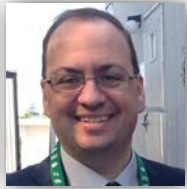




# countdown

TO THE  
CROWN

SEASON 19 WEEK 7 – February 16, 2024



By Jeremy Plonk  
Exclusive to Countdowntothecrown.com

*Editor's Note: The 19th season of Countdown to the Crown – the longest-running, same-authored Triple Crown scouting report in the Thoroughbred industry – offers the most comprehensive analysis of the 3-year-old scene. Countdowntothecrown.com is the home each week from Jan. 5 through the Belmont Stakes, and Countdown keeps you apprised of the rising stars of the sophomore class.*

## 3 Things You Won't Read Anywhere Else

Opinions are like Patrick Mahomes with the game on the line. Good ones only need about 30 seconds to make their point.

1. The Jockey Club Chairman Stuart Janney told *The Nick Luck Podcast* that they already had Jason Servis on wiretap and knew he was doping horses at the time of Maximum Security's 2019 Kentucky Derby DQ for interference. That incident rarely is mentioned in the Bob Baffert fallout from 2021 and Medina Spirit, but it certainly compounds the brand sensitivity for CDI and its marquee moneymaker.
2. Kentucky Derby Future Wager Pool 4 is this weekend and closes Sunday. LOCKED (Todd Pletcher) is the 10-1 individual favorite simply for not running yet. There's a *perception* advantage to holding onto your 2YO form as long as you can before the mask is unveiled. A fever last week slowed his training progress, so betting him at 10-1 at this stage deserves ... well ... a friendly head slap.
3. Highly respected SNEAD (Brendan Walsh) has exited Fair Grounds for Turfway after a minor physical issue and that clouds the trail status of the Gun Runner 2nd. Bummer.

## You Asked for It ... It's Back This Week's Top-20

1. NYSOS (Bob Baffert) \*not eligible Ky Derby\*
2. SIERRA LEONE (Chad Brown)
3. FIERCENESS (Todd Pletcher)
4. MUTH (Bob Baffert) \*not eligible Ky Derby\*
5. TRACK PHANTOM (Steve Asmussen)
6. DORNOCH (Danny Gargan)
7. CATCHING FREEDOM (Brad Cox)
8. LIBERAL ARTS (Robbie Medina)
9. HONOR MARIE (Whit Beckman)
10. MAYMUN (Bob Baffert) \*new not eligible Ky Derby\*
11. HALL OF FAME (Steve Asmussen)
12. TUSCAN GOLD (Chad Brown)
13. TIMBERLAKE (Brad Cox)
14. HADES (Joe Orseno)
15. CONQUEST WARRIOR (Shug McGaughey)
16. LOCKED (Todd Pletcher)
17. RESILIENCE (Bill Mott)
18. AGATE ROAD (Todd Pletcher) \*new\*
19. MYSTIK DAN (Kenny McPeck)
20. NO MORE TIME (Jose D'Angelo) \*new\*

## This Week In Countdown History

### 2014

How about this week's recap of allowance and maiden races across the country?

Bayern romped by 15 lengths at Santa Anita in an ALW and later would become a Breeders' Cup Classic winner. At Gulfstream, Tourist – a future Breeders' Cup Mile winner – broke his maiden on grass.

Also on the lawn in undercard recaps that week were eventual turf millionaires Ironicus and Ring Weekend.

## Keeping Ourselves Honest Picks NOW & Past

Last week's free *Countdown* selections: 2: 0-0-1 (0%)  
2024 *Countdown* season selections: 11: 4-2-4 (36%)

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2023 *Countdown* season selections: 37: 14-6-4 (38%)  
2022 *Countdown* season selections: 35: 12-8-1 (34%)  
2021 *Countdown* season selections: 35: 10-5-6 (29%)  
2020 *Countdown* season selections: 36: 11-8-3 (31%)

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Top choices struggled with a third in the El Camino Real Derby and a whiff in the Sam F. Davis. We take pride in what we do, and have accountability. Each week we'll update how our top picks perform.





