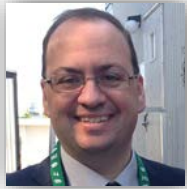




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TO THE
CROWN

SEASON 19 WEEK 8 – February 23, 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 the NBA all-star game – exhibitions at best.

1. It's true the Risen Star 1-2-3 finishers came in exactly the order they were ranked in last week's *Countdown* Top-20. But that's not to say it was the right bet. Gambling and scouting Triple Crown prospects are two different things. You're always in pursuit of the best value when betting.
2. You wanna bet the Bafferts before the Triple Crown? You'll get a chance in the second annual Preakness Future Wager, which adds a second pool this year. Dates will be Feb. 29-Mar. 2 and April 27-May 4, ending just prior to the Kentucky Derby start. The inaugural Preakness Future Wager handled a significant \$304K – and this year's Ky Derby Future Wagers are trending way up in handle.
3. For as wet as it's been this winter, we're fortunate to have only had 3 serious preps on off tracks, the Withers (Aqu), Southwest (OP) and Risen Star (FG). It only seems like every race we've seen has been run in a quagmire.

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. MAYMUN (Bob Baffert) *not eligible Ky Derby*
10. CONQUEST WARRIOR (Shug McGaughey)
11. RESILIENCE (Bill Mott)
12. TUSCAN GOLD (Chad Brown)
13. TIMBERLAKE (Brad Cox)
14. HADES (Joe Orseno)
15. LOCKED (Todd Pletcher)
16. TUSCAN SKY (Todd Pletcher) *new*
17. HONOR MARIE (Whit Beckman)
18. AGATE ROAD (Todd Pletcher)
19. MYSTIK DAN (Kenny McPeck)
20. NO MORE TIME (Jose D'Angelo)

This Week In Countdown History

2019

Just as is the case this week, 5 years ago *Countdown* reviewed the Risen Star Stakes in its Week 8 scouting report.

What an edition it turned out to be, won by the eventual Preakness winner War of Will, who was the even-money favorite despite post 14 for trainer Mark Casse.

The Risen Star runner-up? Eventual Kentucky Derby winner Country House, who rallied from 12th to 2nd. Up the track that day was eventual Preakness third-place finisher Owendale.

The '19 Risen Star ranks the most productive February prep I can recall in the 19 years of doing *Countdown*.

Keeping Ourselves Honest Picks NOW & Past

Last week's free *Countdown* selections: 2: 0-0-0 (0%)
2024 *Countdown* season selections: 13: 4-2-4 (31%)

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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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2nd and 3rd choices won the Sunland Derby and Risen Star, but top picks were off the board in both. *Gotta do better.* 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 (2/23) Turfway Race 5 MSW: 1M test is light with only 1 Triple Crown nominee, but could shed light on past meet winners like TENNESSEE (Brad Cox) and ENCINO (Brad Cox), who appear on the stakes trajectory next. Godolphin's second-timer DRURY LANE (Brendan Walsh) could appreciate the mile, by Ghostzapper out of a half-sis to Preakness winner Bernardini.

Sat (2/24) Saudi Arabia / King Abulaziz Racecourse Race 4 \$1.5M Saudi Derby: 1-turn mile boasts Japan's most promising Triple Crown hopeful FOREVER YOUNG (Yoshito Yohagi), who aims for a 4-for-4 lifetime mark in his first of what could be three international jaunts. The UAE Derby is expected next, so a big effort Saturday will debut him in the *Countdown* top-20. Competition includes Futurity and Pasco winner BOOK'EM DANNO (Derek Ryan) from his Tampa winter base, as well as Gulfstream-based BENTORNATO (Jose D'Angelo), winner of two-thirds of the Florida Sire Stakes series last year.

Sat (2/24) Gulfstream Race 4 MSW: 1-1/8 miles dirt stamina test includes a barometer for the Pegasus World Cup Day MSW in which stakes-bound SPEAK EASY (Todd Pletcher) and VICTORY AVENUE (Gustavo Delgado) ran 1-2. The alumni from that race include second-timer BATTEN DOWN (Bill Mott), the regally bred Tapit-Close Hatches colt, and CORPORATE POWER (Shug McGaughey), a \$925K son of Curlin. STURDY (George Weaver) makes his 3YO return after placing behind prospects like LOCKED (Todd Pletcher), DRUM ROLL PLEASE (Brad Cox) and DOMESTIC PRODUCT (Chad Brown) in 2 prior starts.

