segesta Sandtrap	Sandtrap Segesta Classic Q	Segesta Deep Satin Sandtrap	Deep Satin Segesta Buttercream Babe	Buttercream Babe Classic Q Segesta
8	Bentornato Imagination Book'em Danno	Book'em Danno Bentornato Imagination	Imagination Bentornato Book'em Danno	Illuminare Pentathlon Book'em Danno	Bentornato Illuminare Book'em Danno
9	Ag Bullet Litigation Reef Runner	Ag Bullet Litigation Reef Runner	Ag Bullet Reef Runner Litigation	John The Beer Man Ag Bullet Litigation	Ag Bullet Litigation Clock Tower
10	Crude Velocity Obliteration Six Speed	Crude Velocity Englishman Solitude Dude	Crude Velocity Obliteration Civil Liberty	Six Speed Solitude Dude Englishman	Obliteration Englishman Gilded Bandit
11	Journalism Nysos Saudi Crown	Nysos Journalism Knightsbridge	Journalism Nysos Rated By Merit	Journalism Knightsbridge Antiquarian	Antiquarian Journalism Saudi Crown
12	Rhetorical Bright Picture Deterministic	Bright Picture Deterministic Rhetorical	Rhetorical One Stripe Deterministic	Rhetorical Battle Of Normandy One Stripe	Integration Deterministic Test Score
13	Renegade Golden Tempo Chief Wallabee	Growth Equity Emerging Market Golden Tempo	Golden Tempo Renegade Growth Equity	Renegade Chief Wallabee Commandment	Renegade Golden Tempo Commandment
14	Sounds Like A Plan Elnajd Double Act	Elnajd Pagode Favorable Scenario	Pagode Sounds Like A Plan Favorable Scenario	First Call Bob Noble Factor Winnebago	Winnebago Griffin's Wharf Elnajd
2026 Records	6/35 (-\$31.92)	7/35 (-\$23.66)	7/35 (-\$19.66)	6/35 (-\$15.92)	7/35 (+\$0.12)

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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SWALE (1984)
FERDINAND (1986)
THUNDER GULCH (1995)
ORB (2013)

SWALE

GOLDEN TEMPO

GOLDEN TEMPO (2026)

Owner/Breeder:
Phipps Stable & St. Elias Stable
Trainer: Cherie DeVaux
Jockey: Jose Ortiz

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Portfolio Expansion

Overseas buy lands Grade 1 turf event for Klaravich, Brown

BY PAUL HALLORAN

A transatlantic flight once again paid off for Chad Brown in more than just frequent flier miles.

In 2023, the trainer made what has become a regular trip to the Tattersalls yearling sale in England. When he arrived, he signed off on a filly that bloodstock agent Mike Ryan picked out, a daughter of Night Of Thunder out of French mare Shemya. She cost Seth Klarman of Klaravich Stables \$190,371.

As of 6 p.m. Friday at Saratoga Race Course, she's a Grade 1 winner.

"I go to the sale every year and Mike and Mary Ryan run the show," Brown said, after Portfolio Duration went gate-to-wire in the Grade 1, \$750,000 New York Stakes. "They go over there and look at all the horses before I arrive, and then I go over and make the final selections. We've been doing it now for about seven or eight years, just buying yearlings and shipping them over here, and we've done quite well. Another Grade 1 winner."

Brown sent out Portfolio Duration and three others in the New York.

He saddled three, with assistant Dan Stupp putting the tack on Kathynmarissa, who was coming off a win in the Grade 3 Modesty and had the lowest odds of the quartet at 7-2.

Portfolio Duration stretched out three-sixteenths of a mile from her last two starts, an allowance win and a second by a neck in the Grade 2 Distaff Turf Mile at Churchill Downs on Kentucky Derby Day.

That's where jockey Flavien Prat comes in.

The 2025 Eclipse Award winner took Portfolio Duration to the lead from the inside, moving slightly off the rail into the first turn. Favorite Gezora rushed up from the outside with Kathynmarissa, who did not break sharp, tracking her and Speed Shopper and Brown's Pretty Picture inside of them.

Prat took them through fractions of :24.39



Samantha Decker

Portfolio Duration (right) hangs on to edge Cankoura by a head in the final strides.

and :49.21, with Pretty Picture forcing the issue, followed by Speed Shopper, Gezora and a still wide Kathynmarissa. There were seven horses separated by just 4 lengths going into the far turn, with Prat maintaining a diminishing lead and Kathynmarissa making a threatening move as Gezora faded.