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## Fearless Forecast - Previews

### *Undercard Notables for Preview*

Fri (2/16) Fair Grounds Race 7 ALW: No Triple Crown nominees in this turf sprint, but it does include Keeneland's Indian Summer Stakes winner COMMITTEE OF ONE (Steve Asmussen), third as the beaten favorite last out in the Texas Turf Mile.

Fri (2/16) Oaklawn Race 7 MSW: RONALDINHO (Peter Miller) is the lone TC nom in this 6F sprint. The \$230K Dialed In colt has been working bullets at San Luis Rey Downs in California. He'll meet the full-brother to elite distaff sprinter Frank's Rockette, TOP GUN ROCKET (Riley Mott), who ran into some tough hombres at Churchill in a trio of 2YO starts.

Fri (2/16) Tampa Bay Downs Race 8 ALW: This 7F dirt sprint lacks a Triple Crown nom, but has Inaugural Stakes 3-4 finishers RATHMORE (Tom Albertrani) and SIR FLASH (Gerard Ochoa).

Fri (2/16) Turfway Park Race 5 MSW: No TC noms among these dozen 6-1/2F sprinters. \$500K Lookin At Lucky rookie GOLD ASPEN (Brad Cox) meets \$300K Uncle Mo firster UNIVERSAL SOUND (Steve Asmussen). They'll give away experience to the half-brother to Mitole and Hot Rod Charlie, BOWSTREET (Paulo Lobo), who exits a second-place effort behind the meet's most impressive sophomore to date named EPIC RIDE (John Ennis), who since added the Leonatus Stakes trophy to his case.

Sat (2/17) Fair Grounds Race 3 ALW: Risen Star undercard includes several prospects here he could have danced in the main event, including Lecomte runner-up / Gun Runner third NASH (Brad Cox) and stablemate ETHAN ENERGY (Brad Cox), fourth in the Lecomte. Aqueduct debut winner TUSCAN SKY (Todd Pletcher) and Remsen fourth MOONLIGHT (Todd Pletcher) provide regional measuring sticks in this 1-1/16M heat. MOONLIGHT is cross-entered in the Risen Star.

Sat (2/17) Fair Grounds Race 7 MSW: 6F sprint includes four Triple Crown nominees, including rookie blueblood MISTER LINCOLN (Steve Asmussen), a Constitution colt out of Hot Dixie Chick, making him half-bro to \$2M earner Pauline's Pearl and full-bro to stakes winner Union Jackson. DISCREET MISCHIEF (Brad Cox) 2nd dam was the uber-talented Manistique. BANNED FOR LIFE (Al Stall Jr.) has turned heads.

Sat (2/17) Fair Grounds Race 9 MSW: 1-1/16M dirt route is a fascinating national barometer that could shed light on important FG, GP and OP winners of repute – namely Risen Star starter HALL OF FAME (Steve Asmussen), CONQUEST WARRIOR (Shug McGaughey) and COMMON DEFENSE (Kenny McPeck), the latter who since returned to run fifth in the Southwest.

Sat (2/17) Gulfstream Park Race 8 MSW: 1M dirt test includes a half-dozen Triple Crown nominees, including the 3-4 finishers behind promising CONQUEST WARRIOR (Shug McGaughey). Add in \$1M Twirling Candy rookie TOP CONOR (Chad Brown).

Sat (2/17) Santa Anita Race 7 \$100K Baffle Stakes: 6-1/2F downhill turf sprint includes TC nom BOLTAGE (Richard Mandella), fourth on dirt last out in the San Vicente. Del Mar's Cecil B. DeMille winner STAY HOT (Peter Eurton) is featured.