Sat (2/24) Oaklawn Race 1 ALW: 1-1/16 miles consolation of sorts on the Rebel undercard at the same distance, this could produce an Arkansas Derby starter or 2 and includes 4 Triple Crown nominees. Also gives some measuring stick to Rebel runners later in the day with those who chased CARBONE (Steve Asmussen), WOODCOURT (Cipriano Contreras) and NEXT LEVEL (Keith Desormeaux). IMPERIAL GUN (Steve Asmussen) exits a big move forward in his second-start graduation; FOOTPRINT (Kenny McPeek) comes out of a terrible-trip third vs. similar; and BLOWN COVER (Brad Cox) was beaten favorite in his last 2 at Fair Grounds when running against some command performances.

Sat (2/24) Oaklawn Race 2 MSW: The only TC nominee in this 6F sprint is \$1.35M purchase DAILY GRIND (D. Wayne Lukas), sporting one of the worst ROI's of the crop at 6: 0-0-0 to date. He's full-bro to BC Juvenile runner-up Anneau d'Or. This race lacks any obvious trail impact, but we'll keep an eye out.

Sat (2/24) Oaklawn Race 12 MSW: Triple Crown noms CRUSHED IT (Brad Cox) and THOUSAND SPRINGS (Kenny McPeek) highlight this 1-1/16M finale immediately after the Rebel. CRUSHED IT has lost two photos at 4-5 and 6-5 to date. A trio of these chased Rebel entrant DIMATIC (Steve Asmussen) home last out, so tab his performance in the prior race for more measure. GIVE ME A REASON (Steve Asmussen) is not a TC nom, but he's by Justify and a half-brother to Creative Cause and Destin out of the millionaire-earning blue-hen mare Dream of Summer.

Sat (2/24) Santa Anita Race 1 ALW: This turf mile includes TC nom and Eddie Logan Stakes third-place finisher TWIRLING POINT (Jonathan Thomas) as well as that stakes' fourth-place finisher MIRACLE MARK (Phil D'Amato). Eastern invader UNCLE TRULY (Jonathan Thomas) is a maternal grandson of the champion turf mare Forever Together.

Sun (2/25) Aqueduct Race 1 MSW: 1M cast lacks a TC nominee, but should shed light on romping Jan. 28 graduate CAPITAL IDEA (Christophe Clement), whose runner-up returns in SARDIS (Chad Brown).

Sun (2/25) Aqueduct Race 2 ALW: 6-1/2F sprint includes TC nom RIDGEWOOD RUNNER (Carlos Martin), who had a breakout win in his 7th start last time when adding Lasix and blinkers. GUANARE (Rick Dutrow) won Laurel's Spectacular Bid last out and looks for 4 in a row since coming to Dutrow's barn. We'll get a better line on the Big A's Jimmy Winkfield Stakes winner BERGEN (Brad Cox), who would seem logical for the Gotham next, with 3 of his pursuers back in action.

Sun (2/25) Santa Anita Race 8 MSW: Rousing Jan. 20 maiden winner and follow-up ALW winner MAYMUN (Bob Baffert) will see his 3-4 graduation pursuers return in this 1M dirt route. TESSUTO (George Papaprodromou) and \$1M Gun Runner second-timer NORMANDY LANDING (Bob Baffert) extend around 2 turns. The brilliantly bred Into Mischief-By the Light colt IGNITE THE LIGHT (Rick Dutrow) faced some bears in New York like SIERRA LEONE (Chad Brown), the since-sidelined EL CAPI (Rick Dutrow) and CONQUEST WARRIOR (Shug McGaughey).

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REBEL STAKES – Feb. 24

Set the Table: 1-1/16 miles (2 turns), \$1.25 million, KD Points 50-25-15-10-5.

Historically Speaking: 3 Kentucky Derby winners have raced in the Rebel (Sunny's Halo '83, Smarty Jones '04 and American Pharoah '15), the latter pair also adding the Preakness – as did Rebel alumni Oxbow ('13), Lookin At Lucky ('10), Curlin ('07), Afleet Alex ('05) et al. Add in Belmont winners Creator ('16) and Afleet Alex ('05) during that span. The Rebel has had at least 1 spring-held KD starter year since 2010.