Off the turn, it looked like it would be a Brown match race down the stretch, but French invader Cankoura found her best stride on the rail, and it became clear that the Aga Khan's filly would play a role in the result.

Despite the stretchout, Portfolio Duration had enough left and spurted away from stablemate Kathynmarissa, with Cankoura forced to get off the rail for her final burst.

She passed Kathynmarissa, but could not quite get beyond Portfolio Duration, who won by a head in a final time of 1:57.63 on the Mellon turf course.

"She jumped well. We thought that stretching out, she could be the speed," Prat said. "She gave me a good run, tried hard. After the last time, I think she enjoyed a bit more ground. It took her a little bit of time to get going and today on the stretchout it was better."

Portfolio Duration improved her career mark to 3-2-0 in five starts with earnings of \$630,400 – more than three times that purchase price.

"It looked like there wasn't a lot of pace and it looked like Flavien was able to take advantage of that," Brown said. "Just handicapping the race, on a stretchout from a mile to a mile and three-sixteenths, that's a pretty good jump . . . She figured to be on the lead if she broke well, so we gave him full clearance to do that."

Brown said it is likely Portfolio Duration, bred in England by Michael Wates, will run in the Grade 1 Diana Stakes July 18 at Saratoga.

"A slight cutback to a mile and an eighth would be good if she's good and healthy," he said. "And then we'll have to see if any of these others end up in that type of race."



Samantha Decker

The early going of the New York got crowded behind the eventual winner.

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Validated

Champion Nitrogen gets back to winning in Grade 1 slam dunk

BY TOM LAW

Mark Casse and Jon Green heard and read the comments. They tried to ignore the knocks and notions, sentiments from the wannabes and hopeful sharps that Nitrogen not only preferred the grass but probably was better on the stuff.

Ignoring only goes so far, especially when it comes to digs at a champion filly.

Nitrogen gave reason to hush those doubters with an emphatic victory in Friday's Grade 1, \$500,000 Ogden Phipps, running free through the lane to win in a romp and just miss an almost 19-year-old track record for the same 9 furlongs that several major Saratoga stakes are contested.

"I just want to officially say, I'm tired of hearing everybody say she doesn't like the dirt," Casse said after the 4-year-old Medaglia d'Oro filly won by 12 3/4 lengths under Jose Ortiz in 1:46.93 over the fast track.

Green, part of D J Stable with his father Leonard Green, found the victory by the even-money favorite especially sweet after she lost her most recent two starts in March and April at Oaklawn Park after a win there in early February to start the season.

"I'm rarely speechless and I'm kind of in a fog right now," Green said. "I think it's fair to say its validating. For the simple reason that there were a lot of people, not that we listen to the fans as far as making major decisions, but there were people that said, 'come on, she's better on the turf.'"

"You can make the case that in the slop at Oaklawn she didn't have the turn of foot that she normally does. I attribute that more to the track surface than her abilities. Mark had her cranked today and now this is the second half of the year where the rubber meets the road."

Nitrogen loves the road to Saratoga, where she's now 3-for-3 with victories in the off-the-turf Grade 3 Wonder Again and Grade 1 Alabama last year. The 17-length Wonder Again followed by a nose defeat back on the grass in the Belmont Oaks Invitational last July at Saratoga paved the way to Nitrogen's career on the dirt.

She won the 10-furlong Alabama before a runner-up finish to Gin Gin in the Grade 1 Spinster at Keeneland to earn a spot in the Breeders' Cup Distaff field. She finished second in the Distaff at



Samantha Decker

Nitrogen coasts to victory in the Grade 1 Ogden Phipps, her eighth win from 16 starts.

Del Mar, finishing the season with six wins and three seconds in nine starts, good enough to be an overwhelming winner of the Eclipse Award race for champion 3-year-old filly.

The 2026 season started strong, with a 2 3/4-length win in the Grade 3 Bayakoa at Oaklawn before back-to-back defeats in the Grade 2 Azeri behind Majestic Oops in the slop and Grade 1 Apple Blossom behind Claret Beret on a fast track.

Ortiz, aboard for all of those starts and more going back to her juvenile campaign, and Casse blamed the sloppy track for the third-place showing in the Azeri.

"I've never felt her so tired," Ortiz told Casse, who said Nitrogen's larger feet didn't negotiate the off going as well as Majestic Oops' on that rainy afternoon. Nitrogen made amends in the Apple Blossom, outfinishing Majestic Oops and Regaled while not being a threat to the winner.