Sun (2/18) Tokyo Racecourse Race 9 \$300K Hyacinth: Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby qualifier (30-19-9-6-3 points) will be about 1M in distance. Triple Crown nominees entered (and listed alphabetically) include BALLON D'OR (Mikio Matsunaga), a son of BC Juvenile winner New Year's Day; GEORGE TESORO (Takayuki Kato), runner-up in November's Cattleya Stakes; HABIRE (Ryo Takei), by Henny Hughes coming off a summer victory and layoff; HORTOBAGY (Ryo Terashima), well beaten in his nation's G1 Hopeful; RAMJET (Shozo Sasaki), a Majestic Warrior colt coming off a minor stakes win; and stablemates TAISAI REAL (Yoshito Yahagi) and YY LEGEND (Yoshito Yahagi) from the barn of a multiple Breeders' Cup-winning conditioner who was forced to scratch last year's Kentucky Derby entrant Continuar.

Sun (2/18) Aqueduct Race 1 MSW: Rare 1-1/8 miles dirt MSW includes blue-blooded Curlin-Cathryn Sophia second-time starter CAROLO RAPIDO (Todd Pletcher). He showed little in a debut mile at the Big A on New Year's Eve when 7th. Third-timer EUSEBIUS (Michael McCarthy), a son of City of Light, leaves Kentucky after chasing eventual stakes winners EPIC RIDE (John Ennis) and MYSTIK DAN (Kenny McPeck) to date.

Sun (2/18) Santa Anita Race 9 MSW: Turf mile includes Justify colt BRITISH ISLES (Bob Baffert), half-bro to Eight Rings. He rematches with MESSAGE OF HOPE (Rick Dutrow), those two finishing 2-3 last out in a similar spot a neck apart.

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## RISEN STAR STAKES – Feb. 17

Set the Table: 1-1/8 miles (2 turns), \$400K, KD Points 50-25-15-10-5.

Historically Speaking: 3 Risen Star alumni have won the Kentucky Derby ('02 War Emblem, '19 Country House, '21 Mandaloun via DQ of Medina Spirit). This race has produced the 2-3 KD finishers each of the past 2 years – '23 Two Phils and Angel of Empire, '22 Epicenter and Zandon. It's had a KD top-3 finisher an unfathomable 5 straight years.

What To Watch For: There's a real danger with as deep as this race appears on paper, and the 9F stern test, that a horse could do too much too soon and bottom himself out. Look for those who thrive coming out of this race with quicker returns to the workout tab (10-14 days) and blossoming for more.

Race Keys: Top January regional players TRACK PHANTOM (Steve Asmussen) from FG's Lecomte and CATCHING FREEDOM from Oaklawn's Smarty Jones take on wide-ranging, new challengers. Note TIZZY INDY (Keith Desormeaux) is the only other Lecomte alum entered. TRACK PHANTOM has a tough post, but a pace advantage near the front and he's looked a lot like Epicenter to date, a horse who ruggedly handled this entire series. He'll show up. CATCHING FREEDOM feels a lot like Angel of Empire from last year, a horse who won this race. Loved the way this colt finished up at OP last out and he's been FG-based, so this is a home game for him despite not racing here in the afternoon.

Race Keys: Remsen and Kentucky Jockey Club returnees collide, SIERRA LEONE (Chad Brown) and MOONLIGHT (Todd Pletcher) from NY, as well as HONOR MARIE (Whit Beckman) and REAL MEN VIOLIN (Kenny McPeck) from KY. The also-rans from the Kentucky Jockey Club haven't produced in their returns, while the Remsen comebackers have shown out quite strongly. Advantage: SIERRA LEONE. I'm not wild about the blinkers going on in the first start after a layoff, when a horse often runs more fresh from the time away to begin with. There's a chance SIERRA LEONE is too close to the pace with the fresh feeling and blinkers, which could stunt his finishing move. But he's a serious racehorse and his papa Gun Runner won this race. Both HONOR MARIE and REAL MEN VIOLIN have wintered at FG and fired bullets for the return. They're tough to separate but HONOR MARIE should have more upside with half the starts as her rival last year.