What To Watch For: Smarty Jones winner **CATCHING FREEDOM** (Brad Cox) returned last week to run a solid third in the Risen Star at Fair Grounds, while Southwest winner **MYSTIK DAN** (Kenny McPeck) sits this one out while awaiting the Arkansas Derby or Blue Grass. The Oaklawn trail looks for its third series winner in as many races.

Race Keys: **TIMBERLAKE** (Brad Cox) will be solidly favored off his G1 Champagne win last year and fourth-place finish in the G1 Breeders' Cup Juvenile. He feels like a pop or flop in this spot, either running off easily to win as a 3YO to watch or he'll be humbled by a false reputation earned at 2 earned in 1-turn races and a signature score in the slop. There's enough in the connections, resume and pedigree to make this a top-20 prospect for now, but as a gambler, I'm all out to try and beat him on Saturday. Regular rider Florent Geroux is off to the \$20M Saudi Cup to ride Saudi Crown for trainer Cox, but he picks up local leading pilot Cristian Torres as a viable sub.

Race Keys: 4 alumni of the rescheduled Southwest are now coming back on a compressed, 3-week turnaround. **JUST STEEL** (D. Wayne Lukas), **CARBONE** (Steve Asmussen), **COMMON DEFENSE** (Kenny McPeck) and **MAGIC GRANT** (Eddie Milligan) all have 1 workout since then and it's difficult to project forward movement off that. All came into the Southwest having been locally trained and forced to miss 11 days due to weather in January, so they were behind the progress meter then. My suspicion is the poorly drawn **JUST STEEL** was best of these that day and holds that form even with another terrible post draw. But the horse who bypassed the Southwest, Smarty Jones pacesetter **LAGYNOS** (Steve Asmussen), may benefit on the timing now. He is very sneaky-interesting in this spot after being shipped out to Fair Grounds so not to impact his morning routine as much as the locals. He's had 3 weeks of solid works in succession in New Orleans and should be forwardly placed here with stablemate **CARBONE**. Young Keith Asmussen rides for his dad and has been hot of late, and could get a signature score.

Race Keys: Local maiden and allowance risers include **NORTHERN FLAME** (Kenny McPeck), **TEJON PASS** (Peter Miller), **DIMATIC** (Steve Asmussen), **NEXT LEVEL** (Keith Desormeaux) and **MENA** (Steve Hobby). I thought the best horse in the common allowance that **WOODCOURT** and **TEJON PASS** exited isn't back in this race, the highly troubled **FOOTPRINT** (Kenny McPeck), who instead goes in a Race 1 ALW on Saturday at OP. Check that result for some barometer. **DIMATIC** was the most visually impressive to me of that group and he's making steady progress in each start. Another step forward puts him in the win discussion on Saturday.

Race Keys: X-factor **TIME FOR TRUTH** (Ron Moquett) looked exceptionally talented off his debut win Dec. 31 and came back to validate that form sprinting 6F again in the Ozark Stakes when second-best to **VALENTINE CANDY** (Steve Asmussen), a sprint stud who has won 3 stakes at the meeting going short. **TIME FOR TRUTH** has an all-Rebel pedigree with race winners Omaha Beach as his sire and Lookin At Lucky as his damsire. I'm worried about post 13 with a short run to the clubhouse turn for a horse who has only sprinted. But don't be surprised if he's really, really good. He'll be on my tickets in a deep race.

JP's Picks: W) **LAGYNOS**; P) **DIMATIC**; S) **TIMBERLAKE**





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MIRACLE WOOD STAKES – Feb. 24

Set the Table: 1 mile (1 turn), \$100K, KD Points 0-0-0-0-0.

Historically Speaking: The Miracle Wood has produced 3 Kentucky Derby starters, including '06 post-time favorite Sweetnorthernstaint. Last year's Winner Coffeewithchris advanced to the Preakness, finishing 7th, the first such alum in the Preakness since Alwaysmining, 11th in 2019.

What To Watch For: This will be the final 1-turn race in Maryland for Preakness hopefuls as the Private Terms and Federico Tesio go around 2 bends next up.