Casse sent Nitrogen to his string at Keeneland Race Course with Caden Arthur, who also oversaw much of her work at Oaklawn, with sights set on major races the second half of the season.

Nitrogen breezed three times between the Apple Blossom and Ogden Phipps, including a strong 5 furlongs in :59.60 May 24. She shipped to Casse's string in Saratoga shortly after that work and Arthur wasn't about to miss it. He caught a ride on a private plane from Lexington to Saratoga Springs Friday morning, with a quick return in the evening, and soaked in the stable's victories with Nitrogen and Counting Stars in the Grade 1 Acorn.

"I was with both Stars and Nitrogen all winter,"

Arthur said. "When they were both entered I called Mark the other day and said, 'I hate to miss these two.' I loved them all winter. Had to be there. Nitrogen, how can you not love her? Her last breeze she looked like a freak. Honestly it was the best work I've probably ever seen in my life, she did it so

Continued on Page 39



Samantha Decker

Nitrogen returns after winning the Ogden Phipps.

Phipps -

■ Continued from page 38

easy. She likes this track, she won the Alabama here last year so that was a plus.”

Nitrogen showed her fondness for the quick Saratoga surface and took the lead from the start, opening up a length on Bless The Broken through the opening quarter in :23.74.

“Mark told me if she breaks, ‘don’t be afraid to go to the lead,’ ” Ortiz said. “She broke, I took the lead.”

Maybe not game over, but close.

Nitrogen and Bless The Broken continued to lead the other four through the half in :47.26 and 6 furlongs in 1:10.48 before Ortiz cut her loose between the three-eighths and quarter poles. Nitrogen responded quick, opening up turning for home and flying past the eighth pole 6 1/2 lengths clear of Fully Subscribed.

“She relaxed well,” Ortiz said. “When I asked her to go, she was there for me. She was much the best, as you saw. I asked her from the quarter-pole to the eighth-pole and she opened up. She drifted out a little. I looked back, nobody was coming, so I kind of wrapped up. Now I see that she was a fifth off the record, maybe I should’ve kept asking her and tried to break it, but she did enough.”

Nitrogen cruised home clear, picking up \$275,000 to pad her bankroll to \$2,730,854 from a record of 8-5-3 in 16 starts. Fully Subscribed and Bless The Broken finished in a dead-heat for second, 3 1/4 lengths ahead of Regaled in fourth.

“She’s been doing amazing,” Casse said. “Every time Jose was riding one for us this weekend, I keep saying ‘the big mare’s doing so good, the big mare’s doing so good.’ She was good. ... She’s beautiful, she’s grown up, she’s massive.”

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*Left: Heather St. Clair Davis (British, 1937-1999)
Cheltenham (detail)*

Twinkler

Counting Stars rallies to win first Grade 1 stakes for Casse

BY SEAN CLANCY

Tom Bellhouse bought Irad Ortiz Jr. a hot chocolate. Offered him a seat in the West Point Thoroughbreds' golf cart. Nobody else was around. It was 5 o'clock in the morning at the Morning Line Kitchen. Bellhouse was waiting for Kiaran McLaughlin's first set. Ortiz was waiting for his agent, waiting for a break. It was 2011.

"Every morning, Irad would be there. He didn't speak hardly any English. He was like this little kid who nobody knew. We'd sit there every morning," Bellhouse said. "Come to the Belmont Fall meet, I'm in the paddock. He's not riding for us. He comes running up to me, 'Mr. Tommy, Mr. Tommy, I'm in fourth place in the standings.' I said, 'I know, I watch every day.' I said to Terry (Finley), 'There is something special about this kid.'"

Fifteen years later, Ortiz paid Bellhouse back for all those hot chocolates, all those seats, all those talks, with a flawless ride aboard West Point's Counting Stars in the Grade 1 Acorn at Saratoga. Trained by Mark Casse, the daughter of Honor A. P. settled in third, brushed off previously undefeated Always A Runner and scored by 3 3/4 lengths.

"Today is...today is...I can't even talk about it without getting choked



Samantha Decker

Counting Stars heads to the winner's circle.

ACORN STAKES RECAP

up," Bellhouse said. "He's special to me. So special."

Ortiz guided Counting Stars to her debut win at Churchill Downs in September. The five-time Eclipse Award winner missed her next seven starts which included wins in the Astral Spa, the Year's End, the Grade 2 Fantasy Stakes at Oaklawn Park and a third in the Grade 1 Kentucky Oaks at Churchill Downs. Francisco Arrieta was aboard for those top-shelf efforts.

