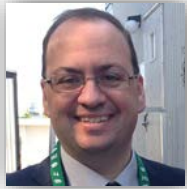




# countdown

TO THE  
CROWN

SEASON 19 WEEK 11 – March 15, 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 whereabouts of Kate Middleton.  
Nobody knows ... and those who might, don't say.

1. LOCKED (Todd Pletcher) is officially out with a knee injury. We've done a good job over the years in that 'Where there's smoke, there's fire' and usually are a few days ahead of the news. Then it was NYSOS (Bob Baffert) who followed suit to the sidelines with an undisclosed injury as we've speculated on our podcasts about his lack of whereabouts for the past few weeks. Pay attention.
2. Trainer Chad Brown's comments this week about the Kentucky Derby being a missing piece to his stellar career is notable for a barn that hasn't gone out of its way to target the race. He's got 3 big chances – see right →
3. Right now the 3 most likely Derby favorites would be SIERRA LEONE (Chad Brown) if he wins his final prep, FIERCENESS (Todd Pletcher) if he has a huge bounce-back rebound next, or TIMBERLAKE (Brad Cox) because, well, names matter in the Derby win pool to the masses.

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

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

## This Week In Countdown History

### 2015

American Pharoah made a smashing 3YO return at Oaklawn Park in the Rebel Stakes, his first start since the Frontrunner Stakes at Santa Anita the previous September. He led wire-to-wire to score by 6-1/4 lengths and run his record to 3-for-4.

The Rebel and Arkansas Derby started American Pharoah's run to the 2015 Triple Crown in which he won 6 in a row on the campaign before losing the Travers and rebounding to add the Breeders' Cup Classic.

At the time of American Pharoah's arrival on the 3YO scene, Bob Baffert had won just 1 of 37 Triple Crown races over the previous 12+ years (only the 2010 Preakness).

## Keeping Ourselves Honest Picks NOW & Past

Last week's free Countdown selections: 1: 1-0-0 (100%)  
2024 Countdown season selections: 19: 7-4-4 (37%)

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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 pick DOMESTIC PRODUCT (Chad Brown) won the Tampa Bay Derby in a non-wagering event. 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

KENTUCKY DERBY



### KENTUCKY DERBY FUTURE WAGER – CLOSING SUNDAY 6:30 PM ET

Since we're devoid of any stakes prep races on the calendar this weekend, let's look at the Kentucky Derby Future Wager that's offered Thursday-Sunday this week. It corresponds with the lone Kentucky Oaks Future Wager of the season. Win wagering is available on both races, as well as exactas. Plus, there's an Oaks-Derby Double bet as well. Here are the 40 wagering interests in the latest KDFW with trainer, sire and Mike Battaglia's morning line from Churchill.