Race Keys: Triple Crown nominee REGALO (Brittany Russell), blowout winner of both Laurel starts, returns home after a tiring fourth in the Jerome at Aqueduct. He's been right in the pace mix in each start and adds blinkers for the first time. The Jerome form held up decently when runner-up EL GRANDE O (Linda Rice) ran similarly well in the Withers next. This Maximus Mischief colt's damside is littered with unstarted and lightly raced mares, and his sire won 3 of 4 in a career that spanned just over 4 months. We'll see how long this one can keep his form and health. He projects better around 1 turn against higher-classed horses.

Race Keys: Local stakes winners SWEET SODDY J (Raymond Ginter), COPPER TAX (Gary Capuano) and CIRCLE P (Flint Stites) have accounted for the Heft, James F. Lewis III and Maryland Juvenile Stakes to date while sprinting. The mile might favor COPPER TAX slightly amongst that trio, though CIRCLE P appears capable late if ready to go from a Dec. 2 layoff. There should be a very strong pace, and the extended second-wire stretch is in play in Laurel 1M races.

Race Keys: STARTS WITH A DREAM (James Lawrence II) and SPEEDYNESS (Jamie Ness) exit local wins over wet tracks and wouldn't mind more of the same conditions. STARTS WITH A DREAM has posted back-to-back bullet works at the Fair Hill training center since his Jan. 28 sprint score, but the more seasoned SPEEDYNESS goes for a Ness barn that won no less than 7 races this past Wednesday alone. The Great Notion colt has won 3 of his last 4 in wire-to-wire fashion, his only loss coming to Miracle Wood rival CIRCLE P in the Maryland Juvenile.

JP's Picks: W) **COPPER TAX**; P) **REGALO**; S) **SPEEDYNESS**

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Everyone's A Critic - Reviews



FAIR GROUNDS
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RISEN STAR STAKES – Feb. 17

No less than 6 *Countdown* top-20 members last week squared off in what promised to be the tell-tale prep of the 2024 season so far. And they didn't disappoint. It's so rare that so many well thought of prospects all ran relatively close to their abilities and exit a race with as much appreciation for them afterward as we had going in. This time of year, you're looking to see contenders fall by the wayside. That didn't happen in the Risen Star, despite the challenges of its 1-1/8 miles distance and wet track conditions.

And consider: this race has produced the 2-3 Kentucky Derby finishers each of the past 2 years – '23 Two Phils and Angel of Empire, '22 Epicenter and Zandon; and it boasts a KD top-3 finisher an unfathomable 5 straight years. It's as historically important a race in recent history as we'll find, which makes it more exciting when so many horses exited it on the upswing.

SIERRA LEONE (Chad Brown) delivered on his No. 2 *Countdown* national ranking with a rallying score. We'll detail all the main players' trips in a moment. A big fear of such a good race this year in the year and at 9F is that it would be too much, too soon. But the way the pace and flow of the Risen Star worked out, that's just not the case. Comfortable splits were 24.32, 25.35, 25.07, 24.66 and 12.73 for 1:52.13. It ran almost like a turf race, finishing stronger than you expect on dirt.

Since going to 1-1/8 miles in 2020, here are the final 3F of the Risen Star by year:

36.78 | Epicenter (2022)
37.39 | Sierra Leone (2024)
37.58 | Mr Monomoy (2020-D2)
37.65 | Mandaloun (2021)
38.66 | Modernist (2020-D1)
39.26 | Angel of Empire (2023)

Let's get to the detailed notes on all the major players from the Risen Star.

SIERRA LEONE (Chad Brown): won by 1/2L. Never more than 6-1/2 lengths back at any call (though was about 9-10 back before the first quarter expired), the blinkers kept him closer than he was in the Remsen, and far more focused late. Recall he was 12 back in the Remsen. He now has a pair of 9F strong showings, more than anyone else will end up with even after the final preps ... next up: Blue Grass. SIERRA LEONE got a good education here breaking somewhat tight between horses and settling near the back, settled in the 2-path clubhouse turn, tipped out 3-4 path on backstretch to stay outside CATCHING FREEDOM and avoid kickback. He never had a horse inside or outside of him the entire trip, so was able to tuck back in around 2-path on far turn and not give ground, gradually angled out at top of stretch. The "wide" trip was just perception, not reality, as he steady progress around rivals already when straightened and galloped out slightly best with good energy.