Ortiz called Casse at 8 o'clock after the Kentucky Derby looking to ride Silent Tactic in the Preakness. Casse took the call. Of course.

"Well let's see but I want you to ride Counting Stars in the Acorn," Casse said.

Silent Tactic didn't make it to the Preakness and about 10 days later, Ortiz's agent Steve Rushing gave Casse the call on Counting Stars.

"Francisco rode her great but the old saying, 'Don't bring sand to the beach.' I have to tell you, if Irad doesn't ride her then Francisco rides her," Casse said. "I had Francisco waiting. I had no qualms with him. He's a great rider."

Terry Finley had no qualms about Counting Stars, the Acorn or Ortiz.

"She turned down the backside the other morning, she changed leads after the end of a mile and a quarter and just exploded. She was oozing confidence," Finley said. "I was telling Irad all this and he's such a pro, he said, 'Oh yeah, I might be on the lead, if Brad Cox goes I'll be sitting right there and I'll have the same race as the Fantasy.' Which was two races ago. He knew exactly where we're at, so I walked around the last couple of days full of confidence. He knew every single thing about her."



Samantha Decker

Counting Stars (right) pulls clear of Always A Runner and Meaning in the stretch.

And then put it all to work.

Counting Stars broke sharp from post two and cleared Prom Queen (Brad Cox) to her inside. Established on the rail, Ortiz forced Maximum Offer to engage from post four and then eased back as Meaning moved into an outside stalking spot in second. Always A Runner slotted into fourth from the outside post. Maximum Offer led through the first quarter mile in :23.41 and a half mile :47.73. The quintet spanned 3 lengths after three quarters in 1:11.51.

Meaning put away Maximum Offer but was quickly joined by Always A Runner. All the while, Ortiz was waiting like he was drinking one of those hot chocolates back in the summer of 2011, sliding back to fourth, then feathering four wide passing the quarter pole. Counting Stars swapped to her right lead, pinned her ears, brushed with Always A Runner and skipped clear to register her fifth career victory and first Grade 1 stakes score.

Third behind Always A Runner and Meaning in the Kentucky Oaks, Counting Stars flipped those results in the Acorn.

"I was really confident going into the Oaks, I didn't think anything could beat her," Casse said of her

2 1/4-length defeat. "I was a little disappointed. When that happens, you're like, 'Maybe two better fillies beat her.' I can only worry about my own, I can't worry about everybody else, and I felt like she was doing as good if not better than ever."

Counting Stars breezed twice since the Oaks, going an easy three-eighths in :38 at Churchill Downs May 21 and a bullet half-mile in :47.01 at Saratoga May 29. Casse was confident, as he's always been with the \$150,000 OBS April purchase.

"Some of the people who owned Sandman bought into her," Casse said. "We were at the Arkansas Derby and they're like, 'We are so excited.' I said, 'You're going to be excited about the next one.' That was in April of her 2-year-old year. Sometimes you can tell."

Casse, as he does when he wins Grade 1 stakes at Saratoga, got a bit wistful as he walked out of the winner's circle.

"I'm so lucky to be in this sport, who would have thought when I was here at 10 years old, getting autographs from Angel Cordero," Casse said. "I just take it as it comes. I don't take myself too serious. I just feel very fortunate that I have a lot of wonderful people who give me good horses."

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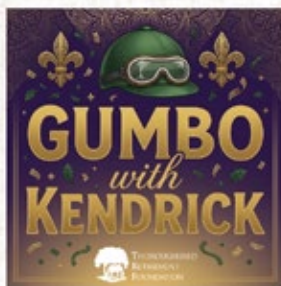


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Sir Alfred James Munnings

Hugo, A Terrier in an Armchair (detail)
oil on canvas, 16 x 14 inches, signed AJ Munnings

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Five Spot

Ways And Means adds to Spa resume

BY TOM LAW

Chad Brown walked out of the winner's circle early on Friday's card at Saratoga Race Course, ready to accept congratulations from some friends and family before fielding one last question after Ways And Means eked out another victory at her favorite racetrack.

"Have you ever trained a horse that won five races at Saratoga?"

"I'll have *you* get back to *me* on that," said Brown, who really wasn't sure.

The answer? No.

Until Friday anyway. Ways And Means, who improved to 5-for-6 in upstate New York with a last-jump title-defense score in the Grade 2 Bed o' Roses Stakes.