Race Keys: Class risers HALL OF FAME (Steve Asmussen), RESILIENCE (Bill Mott), CARDINALE (Todd Pletcher) and BEE DANCER (Dallas Stewart) bring further X-factors and obvious talent. HALL OF FAME ran a few lengths faster in his ALW win than the same-day Lecomte, looking almost worth the \$1.4M pricetag this son of Gun Runner attracted at the sale. His workout tab has been VERY light since then, however, working once to stablemate TRACK PHANTOM's twice during the identical span. Might he have come out of that huge performance on a bit of a negative bounce? CARDINALE backers have to hold their nose after seeing CHANGE OF COMMAND (Shug McGaughey) run so poorly in the Sam F. Davis at Tampa last week after beating this colt in a tussle. BEE DANCER is being asked too much too soon from post 12 off the single 6F race. Then there's RESILIENCE, who will be a great value play Saturday. I loved his breakout MSW win at Gulfstream when beating Arrogate's half-brother, and he's got that Triple Crown-kinda pedigree I love – by brilliant Into Mischief and then with his second dam being the superstar turf stamina mare Tranquility Lake. There are more accomplished horses than him, but from a gambling perspective, Saturday is the time to find out at a price.

JP's Picks: W) **RESILIENCE**; P) **CATCHING FREEDOM**; S) **SIERRA LEONE**





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## SUNLAND PARK DERBY – Feb. 18

Set the Table: 1-1/16 miles (2 turns), \$400K, KD Points 20-10-6-4-2.

Historically Speaking: Mine That Bird in 2009 is the only Kentucky Derby winner to have competed in the Sunland Park Derby. Firing Line came out of this race in 2015 to finish 2nd to American Pharoah at CD. But the race hasn't produced a Kentucky Derby starter since 2019.

What To Watch For: Shortened in distance from 9F and moved up 5 weeks on the calendar, it's a new dawn for the race that began in 2003. It was worth \$800K in 2019, how half of that, so we can't expect it to have the same impact and field quality.

Race Keys: Shippers **INFORMED PATRIOT** (Steve Asmussen) and **STRONGHOLD** (Phil D'Amato) give us some regional strength to consider. **INFORMED PATRIOT** exits a solid third in the Smarty Jones at Oaklawn and we'll see that race's winner back in action Saturday in the Risen Star at Fair Grounds. The Smarty Jones runner-up already has returned to run a good second in the Southwest at OP, **JUST STEEL** (D. Wayne Lukas). Pedigree might be best at middle distances, so the shorter Sunland Park Derby trip this year benefits **INFORMED PATRIOT**. As for **STRONGHOLD**, he chased superstar **NYSOS** (Bob Baffert) to no avail sprinting at Del Mar, but was clearly second-best that day. He then slugged it out between stablemates **WYNSTOCK** (Bob Baffert) and **COACH PRIME** (Bob Baffert) through the marathon stretch of the Los Al Futurity. He's a rock-solid son of Ghostzapper who likely on damside pedigree won't want to go much farther than this either. My take is that the Smarty Jones was a better race than the Los Al Futurity, especially after **WYNSTOCK** since shipped to Oaklawn and was no factor in the Southwest.

Race Keys: The top-4 finishers from Sunland Park's Riley Allison Derby re-match while adding a sixteenth of a mile in trip. **LUCKY JEREMY** (Bill Morey) scored that one, and I'd love to see my namesake add the Sunland Derby and make it to back to Louisville, where he broke his maiden in October. But I wanted to see him punch out those milers last time with more zip than he exhibited. Granted, it was his first route and first start off the layoff while taking in new surroundings. He's remained at Sunland since and I see no reason why he won't top those locals again. **ALOTALUCK** (Ty Garrett) is plenty fast and will keep him company up front, however.

Race Keys: Maiden risers **NO TROUBLE** (Joel Marr) and **CURLIN'S KAOS** (Antonio Garcia) will see where they fit. Either would be a surprise, but local **NO TROUBLE** does hail from the same respected local barn that won this race a year ago.

JP's Picks: W) **INFORMED PATRIOT**; P) **STRONGHOLD**; S) **LUCKY JEREMY**





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## Everyone's A Critic - Reviews



### SAM F. DAVIS STAKES – Feb. 10

NO MORE TIME (Jose D'Angelo) wasted no time asserting himself in the 1-1/16 miles prep for the Tampa Bay Derby, surging to the front and running CHANGE OF COMMAND (Shug McGaughey) into absolute submission. And while the latter folded to 11th and beaten more than 21 lengths, NO MORE TIME just kept going. Late-running AGATE ROAD (Todd Pletcher) got the set up and finished encouragingly, but didn't threaten the 1-1/4 length winner.