TRACK PHANTOM (Steve Asmussen): 2nd by 1/2L after setting pace. Like Asmussen predecessor Epicenter, he's now 3: 2-1-0 going into Louisiana Derby series finale. Broke sharp and clean, made lead without having to be shoved on too hard, got to rail by clubhouse turn having only one horse to clear and did so in hand, didn't have a horse even on his hip until the 5/16 marker when RESILIENCE moved to him, didn't corner sharply about 3-4 paths out, all out final furlong but didn't give way and galloped out similarly with winner. Another rock-solid effort as you'd expect.

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CATCHING FREEDOM (Brad Cox): 3rd by 1-3/4L. Settled about 2L in front of Sierra Leone down backstretch. He broke a bit clunky and shuffled slightly, 3-wide clubhouse turn with a wall in front of him midpack, traveled behind wall of 3 horses entire backstretch while under decent hold by Luis Saez, good enough to get through between horses deep into far turn, but wound up 7 wide moving while still on the elbow (losing ground). He ducked in around 3/16 pole and stunted his momentum on his own doing, struggling with lead change, and found himself in tight between horses in deep stretch. But that likely didn't cost him any placing – the leader didn't come back and the winner closed stronger. Didn't gallop out quite as strong as the others, but this was a step forward from his Smarty Jones win and remains viable. Expect LA or Arkansas Derby next.

RESILIENCE (Bill Mott): my top pick and longshot value play wound up 4th by 3-1/2L after doing the dirty work. He broke in slightly and looked comfortable to sit second flight under the wire first time, but advanced with interest into the clubhouse turn and made a nice move between horses to split and get position in first-over to track **TRACK PHANTOM**. He sat in a very good position on a sloppy track in 2-path avoiding kickback, and was not sent after the leader until about 5/16ths left when **HALL OF FAME** approached his outside and necessitated a little burst, which he did nicely. He was asked hard before the quarter pole and when **TRACK PHANTOM** didn't come back, it looked a bit like **RESILIENCE** was discouraged ... but he kept on mid-track and really only gave way about 2 lengths after many would have had their heart ripped out. He galloped out well just behind the top pair with interest. Lots to like moving forward with any of the big final preps possible for Mott.

HONOR MARIE (Whit Beckman): 5th by 6-1/4L after closing about 4L over the back half of the race. That KJC rival **REAL MEN VIOLIN** (Kenny McPeck) wound up 8th by 12-1/4L indicates maybe the KJC wasn't as strong. **HONOR MARIE** was away clean and saved ground without any early speed, had good gaps between him and others running clear while only 1 horse beat onto the backstretch Saved ground into far turn and was about 2-3L still behind **SIERRA LEONE** into the far turn. He had an absolute dream trip where he could pick any spot on the track he wanted, modestly gaining ground while seeming to pick up interest late. He galloped out well enough alongside **RESILIENCE**. Don't think he's a star, but he absolutely fits in this crop. Louisiana Derby or Blue Grass next make the most sense.

HALL OF FAME (Steve Asmussen): 7th by 8-3/4L would seem a disappointment for this flashy last-out winner. But note he missed a work prior and came up short here with plenty of excuse. He broke alert, but rider Ricardo Santana visibly took ahold of him approaching the wire the first time while inside, conceding the front to stablemate **TRACK PHANTOM** – which likely was to instructions. **HALL OF FAME** sat third inside. But he soon found trouble on the clubhouse turn with a trio of horses claiming his space and was shuffled around. He wound up between horses most of the backstretch and into the far turn, never a comfortable spot. He made a 3-wide move about 3F out, but ran out of starch while out in the 6-path turning for home. With more consistent morning preparation and intent on showing his natural early speed, he could bounce back. He feels like a horse who deserves that kind of shot in a race where speed plays well like the Blue Grass.

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SUNLAND PARK DERBY – Feb. 18

It's not like your grandfather's Sunland Park Derby was a Rolls Royce, but even this wasn't your grandfather's Sunland Park Derby. The late March staple at 1-1/8 miles was moved up 5 weeks on the calendar and shortened to an intermediary distance of 1-1/16 miles for this year's running. So what once was a race that got you into the Kentucky Derby, it's now a race that gets you only to the doorstep.