Klaravich Stable's homebred 5-year-old Practical Joke mare won the 7-furlong Bed o' Roses by a nose over Grand Job for her sixth career win from 12 starts. She came into the day one of six with four Saratoga wins – Carl Spackler, Dayatthespa, Emaaraaty, Kid Kate and Technical Analysis the others, according to Equibase – and walked back to the barn in her own company.

"Maybe she's the female Fourstardave if I keep her in training," Brown said, referring to the popular New York-bred gelding nicknamed 'The Sultan of Saratoga' for his penchant for winning here. Fourstardave won nine of 22 starts at Saratoga, including a stretch of eight consecutive seasons from 1987 to 1994.

Ways And Means started her run in her debut at 2 at the 2023 Saratoga meet. She won the Grade 1 Test Stakes at 3 and last year's Bed o' Roses over eventual Breeders' Cup Distaff winner Scylla during the Belmont Stakes Racing Festival.

A nagging illness derailed the rest of her 4-year-old campaign last season, and the chance to add another win in any of the top filly and mare dirt sprint stakes. She also lost time due to an injury following a fifth in the 2024 Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Sprint at Del Mar.

"Her best races are definitely here but I've been having trouble keeping her in a regular campaign though," Brown said. "Exiting here she's run well at Aqueduct. Great question. The one Del Mar start didn't look too good but then again she came out of there with an ankle chip. There are some question



Dave Harmon

Ways And Means gets up in time, just, to win Friday's Bed o' Roses, her fifth win at Saratoga Race Course.

marks and she's going to have to take her game on the road."

Brown hopes that road leads to Keeneland Race Course this fall, where she's never run, for the 7-furlong Filly and Mare Sprint.

Ways And Means needed every inch of the Bed o' Roses' 7 furlongs Friday to collect that fifth Saratoga win.

Brown and owner Seth Klarman took it in from their clubhouse boxes, watching 3-5 favorite Ways And Means come away clean from the break before a quick move into contention just outside Grade 1 Madison Stakes runner-up Grand Job. Those two slid through inside last year's Grade 3 Prioress winner Praying to lead from the chute onto the backstretch.

Grand Job, winner of the Grade 2 Inside Information two starts back for trainer Bill Mott, opened a length through the opening quarter in :22.07. The two continued to lead the way toward the far turn and onto the bend, still separated by just a length through a razor-sharp half in :43.97.

Flavien Prat moved Ways And Means within about a half-length approaching the quarter pole as Junior Alvarado floated Grand Job about five paths off the rail. Grand Job spurted away again straightening away and Prat thought he might be headed to a second like the Grade 1 Spinaway in Ways And Means' second start in 2023.

"Honestly, at that point it looked like Junior's filly was still going very well," Prat said. "At that

point I thought I was going to run second and just push the other one away."

Just past the 6-furlong mark in 1:07.69 – faster than Imperial Hint's Saratoga's track record of 1:07.92 – Grand Job held a 1 1/2-length advantage. Alvarado stayed busy and Prat kept to his hand ride at the sixteenth pole.

Ways And Means made up a length from the sixteenth pole to the finish to win by a nose in 1:21.05, fast but not quite the 1:20.40 track record set by Darby Creek Road in 1978.

"I was making a steady run, and luckily the leader kind of fell off the last 50 yards," Prat said. "My filly was brave enough."

Brown shared Prat's feelings in the stretch, knowing Grand Job's quality and thinking Ways And Means might be second best.

"She's going to have her work cut out for her wearing her down," Brown said. "Just thankful that we were able to get her nose down in time. I was telling Flavien in the winner's circle, we brought her back in training this year to try to get to the Breeders' Cup at Keeneland, which of course is seven-eighths. She'll love the seven-eighths at Keeneland. You can see she's just getting there at 6 1/2 so if we can keep her healthy and have her ready for that race in the fall she can be very competitive going 7."

Brown also sent out Senza Parole, who finished 9 1/2 lengths behind the top pair to pick up her first graded-stakes placing. Scalable finished fourth.

Progress

Fitz Right stays unbeaten in 2026 with Grade 2 triumph

BY ALEC DICONZA

Notching another important race at Saratoga Race Course never ceases to amaze owner Michael Dubb.

“There are no words,” he said, walking from the winner’s circle to the Carmen Barrera Room after his 3-year-old filly Fitz Right won Friday’s Grade 2 Wonder Again Stakes. “It’s surreal. I wouldn’t own horses if there was no Saratoga. To do it in the big game at the greatest racing venue in the world, it’s surreal to me that I’m actually in this position of winning races like this.”