The Davis was not gifted to NO MORE TIME, but rather earned through splits of 23.52, 23.09, 24.20, 25.78 and 6.67 for a final time of 1:42.26. Whenever you rocket like that in the second quarter, much faster than the first, the pace nearly always will stop. So you have to credit NO MORE TIME for keeping on keeping on while the other speed ended up 12-3/4 and 21-1/2 lengths in the rear-view mirror.

NO MORE TIME handled his first two-turn test much better than anticipated here. He was an obvious bounce-back candidate after he spent most of the Mucho Macho Man Stakes in make-up mode after a troubled start. But he had not tried two turns through his prior trio of starts and his pedigree didn't scream for it. That the Mucho Macho Man Stakes alumni didn't show much in the Holy Bull made for less confidence on my part, though the betting public was dialed in making him the 3-1 favorite in the Davis.

The freight train performance by NO MORE TIME was reminiscent of the 2020 Tampa Bay Derby when King Guillermo freaked by 4-3/4 lengths via Gulfstream for Juan Avila. But he was essentially a one-hit wonder who lost his next 7 and never won again. If NO MORE TIME comes back in the Tampa Bay Derby as expected, he won't have to answer any additional distance questions as it's the same trip. But it won't tell us any more about his Kentucky Derby candidacy in terms of stamina.

Stamina and distance likely won't be a discussion with runner-up AGATE ROAD. The Quality Road colt twice won routing on turf at age 2, including the Pilgrim. He showed an ability to take dirt in his Saratoga debut and did so again when making up about 11 lengths in the Davis. The competition gets much stronger for all of these next time, but the grinding style AGATE ROAD has shown on multiple surfaces bodes well for 10 furlongs ... maybe not to win the roses, but be deserving of a spot in the gate when May rolls around.

CHANGE OF COMMAND (Shug McGaughey) stopped in a manner that suggests perhaps he bled, lost air or had some sort of physical issue. He's too good to pack it in like that, but obviously was overrated on my part coming into the Davis.

Gulfstream Park preppers ran 1-2 in this spot and that's a positive sign for that circuit's 3YO crop as they start to branch out. The defeat by FIERCENESS (Todd Pletcher) in the Holy Bull might keep more of the Gulfstream crew at home than if he had dominated there and scared away competition.



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## GOLDEN GATE FIELDS EL CAMINO REAL DERBY – Feb. 10

For the second time in four years, an automatic Preakness berth goes to trainer Michael McCarthy as his turf performer **ENDLESSLY** (Michael McCarthy) followed up on the success of Rombauer from 2021. Now if the 2024 El Camino Real Derby winner can only take that spring step like Rombauer and be draped in the black-eyed susans at Pimlico?

Sent off the 3-5 favorite in the 1-1/8 miles test on Tapeta, **ENDLESSLY** finished with a flurry just as he had in wining turf miles like the Del Mar Juvenile Turf and Santa Anita's Zuma Beach. The Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf alum closed 7-1/2 lengths from 7th of 8 to win by 1-1/4 lengths over a pair of fellow Santa Anita shippers.

The top 3 wagering choices completed a formful trifecta with **TAPALO** (John Sadler) inheriting the lead, and winding up second-best, and **GUY NAMED JOE** (Doug O'Neill) making up about 5 lengths after trailing much of the way. Splits were cut out in 23.05, 24.56, 25.43, 25.12 and 12.52 for a solid 1:50.68 More impressively, the 37.64 final 3F saw **ENDLESSLY** close about 5L during span, so he came home the mid :36s. There was 7 lengths first to fourth, and you like to see that on synthetic, a rare separation.