STRONGHOLD (Phil D'Amato) asserted his class late for a workmanlike victory by 2-1/2 lengths over locally based **ALOTOLUCK** (Ty Garrett) and **LUCKY JEREMY** (Bill Morey). After chasing Bob Baffert brawlers in Del Mar's Bob Hope as well as the Los Alamitos Futurity, **STRONGHOLD** found this Grade 3 \$400,000 cast a legitimate drop in class. The well-traveled son of 2004 Horse of the Year Ghostzapper began his career in Kentucky last summer and now has competed over 5 different tracks in his 5 efforts, all first or second-place finishes. There's a respect for that ability to travel and take your form with you as consistency isn't a given. Ask his Los Al Futurity conqueror **WYNSTOCK** (Bob Baffert), who subsequently got run out of Oaklawn in the Southwest Stakes with a blank check.

STRONGHOLD always was in good position under Antonio Fresu, pressing the pace set by Riley Allison Derby winner **LUCKY JEREMY**. They put up solid and consistent fractions of 23.69, 23.76, 23.87, 24.69 and 6.63 for a final clocking in 1:42.64. We've seen Sunland Park play like a dragstrip on its big days in the past, but it wasn't quite that fast this year. The 1M split for the Sunland Park Derby was pretty much equal to the 1M Harry Henson Stakes final time earlier on the card for older horses, and more than 6L faster than the final clocking for the 1M Sunland Park Oaks that day. All in all, a pretty strong race for these horses who appear on the trail fringe and who have more work to do.

That **STRONGHOLD** has traveled so much gives him options for a final potential Derby prep. A return to Kentucky for the Blue Grass or a return back to SoCal for the Santa Anita Derby would fit. He's earned 25 points qualifying toward the Kentucky Derby and that may be enough to get in already; at worst, he'd need only the most minor placing in his final prep, so even running into a Baffert buzzsaw or 2 in the Santa Anita Derby wouldn't put him in a lot of qualifying danger.

The big disappointment here was **INFORMED PATRIOT** (Steve Asmussen), the Smarty Jones Stakes third-place finisher. He ran a lackluster fifth while never showing any interest after being a model of consistency prior. He's likely a cut below and perhaps one for the Lexington at Keeneland at best. Smarty Jones winner **CATCHING FREEDOM** (Brad Cox) came back to run well in the Risen Star last week, and that race's runner-up **JUST STEEL** (D. Wayne Lukas) reappears in Saturday's Rebel at OP.

Undercard Notables for Review

Fri (2/16) Tampa Bay Downs Race 8 ALW: **SIR FLASH** (Gerard Ochoa), fourth in the Inaugural Stakes, found class relief in this wire-to-wire score over 7F. The race lacked any Triple Crown nominees and the winner likely stays sprinting for now. Inaugural winner **PATRIOT SPIRIT** (Michael Campbell) already has returned to run a disappointing 9th in the Sam F. Davis.

Fri (2/16) Turfway Park Race 5 MSW: \$300K Uncle Mo firster **UNIVERSAL SOUND** (Steve Asmussen) impressed in his debut with a rallying, 2-length sprint score over the heavily favored half-brother to Mitole and Hot Rod Charlie named **BOWSTREET** (Paulo Lobo). Neither is Triple Crown nominated, but this had the look of one of the better MSW races of the meet. **BOWSTREET** won the pace battle, but lost the war late and won't be a maiden long.





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Sat (2/17) Fair Grounds Race 3 ALW: Scratches decimated the depth of this 1-1/16M test, but the two main players remained – and they put on a show. Aqueduct debut winner TUSCAN SKY (Todd Pletcher) outgamed Lecomte runner-up / Gun Runner third NASH (Brad Cox) in what was veritable match race in a field of just 3. NASH made the front and had no excuse while TUSCAN SKY went by late for a 2-length score. The son of Vino Rosso put himself squarely on the Derby trail following up his Jan. 13 sprint win in 1:43.74. Both colts were visibly tired late after a couple of 23-and-change internal splits, but absolutely earned that right after going .30 faster than the same-day Mineshaft Stakes on the same card for older horses. The caveat for TUSCAN SKY is both career starts have been on wet tracks, so we'll see how it translates on a dry day. This one is half-brother to millionaire turf sprinter Private Creed. Pletcher has depth and options like most springs, so the next stop for TUSCAN SKY may have as much to do with some other runners as his best fit. I'd be inclined to look at the Wood Memorial, a race his sire won and a race that Pletcher last year was a photo-finish third with similarly inexperienced Dreamlike. As for NASH, distance was always going to be the question as we've noted about him in the past, and he may be best-suited to aim for the Pat Day Mile at Churchill.