Dubb owns Fitz Right with William Lawrence, The Elkstone Group and Michael Kisber. The group got together to purchase the daughter of Charlatan for \$200,000 at the 2024 Keeneland September sale and sent her to trainer Chad Brown. She padded her earnings to \$301,950 in the Wonder Again.

“A couple of Chad’s owners, we decided we would get together and buy some horses,” Dubb said. “We let a bloodstock agent recommend horses to us and then we would bring them to Chad. Chad would approve it. We bought a group of horses and this is one of that group. It’s a nice group of owners of Chad’s that have been with him. It’s all good.”

Fitz Right broke from post two and settled in third along the hedge, relaxing off leaders Coach Mazzula and 6-5 favorite Lion Lake through soft opening splits of :24.42 and :48.48 over the firm inner turf. Jockey Flavien Prat shook the reins aboard Fitz Right with just over a quarter-mile left to travel as Lion Lake took a slight advantage. Fitz Right tipped out and met Lion Lake at the eighth pole before drawing off to win by 1 length. Lion Lake held second, Time To Dream rallied for third and Coach Mazzula finished fourth. Fitz Right won the 1 1/16-mile stakes in 1:40.39.

“I had a good draw, so I wanted to take advantage of it,” Prat said. “I didn’t feel like we were going that fast for the way the track was playing. I thought we were going quite easy. I felt like I was the only one who could keep up with the pace and second-guessed myself, briefly, but then I thought I was behind good horses, so I wanted to stay there and be involved. I was



Samantha Decker

Fitz Right becomes a graded stakes winner while extending her winning streak to three.

able to save ground all the way around and tip out when I wanted to, then she made a good run.”

Fitz Right finished second in her debut at Monmouth Park and won her second start in a Meadowlands 1-mile maiden race. She finished sixth in the Chelsey Flower at Aqueduct to round out her 2-year-old season. She’s unbeaten in three starts this year and a 5 1/2-length win in optional claimer at Tampa Bay Downs and a 3 1/2-length victory in the Memories Of Silver at Aqueduct made her Wonder Again no surprise.

“I’m very proud of her,” Brown said. “She’s really developed from 2 to 3. I want to congratulate and thank the owners for their patience. She trained sort of middle-of-the-road as a 2-year-old, they let me back up on her, rest her this winter and

sure enough she got a lot stronger, and a lot faster.”

Dubb didn’t know what to expect from Fitz Right early in her career, but the confidence he developed in his filly over the winter was rewarded Friday.

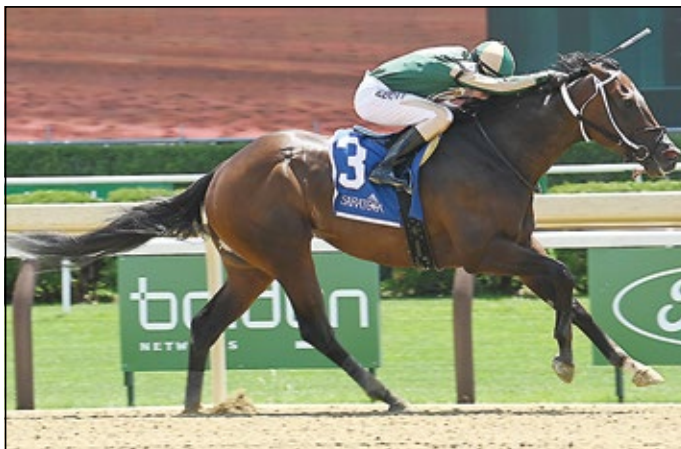
“We weren’t sure what we had here,” he said. “...Each time, this horse got better and better. ... Off the last race, we just targeted this race and it all worked out great.”

Dubb and Brown indicated that the Grade 1 Belmont Oaks July 4 at Saratoga could be next for Fitz Right.

- Old Tavern Farm’s homebred Hit The Post hit the mark in his return to Saratoga.

The Melanie Giddings-trained son of Kantharos dueled with Factually Correct in the opening stages of the second race before claiming the lead in the 6-furlong state-bred optional claimer. He led and jockey Christopher Elliott led the field through an opening quarter in :22.21, rolling through the turn as Factually Correct struggled to keep up. Projectability and Kenny Be gave chase at the top of the stretch, but could not catch Hit The Post.