McCarthy does not sound in a hurry to put **ENDLESSLY** on dirt. Sire Oscar Performance was a pure grass horse, but his son Tumbarumba won last year's Ellis Park Derby on dirt and Gulfstream's Harlan's Holiday last month on dirt. Damsire Langfuhr won the Vosburgh, Carter and Met Mile on dirt. After Rombauer's El Camino Real Derby win in 2021, his next stop was on dirt in the Blue Grass at Keeneland, though he notably was stakes-placed on dirt as a 2YO prior, unlike **ENDLESSLY** who has never run on dirt. **TAPALO** reportedly could be headed to the Jeff Ruby at Turfway next, sticking to the synthetics.

### *Undercard Notables for Review*

Fri (2/9) Tampa Bay Downs Race 7 ALW: **FULL NELSON** (Jose D'Angelo) started a big weekend for the barn, winning this 1M turf ALW in wire-to-wire fashion over last year's Central Park Stakes runner-up **WALLEY WORLD** (Chad Brown). Stablemate **NO MORE TIME** (Jose D'Angelo) would win the next-day Sam F. Davis Stakes. **FULL NELSON** has now won 3 straight and ascending from his former MCL level. His pedigree taps out around a mile – even though he quickened very nicely here 23.14 final quarter. So while there may be temptation to look at the Jeff Ruby on synthetic, lower-hanging fruit at shorter grass trips would be recommended.

Fri (2/9) Turfway Race 5 MSW: Those in pursuit of Jan. 12 local MSW winner **TENNESSEE** (Brad Cox) returned to run 1-2 in this Tapeta mile. **BOLT AT MIDNIGHT** (Mick Ruis) rolled wire-to-wire by 4-3/4 lengths as the favorite. It was the fifth start for graduation day for this son of Bolt d'Oro, who had been no match for west coast MSWs last year. The form flattery for **TENNESSEE** would pay off 24 hours later.

Sat (2/10) Turfway Race 6 ALW: Triple Crown nominee **TENNESSEE** (Brad Cox) announced his presence for the Jeff Ruby by winning this 1M ALW by a length as the 4-5 favorite. Front-running **EVENING NEWS** (James Noble) got away with 6F in 1:13.11 and made the chalk work for it. But the Justify colt **TENNESSEE**, who is half-brother to Dueling Grounds Derby winner Moon Over Miami, handled business and they put 8 more lengths on the rest of a suspect cast. .

Sat (2/10) Aqueduct Race 1 MSW: Triple Crown nominee **ELIMINATE** (Todd Pletcher) finally closed the deal as the 8-5 favorite after nibbling as the chalk in several starts prior. The \$525K son of Curlin is out of the good sprint mare I'm A Looker, which makes a major distance test questionable to this eye. This was merely a small step in the right direction vs. 4 rivals.

Sat (2/10) Tampa Bay Downs Race 2 MSW: Odds-on favorite **HEARTENED** (Todd Pletcher) made the successful turf-to-dirt switch to win this 1M40Y route on the main track. He benefitted from soft fractions up front in beating a modest bunch. This was not a Sam F. Davis undercard 'wow' performance and the pedigree checks out right around a miler.

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Sat (2/10) Gulfstream Race 6 MSW: A strong runner-up in this 1M turf tilt by 19-1 longshot THEMANUPFRONT (Michael Yates) was positive for *Countdown* Top-20 member RESILIENCE (Bill Mott), who comfortably handled this runner in a previous matchup. RESILIENCE returns Saturday in an ultra-tough edition of the Risen Star Stakes. Neither this race, nor its Race 2 split division the same day, featured any Triple Crown noms.

Sat (2/10) Gulfstream Race 8 MSW: Rookie barnmates BEELINE (Riley Mott) and MR SKYLIGHT (Riley Mott) dueled 1-2 throughout in this 6F sprint before the former pulled away to a 3-3/4 length victory. The young Mott exacta returned 308-1 odds in a zippy 1:09.74 with nearly 10 lengths between first and fourth. With 9 firsters in a field of 12 it's hard to know what was behind them, but the 3-4-5 finishers were debut artists that figured to have some repute. BEELINE is full-brother to solid '23 soph sprint filly Topsy, runner-up in the Miss Preakness and winner of the 6F Zia Distaff.