Sat (2/17) Fair Grounds Race 7 MSW: DRIP (Whit Beckman) may not be Triple Crown nominated, but he ran like a horse with a big future in winning his 6F debut in a flashy 1:09.77. The Good Magic colt had garnered attention as the assertive workmate of Kentucky Jockey Club winning stablemate HONOR MARIE (Whit Beckman) and ran to his favoritism with a 2-1/4 length score in wire-to-wire fashion. In immediate pursuit were fellow highly thought of rookies DISCREET MISCHIEF (Brad Cox) and BANNED FOR LIFE (Al Stall Jr.). Neither will be a maiden long; look for this to be a key race. DRIP may be a viable candidate for the Lexington at Keeneland at 1-1/16 miles as a steppingstone. Late nominations for the TC are due April 1.

Sat (2/17) Fair Grounds Race 9 MSW: ANTIQUARIAN (Todd Pletcher) added onto a strong Lecomte Day undercard for the TAP stable, winning this 1-1/16M dirt route on a roadtrip from Gulfstream. The win flattered the form of his Jan. 13 half-length conqueror CONQUEST WARRIOR (Shug McGaughey), who may be seen next in the Fountain of Youth. ANTIQUARIAN put away his pace dueler by more than 7 lengths and held nicely here for a length score over rallying CORNISHMAN (Brad Cox), a highly reputed second-timer with a Curlin-Penwith genepool. ANTIQUARIAN is a May 11 foal making up for some lost development and won here in 1:45.73, about 10 lengths slower than stablemate TUSCAN SKY (Todd Pletcher) sizzled in an earlier 3YO ALW on the card. But you have to love the rock-steady 24s pounded out throughout, giving some Belmont Stakes vibes here if you're looking for one at the end of the TC series. Don't be shocked if he's in the Peter Pan. Sire Preservationist had issues earlier in this career and didn't blossom until age 6, winning the Suburban and Woodward.

Sat (2/17) Gulfstream Park Race 8 MSW: Debut runner and TC nominee TOP CONOR (Chad Brown) showed why he drew \$1M at the OBS 2YO sale, scoring a 2-length victory in his 1M premiere. The 2-3 finishers here came out of a strong race against CONQUEST WARRIOR (Shug McGaughey) and had some experience edge on the winner. TOP CONOR is by versatile sire Twirling Cnady and out of 7F Beaumont Stakes runner-up Divine Dawn. The 1-turn mile suited, but it's fair to question if he'll want to go more classic distances. Add in the fact this race blistered early and was terribly slow late (45.61 first half, 52.61 second half – as big of a spread as you'll see).

Sat (2/17) Santa Anita Race 7 \$100K Baffle Stakes: 6-1/2F downhill turf sprint in was won in last-to-first fashion by Del Mar's Cecil B. DeMille winner STAY HOT (Peter Eurton), the 2-1 favorite. By Summer Front out of a Smart Strike mare, it's a turf-on-turf pedigree best-suited to stick to the green (he's not TC nom'd) – even if he had 2 fair dirt efforts last year at Del Mar.

Sun (2/18) Tokyo Racecourse Race 9 \$300K Hyacinth: Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby qualifier (30-19-9-6-3 points) was won by RAMJET (Shozo Sasaki), a Majestic Warrior colt who passed his first serious class test in this about 1M race (around 1 turn). He showed a strong rally from far back in the field, taking advantage of the massive stretch straightaway, to best 4 other Triple Crown nominees among the field. Trainer Sasaki is best known for his 2003 Japan Cup winner Tap Dance City. He appears a far cut below Japan's most serious Derby threat, FOREVER YOUNG (Yoshito Yohagi), who goes in this Saturday's Saudi Derby.

Sun (2/18) Aqueduct Race 1 MSW: UNIQUE INSIGHT (Chad Brown) drew away by 4-1/2 lengths in this 1-1/8 miles stamina test, racking up yet another victory for sire Gun Runner. He's out of the turf miler Raucous, so 26.27 and 13.58 come-home splits come with added caution against a soft field. But track conditions were terribly slow throughout the card. He's not a TC nom and didn't show much in the first 3 starts, so don't consider him a trail talker.