- #1 **Agate Road** (Todd Pletcher, Quality Road, 40-1): Shrewd skipping Tampa Derby at 1-1/16M; longer better for final prep.
- #2 **Be You** (Todd Pletcher, Curlin, 90-1): 6 tries to finally break maiden and barn has plenty of other bigger options.
- #3 **Born Noble** (Todd Pletcher, Constitution, 80-1): Scratched from FoY and playing a lot of catch-up; talented, but big risk.
- #4 **Catching Freedom** (Brad Cox, Constitution, 30-1): Risen Star 3rd impressed at OP prior and offers good value at 30-1.
- #5 **Common Defense** (Kenny McPeck, Karakontie, 30-1): Rebel runner-up feels 15-1/20-1 in KD even if wins final prep.
- #6 **Conquest Warrior** (Shug McGaughey, City of Light, 25-1): Formidable Florida Derby threat has look of contender.
- #7 **Corporate Power** (Shug McGaughey, Curlin, 50-1): Won strong 9F MSW at Gulfstream, but barn not one to rush these.
- #8 **Deterministic** (Christophe Clement, Liam's Map, 20-1): Getting lots of hype off Gotham win from Spa return; how far?
- #9 **Domestic Product** (Practical Joke, Chad Brown, 30-1): Holy Bull and Tampa Derby indicate colt moving right direction.
- #10 **Dornoch** (Danny Gargan, Good Magic, 12-1): Cleaned up some of his greenness in Fountain of Youth; should improve.
- #11 **El Grande O** (Linda Rice, Take Charge Indy, 90-1): Admirable colt comes to work each time, but 10F too far to trust.
- #12 **Encino** (Brad Cox, Nyquist, 50-1): Strong win in Turfway's Battaglia; Ruby path has had a KD 1-2 finisher past 2 years.
- #13 **Endlessly** (Michael McCarthy, Oscar Performance, 50-1): Turf/synthetic sort would seem more likely Preakness aim.
- #14 **Epic Ride** (John Ennis, Blame, 80-1): Distance exposure the concern for solid Turfway winter warrior after Battaglia loss.
- #15 **Fierceness** (Todd Pletcher, City of Light, 12-1): Recent work encouraging that much-needed Holy Bull rebound to come.
- #16 **Forever Young (JPN)** (Yoshito Yahagi, Real Steel, 20-1): Want to see more dominance in UAE Derby; top-4 KD fav if so.
- #17 **Hades** (Joe Orseno, Awesome Slew, 30-1): Working well toward Florida Derby; KD price far shorter than 30-1 if wins.
- #18 **Hall of Fame** (Steve Asmussen, Gun Runner, 80-1): Rushed into Risen Star and had a tough trip; capable of rebound.
- #19 **Honor Marie** (Whit Beckman, Honor Code, 40-1): Okay effort in Risen Star must be improved upon in LA Derby.
- #20 **Just a Touch** (Brad Cox, Justify, 30-1): Expected more in Gotham, talented colt behind schedule and foundation for KD.
- #21 **Just Steel** (Wayne Lukas, Justify, 80-1): Better than Rebel when calendar got squeezed, but must bounce back next out.
- #22 **Lat Long** (Kenny McPeck, Liam's Map, 80-1): Barn appears to have more talented 3YOs, but could be underneath type.
- #23 **Le Dom Bro** (Eniel Cordero, Mucho Macho Man, 80-1): Gave Dornach all he wanted in FoY, but is 50-1+ in Derby if in.
- #24 **Liberal Arts** (Bobby Medina, Arrogate, 40-1): Sneaky-good close in 3YO return and love his Ark Derby chances.
- #25 **Mystik Dan** (Kenny McPeck, Goldencents, 20-1): If he runs as well on fast dirt as he did in wet Southwest, look out.
- #26 **Nash** (Brad Cox, Medaglia d'Oro, 50-1): Talented colt was always a distance question mark; hard to recommend 10F.
- #27 **No More Time** (Jose D'Angelo, Not This Time, 50-1): Tampa Bay Derby runner-up takes long break; longshot in L'ville.
- #28 **Resilience** (Bill Mott, Into Mischief, 50-1): Better-than-it-looks 4th in tough Risen Star; excellent value for this pool.
- #29 **Seize the Grey** (Wayne Lukas, Arrogate, 90-1): Oaklawn ALW winner will be given stakes chance; outsider looking in.
- #30 **Sierra Leone** (Chad Brown, Gun Runner, 5-1): Horse to beat now, but even if Derby fav, probably in 7-2 / 4-1 range.
- #31 **Stronghold** (Phil D'Amato, Ghostzapper, 80-1): Sunland Derby winner didn't beat much; try small field in SA Derby?
- #32 **The Wine Steward** (Mike Maker, Vino Rosso, 60-1): Too far behind the calendar to consider at this point.
- #33 **Timberlake** (Brad Cox, Into Mischief, 8-1): Rebel victory good 3YO building block; move forward makes him a player.
- #34 **Time for Truth** (Ron Moquett, Omaha Beach, 90-1): Liked his ALW win routing at Oaklawn and has talent; class test next.
- #35 **Top Conor** (Chad Brown, Twirling Candy, 90-1): Big stretch to think 2/17 debut winner makes Derby w/ Brown's posse.
- #36 **Track Phantom** (Steve Asmussen, Quality Road, 25-1): Rock-steady player will be in the LA Derby hunt once again.
- #37 **Tuscan Gold** (Chad Brown, Medaglia d'Oro, 80-1): Big chance to announce presence in LA Derby, great buy now.
- #38 **Tuscan Sky** (Todd Pletcher, Vino Rosso, 30-1): Outworked by Fierceness recently + yet to try a stakes. Talent, a reach.
- #39 **Uncle Heavy** (Butch Reid Jr., Social Inclusion, 80-1): Withers winner gets final test in Wood. Price if in Derby regardless.
- #40 **All Other 3-Year-Olds** (15-1): No outliers of major Derby interest remain for me not included in the 39 above.