“We’re so fortunate to have owners like Old Tavern Farm, who bred this horse,” Giddings said. “Their whole idea is to have a bright future for everything they breed and for their mares. The goal is always to help the page a bit for the broodmare, and we think this horse has blossomed.”



Dave Harmon

Hit The Post scores in Friday’s second.

Continued on Page 44

Friday -

■ Continued from page 43

Hit The Post improved to 3-for-10 in his career, which includes a win last summer in the Ontario County Stakes at Finger Lakes. Hit The Post also finished second in last year's New York Derby and Albany Stakes. He finished 2025 with an eighth in the Hudson Stakes before enjoying a winter vacation. Hit The Post returned in April at Aqueduct, running third in allowance company.

"The purpose was to give him a layoff because we like him a lot," said Giddings, "We wanted him to come back fresh. I said, 'let's give him a race and he's going to prove himself the rest of the year.'"

- Jena Antonucci paid no heed to New Rose's 21-1 odds before the filly's victory in the sixth race.

"I'm so used to my odds being long that I don't even look anymore," Antonucci said. "The horse doesn't care, my rider doesn't care and our horses show up."

The Nyquist filly hustled out of



Samantha Decker

Determined Kingdom (second from right) digs in late to outrun a crowd in the stretch of Friday's eighth race.

the gate to settle just off frontrunning Deference. She stayed patient on the outside as the field travelled along the backstretch, issuing a challenge at the top of the stretch. Deference faded as New Rose rolled by, extending her lead as she geared down to win by a length over Home Wrecker. Favored Shelzawa finished third.

"She's a really nice filly," Antonucci said. "Ownership has been so patient in letting her develop. We got a

start in her at Keeneland just to teach her some things and get some experience under her belt. Obviously, pedigree, everything says two turns about her. Jose [Morelos] gave her a brilliant ride. We expected her to be forward coming out of a sprint to here, and she sat a beautiful trip, relaxed lovely on the backside and just exploded."

Morelos also celebrated first Saratoga victory.

"It feels great," he said, "I'm so happy. My first victory in Saratoga, I'm just so grateful. In the stretch, I asked my filly and she responded. I thought, wow, maybe I'll win the race. And I won the race."

A \$135,000 purchase at the 2024 Keeneland September sale, New Rose races for Copper Thoroughbreds, Fred Rosen, Merriebelle Stable and Steve Dervenis.

- Determined Kingdom returned from Fair Hill and won the eighth, a 5 1/2-furlong turf allowance, for his first victory since October 2024.

"He's run very well up here," said Chris Aro, assistant to trainer Mike Trombetta. "This was a little drop in class. Luis Saez fits this horse great. He's won on this horse before at Keeneland when he was with another trainer. He did a great job. Sat off the pace and made the move at the right time."

After an even start, the son of Animal Kingdom settled in third on the outside as Mentee and Twisted Filigree battled for the lead through the opening quarter in :21.47. Determined Kingdom confronted the leaders as they entered the stretch, taking a tenuous lead over a stubborn Twisted Filigree as Spiced Up and Fi-

nal Verdict rocketed down the center of the track. Determined Kingdom won by a head. Determined Kingdom finished sixth last time out in the Jim McKay Turf Sprint at Laurel Park on Preakness Day.

"We ran against a good group last time out," said Aro. "We expected him to run well today."

Determined Kingdom finished third in last year's Grade 2 Troy Stakes behind Bring Theband Home and Twenty Six Black, who runs in today's Grade 1 Jaipur.

- Copious took the opener, a 9-furlong maiden on the dirt, for trainer Linda Rice. The Curlin colt won by 2 1/2 lengths under Manny Franco. ... Tab At Zanzibar gave Franco his second win of the day in the third. Trained by Brad Cox, the 3-year-old Candy Ride gelding won by 3 lengths in the 6 1/2-furlong maiden on the main track. ... Trainer Bill Mott and jockey Junior Alvarado teamed up to stun with 27-1 longshot Pillar Of Beauty in the fifth, a 5 1/2-furlong allowance on the turf. The Caracaro filly rallied in the stretch to score by 1 1/4 lengths over Silsbee. ... Money Game, a half-brother to Acorn fourth Prom Queen, battled in the final furlong to win the seventh, a 9-furlong allowance on the dirt, for trainer Brad Cox and jockey Irad Ortiz Jr. ... Irikan LLC's Central Banker homebred filly Irish Fortune went gate-to-wire in the 13th, a 7-furlong allowance, for trainer Tom Morley. ... Mott and Alvarado teamed for another winner in the nightcap – which went to post at 7:49 p.m. – with Juddmonte homebred Silent Impact.