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countdown

TO THE
CROWN

SEASON 19 WEEK 8 – February 23, 2024

Kentucky Derby Future Wager Pool 4 Closing Odds. Jeremy's top values in bold.

- #40 "All Other 3-Year-Olds from 2021 Foal Crop" (5-1, \$13.38)
- #31 Sierra Leone (Chad Brown, Gun Runner, 6-1, \$14.28)
- #10 Dornoch (Danny Gargan, Good Magic, 9-1, \$20.76)
- #34 Timberlake (Brad Cox, Into Mischief, 15-1, \$32.80)
- #24 Locked (Todd Pletcher, Gun Runner, 16-1, \$34.22)
- #13 Fierceness (Todd Pletcher, City of Light, 16-1, \$34.40)
- #35 Track Phantom (Steve Asmussen, Quality Road, 20-1, \$43.06)
- #14 Forever Young (JPN) (Yoshito Yahagi, Real Steel-JPN, 21-1, \$44.20)
- #26 Mystik Dan (Kenny McPeek, Goldcents, 21-1, \$44.70)
- #21 Knightsbridge (Bill Mott, Nyquist, 23-1, \$48.54)
- #20 Just a Touch (Brad Cox, Justify, 27-1, \$57.52)
- #6 Conquest Warrior (Shug McGaughey III, City of Light, 29-1, \$60.90)
- #5 Catching Freedom (Brad Cox, Constitution, 31-1, \$65.32)
- #37 Tuscan Sky (Todd Pletcher, Vino Rosso, 31-1, \$65.42)
- #15 Hades (Joe Orseno, Awesome Slew, 32-1, \$66.86)
- #16 Hall of Fame (Steve Asmussen, Gun Runner, 33-1, \$68.22)
- #17 Honor Marie (Whit Beckman, Honor Code, 36-1, \$75.34)
- #1 Agate Road (Todd Pletcher, Quality Road, 37-1, \$77.08)
- #32 Speak Easy (Todd Pletcher, Constitution, 41-1, \$85.44)
- #23 Liberal Arts (Bobby Medina, Arrogate, 57-1, \$116.04)**
- #18 Imperial Gun (Steve Asmussen, Gun Runner, 57-1, \$117.08)
- #27 Nash (Brad Cox, Medaglia d'Oro, 69-1, \$141.50)
- #38 Uncle Heavy (Butch Reid Jr., Social Inclusion, 72-1, \$146.22)
- #19 Just Steel (Wayne Lukas, Justify, 79-1, \$160.58)
- #3 Born Noble (Todd Pletcher, Constitution, 79-1, \$161.32)
- #9 Domestic Product (Chad Brown, Practical Joke, 80-1, \$162.18)
- #30 Resilience (Bill Mott, Into Mischief, 83-1, \$168.46)**
- #36 Tuscan Gold (Chad Brown, Medaglia d'Oro, 92-1, \$187.28)**
- #7 Deterministic (Christophe Clement, Liam's Map, 93-1, \$188)
- #33 Stronghold (Phil D'Amato, Ghostzapper, 99-1, \$200.72)
- #12 Epic Ride (John Ennis, Blame, 105-1, \$212.80)
- #8 Dimatic (Steve Asmussen, Gun Runner, 120-1, \$242.12)
- #2 Amante Bianco (JPN) (Keisuke Miyata, Henny Hughes, 121-1, \$244.08)
- #25 Lucky Jeremy (Bill Morey, Lookin At Lucky, 131-1, \$265.48)
- #4 Capital Idea (Christophe Clement, Classic Empire, 131-1, \$264.54)
- #28 No More Time (Jose D'Angelo, Not This Time, 148-1, \$299.28)
- #29 Real Men Violin (Kenny McPeek, Mendelssohn, 171-1, \$344.94)
- #39 West Saratoga (Larry Demeritte, Exaggerator, 207-1, \$416.40)
- #11 El Grande O (Linda Rice, Take Charge Indy, 220-1, \$442.44)
- #22 Lat Long (Kenny McPeek, Liam's Map, 428-1, \$859.48)

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