JP'S BEST BETS AT MORNING LINE PRICES:

#16 FOREVER YOUNG, #24 LIBERAL ARTS, #37 TUSCAN GOLD, #28 RESILIENCE, #12 ENCINO





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## Everyone's A Critic - Reviews

### TAMPA BAY DERBY – March 9

Wagering debacles aside with the communication lines between the necessary parties, the slow pace of the \$400,000 Tampa Bay Derby was the story once the gates finally opened about 30 minutes late. The horses were lulled to sleep as the tote delay ensued, and perhaps the jockeys, too, as the tempo for this 1-1/16 miles test was historically slow. But when the dust settled, nothing weird really happened in a race that often has a head-scratcher in the mix. The horses expected to deliver, did, even if not for a razor-thin margin in the end.

Holy Bull Stakes runner-up DOMESTIC PRODUCT (Chad Brown), who would have been favored had betting been able to commence, got there by a neck over NO MORE TIME (Jose D'Angelo), who no doubt would have been second choice of the public. That's rare in a race where the two favorites haven't comprised the exacta since Street Sense and Any Given Saturday in 2007. Never mind that four horses hit the wire within three-quarters of a length in this edition; it somehow managed to make sense. Swale Stakes third-place finisher GRAND MO THE FIRST (Victor Barboza) was a neck and head back, while pace-setter and class riser GOOD MONEY (Chad Brown) was narrowly beaten in fourth.

GOOD MONEY led the merry fractions that were 25.25, 25.89 and 25.07 through 6 furlongs in a laughable 1:16.21. But the tempo quickened like a turf race with a fourth quarter in 23.15 and a final sixteenth in 6.11. No matter of frantic finish could make up the overall clocking, which was 1:45.67 on a day when older stakes horses in the Challenger Stakes had just gone 1:43.12. It was the slowest Tampa Bay Derby since 1994.

I'm left treating the evaluation here like a turf race since it was run like one. You don't slough off a winner on turf who comes home rapidly and finds the wire first. You give them credit for overcoming the pace and proving best. That's what DOMESTIC PRODUCT looked like on paper coming into the race, and he did nothing here to dissuade that. The question for this son of Practical Joke will be just how far he wants to run when there's a real pace to chase. Most good horses will fly home when allowed to waltz to the far turn; who can chase hot fractions and still provide stamina? That's the elite. Practical Joke is a sire whose best horses have been sprinters like Skelly, Tejano Twist and the like; himself better around 1 turn than 2. But he did sire the ill-fated Practical Move, who was the exception last year in winning the Santa Anita Derby.

I want to see DOMESTIC PRODUCT over 9 furlongs before I make any determination about his ability to go 10 in Louisville. Brown shrewdly said he'd run again, likely in the Wood at Aqueduct or Blue Grass at Keeneland. The former seems more likely as more accomplished barnmate SIERRA LEONE (Chad Brown) would be the better Blue Grass prospect. The stable also has next week's Louisiana Derby hopeful TUSCAN GOLD (Chad Brown). On the flipside, D'Angelo indicated that NO MORE TIME would await the Kentucky Derby with his 45 qualifying points in tow and safely in the field. It's difficult to see this horse not in the bottom third on the field in Louisville off that preparation.

### Undercard Notables for Review

Sat (3/9) Oaklawn Race 8 MSW: It's not too late for Oaklawn TC aspirants with the Arkansas Derby and Bath House Row Stakes still at the meet, so NATIVE LAND (Riley Mott) certainly made his case with a 6-length romp in this 1-1/8 miles stamina test. The Mastery colt is an improving third-timer and the result here flattered the form of Feb. 11 MSW winner SPEEDTAIL (Ingrid Mason). The first two dams of NATIVE LAND were high-quality stakes sprinters, so his well-time burst might be more formidable at shorter distances when facing tougher competition.

Saturday (3/9) Aqueduct Race 9 MSW: Withers 8th-place finisher SOCIETY MAN (Danny Gargan) found class relief to his liking over a sloppy track in winning this 1M heat by 3 widening lengths. That may not flatter the form of the Withers on the class drop so much, but it at least validates Wood Memorial-bound UNCLE HEAVY (Butch Reid) a bit more after EL GRANDE O (Linda Rice) also returned 2 weeks back to run a good 3rd in the Gotham.

Saturday (3/9) Santa Anita Race 4 MSW: VLAHOS (Luis Mendez) isn't for the trail, but may be one of the fastest 3YO sprinters we've seen this season. The Kantharos colt romped by 4-1/2 lengths in 1:15.75 for 6-1/2 furlongs. Look for him in key sprints.