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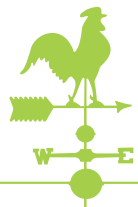
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World Tour

The South African Jockey Academy called Gavin Lerena's parents with an offer.

It was the first chance he had gotten at the acclaimed five-year program. Following his grandfather, his father, his uncle, his whole family into racing, Lerena enrolled in the apprentice program and took an instant hit. Denied. Lerena was relegated to the equestrian side of the school. Show jumping, dressage, eventing. Like caging a tiger.

After six months, the school called home.

"We'll give him a chance, when he gets too big, he gets too big."

He never got too big.

"My family tried to keep me away from it but once it's there..." Lerena said. "I actually didn't fit the criteria. They had two sections, equestrian and the jockey side. I went in as an equestrian. I was too big, they measured my weight, my shoes, my bones. I was blessed, after six months, they saw that this kid, it's all he wants to do. They gave me an opportunity. They called my parents. The rest is history."

Today, Lerena tries to make history.

The South African jockey rides South African-bred One Stripe in the Grade 1 Manhattan, the 12th race on the 14-race Belmont Stakes buffet. Twenty-three years after fighting for a spot on the jockey side of the jockey school, the 40-year-old is still going strong.

"I was exercising horses before I went to the academy in the morning. That's all I ever wanted," Lerena said. "I was very thick skinned. I knew. 'Whatever happens, I'm going to be a jockey.' I never had another thought in my mind. Since then, all the guys who they eventually let come on board, those were the ones who succeeded, the ones who really wanted it. I love it. I love it."

Emulating his heroes Piere Strydom, Anton Marcus and of course, Frankie Dettori, Lerena has built a stellar career in South Africa, securing apprentice championships, two national championships and traveling to England, Hong Kong, China, Mauri-



tius, Dubai and now Saratoga.

"Piere Strydom was my number one," Lerena said. "I don't think I've ever seen a jockey in the world ride like him. He was just phenomenal, his balance, how he could get horses to run, not a big whip rider, all in the hands. I used to look up to him."

Do you ride like him?

"I ride like Gavin Lerena," he said. "We all have our own styles. I've taken a little bit from everyone, but I have my own style. Cool, calm and collected. Let the horse do the talking, let the horse tell me where he wants to be. If they have speed, use the speed. If they can't master the speed, wait for him. It's like driving a car, you're just trying to save petrol. That's race riding. I don't think you can learn it. I think you can feel it. Feel what your horse wants to do. The horse is the bottom line."

One Stripe is as thick a bottom line as any horse in Lerena's career.

They joined up after Bernard Fayd'Herbe got hurt in early 2024. Owner Rikesh Sewgoolam reached out to Lerena to see what he was doing the following weekend. They won the Grade 3 Winter Nursery at Kenilworth in May and three in a row later that season.

The skein included the Grade 1 Cape Guineas and the Grade 1 King's Plate over older horses.

Imported to the U.S. and handed over to trainer Graham Motion, One Stripe finished fifth in the Woodbine Mile, and 13th in the Breeders' Cup Mile before winning an allowance race at Gulfstream in December.

Lerena ventured here for the first time to guide the son of One World to a tough-trip second, beaten a neck, in the Pegasus Turf at Gulfstream in January. John Velazquez guided the 5-year-old to a second behind Zulu Kingdom in the Maker's Mark at Keeneland in April.

Now, Lerena returns.

"I've ridden good horses but he's special. His turn of foot, his acceleration is phenomenal," Lerena said. "This horse has done wonders for my life, helping me see the world. It's always been a dream to ride in America and thanks to One Stripe we are here."

He nearly wasn't.

Lerena broke his left ankle in a fall and missed the Maker's Mark. He wasn't missing this one.

"I'm upset I missed the ride on him the last time," he said. "I thought he was only going to run in August, so I was in the boot, walking around. One Stripe ran and a couple of days later, they said Graham was thinking about running him on the 6th of June. The hyperbaric chamber, the red-light therapy, the works. I said, 'I'll be back. I'll be back.' It was a quick turnaround. And now we're here."

And what would it mean to win a Grade 1 at Saratoga?

"A dream come true," Lerena said, flexing his left ankle from a picnic table in the jocks' room backyard. "I always set bigger goals, to ride a Group 1 in America..."

Lerena drew a giant check mark in the Saratoga air.

"Make it happen," Lerena said. "Make it happen."

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