Sat (2/10) Gulfstream Race 11 ALW: IN A JAM (Mark Casse), who needed 8 starts to break his maiden, wheeled right back to win this 7-1/2F turf route ALW in a furious finish. Five of them hit the line within 2 lengths with lightning 11.35 and 5.78 final splits. The winner was 0-4 on dirt prior and not nominated to the TC. Disappointment here for Jan. 13 debut winner TURN UP THE TREES (Todd Pletcher). The \$500K son of Liam's Map beat just one home and probably headed back to dirt.

Sat (2/10) Oaklawn Race 10 \$150K Ozark Stakes: VALENTINE CANDY (Steve Asmussen) ran down sharp debut winner TIME FOR TRUTH (Ron Moquett) and pulled clear to a 2-1/2 length win in this 6F sprint. By Justify, there's been no hurry to stretch out VALENTINE CANDY and it has paid off with a trio of sprint stakes wins at the meet. VALENTINE CANDY is not Triple Crown nominated and you could see the barn, which has other classics prospects, keeping him short and aiming for races like the Pat Day Mile, Chick Lang or Woody Stephens. TIME FOR TRUTH is nominated to the Triple Crown and ran well enough here to get a look on the trail, perhaps fitting in something like the Lexington at Keeneland at 1-1/16 miles.

Sun (2/11) Oaklawn Race 3 ALW: Just 24 hours after VALENTINE CANDY showed he's one of the top 3YO sprinters in the Midwest, stablemate BOOTH (Steve Asmussen) romped to a 4-1/4 length win in this 6F ALW. The Mitole colt had been beaten favorite in the Ed Brown Society at Churchill to JUST STEEL (D. Wayne Lukas), since Oaklawn's Southwest runner-up. BOOTH would appear a candidate for many of the same sprint races this spring ... Pat Day Mile, Chick Lang, Woody Stephens, etc. First, there's the local Hot Springs Stakes at 1M and the Bachelor at 6F before meet's end.

Sun (2/11) Oaklawn Race 9 MSW: SPEEDTAIL (Ingrid Mason) pulled an 11-1 upset in this 1-1/16M MSW in his 6th start. The Mastery colt had been runner-up to promising *Countdown* player SNEAD (Brendan Walsh) last fall at Churchill. He bounced back from a troubled drubbing locally at the heels of DIMATIC (Steve Asmussen), flattering that one in this performance.

Sun (2/11) Santa Anita Race 6 ALW: Perhaps the significant player of the weekend returned on Super Bowl Sunday with his second victory in as many starts. But it wasn't as easy as projected for MAYMUN (Bob Baffert), who blew the clubhouse turn and later lost the lead mid-stretch to stablemate IMAGINATION (Bob Baffert) and had to find another gear on the rail to secure this mile ALW by a neck. Those two were more than 10 lengths clear of the rest in their own match race, which went in splits of 23.91, 24.16, 23.47 and 25.11 for a final time of 1:36.65. As we've written previously about MAYMUN, he doesn't scream classic distances on the pedigree and developmental fronts, but there's no denying he's brilliant. IMAGINATION, a last-out winner who cost \$1.05M obviously is no slouch. It's almost certainly on to stakes next for both and it will be interesting where this barn begins to separate and how it prepares potential Preakness or Belmont Stakes contenders. MAYMUN feels like a Blue Grass or Lexington Stakes horse at Keeneland, a path that served Arabian Lion well last year en route to Sir Barton and Woody Stephens victories; but he certainly also could be a 1-1/16 miles Rebel Stakes horse at Oaklawn next month.

Tue (2/13) Fair Grounds Race 7 ALW: Serious sprinter DONCHO (Michelle Lovell) made it 2-for-2 with a cruise control victory in a flashy 1:09.52 for 6F. A 23.96 final quarter and big gallop out were cherries on top. The Mo Town gelding certainly leans shorter than the classics, but has legit talent and has to be considered for all the big sprints/mile-type races.

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