

# Derby Dispatch for Thursday, April 4, 2024

Apr 05, 2024



One month remains until the first Saturday in May and there are only four remaining opportunities for horses to qualify for the 150th running of the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (Grade I).

Three of those races will be run Saturday: the \$1 million Blue Grass (GI) at Keeneland; \$750,000 Santa Anita Derby (GI) at Santa Anita Park; and \$750,000 Wood Memorial (GII) at Aqueduct.

All three races will award 100 points to the winning horse and a qualifying spot in the starting gate for the "Run for the Roses" should they be eligible to compete in the race.

While many possibilities remain to determine this year's Kentucky Derby field of 20 3-year-olds, there are already four horses within the top 20 point earners that have arrived at Churchill Downs to prepare for a possible start in America's greatest race: Catching Freedom, Endlessly, Honor Marie and Track Phantom.

SIERRA LEONE FACES TALENTED CAST IN \$1 MILLION BLUE GRASS – Peter Brant, Mrs. John Magnier, Michael Tabor, Derrick Smith, Westerberg and Brook Smith's Risen Star (Grade II) winner Sierra Leone will face a talented cast of 11 3-year-olds including West Paces Racing, R. A. Hill Stable,

Belmar Racing and Breeding, Two Eight Racing and Pine Racing Stables' Fountain of Youth (GII) winner Dornoch in Saturday's \$1 million Blue Grass Stakes (GI) at Keeneland.

The Blue Grass is a major steppingstone for this year's 150th running of the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI), awarding a total of 200 qualifying points to the top five finishers on a 100-50-25-15-10 scale.

Run at 1 1/8 miles, the Blue Grass will go as Race 12 on the 13-race program with a post time of 5:52 p.m. (all times Eastern).

Sierra Leone, trained by Chad Brown, is set for his fourth career start after closing from last-to-first in the Feb. 17 Risen Star at Fair Grounds. The former \$2.3 million yearling purchase at the Fasig-Tipton Saratoga Sale faced Dornoch at the conclusion of his 2-year-old campaign when he finished a game second in the Remsen (GII) at Aqueduct.

While Sierra Leone was tabbed as the 2-1 morning line favorite, Dornoch will attempt to defeat his rival once again as the 3-1 second choice. Trained by Danny Gargan, Dornoch made his 3-year-old debut on March 2 with a 1 3/4-length win in the Fountain of Youth. The talented son of Good Magic is the full brother to Kentucky Derby 149 winner Mage.

Another talented colt that entered the Blue Grass is Qatar Racing, Resolute Racing and Marc Detampel's Just a Touch. Trained by 2021 Blue Grass-winning conditioner Brad Cox, Just a Touch didn't debut until Jan. 27 when he defeated seven rivals by 4 1/4 lengths in a six-furlong maiden special weight contest at Fair Grounds. In his first stakes effort, Just a Touch finished runner-up to Deterministic in the one-mile Gotham at Aqueduct.

Here is the complete Blue Grass field from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and morning line odds): Top Conor (Jose Ortiz, Chad Brown, 15-1); Be You (Irad Ortiz Jr., Todd Pletcher, 8-1); Seize the Grey (Nik Juarez, Wayne Lukas, 20-1); Dornoch (Luis Saez, Gargan, 3-1); Good Money (Javier Castellano, Brown, 20-1); Just a Touch (Florent Geroux, Brad Cox, 7-2); Lat Long (Brian Hernandez Jr., Kenny McPeck, 30-1); Epic Ride (Adam Beschizza, John Ennis, 20-1); Mugatu (Joe Talamo, Jeff Engler, 30-1); Sierra Leone (Tyler Gaffalione, Brown, 2-1); and Encino (Flavien Prat, Brad Cox, 12-1).

GOTHAM WINNER DETERMINISTIC RETURNS IN WOOD MEMORIAL – St. Elias Stable, Ken Langone, Steven Duncker and Vicarage Stable's undefeated Gotham Stakes (Grade III) winner Deterministic will attempt to stamp his spot in the 150th Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI) when he takes on 12 rivals entered in Saturday's \$750,000 Wood Memorial (GII) at Aqueduct.

The Wood Memorial, contested at 1 1/8 miles, will go as Race 10 of 11 with a post time of 4:07 p.m. The Road to the Kentucky Derby "Championship Series" race will award the top five finishers qualifying points on a 100-50-25-15-10 scale towards a spot in the starting gate for the \$5 million Kentucky Derby.

Deterministic, trained by Christophe Clement, debuted on Aug. 12 at Saratoga when he gamely won a seven-furlong maiden special weight contest, earning a solid 90 Brisnet Speed Rating. The son of Liam's Map was away from the races for nearly seven months until he returned in the one-mile Gotham where he made a bold, late run to defeat Just a Touch by a widening two lengths.

In the Wood Memorial, Deterministic will face some of New York's top 3-year-old prospects including Withers (GIII) winner Uncle Heavy along with the ultra-consistent El Grande O, who finished a scant nose behind Uncle Heavy in the Withers and third in the Gotham.

Two other talented 3-year-olds that will be attempting to garner qualifying points on the Road to the Kentucky Derby are Risen Star (GII) fourth-place finisher Resilience and Tuscan Sky, who broke his maiden over stakes winner Nash on the undercard of the Risen Star.

Here is the Wood Memorial field from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and morning line odds): Resilience (John Velazquez, Bill Mott, 6-1); El Grande O (Dylan Davis, Linda Rice, 8-1); Lonesome Boy (Adam Bowman, Hugo Padilla, 50-1); Deterministic (Joel Rosario, Clement, 7-5); Protective (Kendrick Carmouche, Todd Pletcher, 30-1); Evening News (Jareth Loveberry, Mike Pino, 20-1); Merit (Edwin Gonzalez, Saffie Joseph Jr., 20-1); Elysian Meadows (Jose Lezcano, Bill Mott, 15-1); Tuscan Sky (Manny Franco, Todd Pletcher, 4-1); Gettysburg Address (Manny Esquivel, Dallas Stewart, 30-1); Society Man (Luis Rivera Jr., Danny Gargan, 30-1); Deposition (Dexter Haddock, Uriah St. Lewis, 50-1); and Uncle Heavy (Mychel Sanchez, Butch Reid Jr., 8-1).

SUNLAND DERBY WINNER STRONGHOLD RETURNS HOME FOR SANTA ANITA DERBY – Rick and Sharon Waller's ultra-consistent Sunland Derby (GIII) winner Stronghold returns to his California base to take on seven fellow 3-year-olds that entered Saturday's \$750,000 Santa Anita Derby (Grade I), the final West Coast stop on the Road to the Kentucky Derby.

The 1 1/8-mile Santa Anita Derby will go as Race 10 of 12 with a post time of 7:30 p.m. The Road to the Kentucky Derby "Championship Series" race has six eligible runners who could garner a total of 200 qualifying points on a 100-50-25-15-10 scale towards a spot in the starting gate for the 150th running of the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI) on Saturday, May 4 at Churchill Downs.

Stronghold, the 5-2 second choice on the morning line odds, began his career based in Kentucky and broke his maiden at second asking in a one-mile maiden special weight contest at Churchill Downs. Following that performance, trainer Phil D'Amato shipped the Ghostzapper colt to his California-based string where he finished second to Nysos in the Bob Hope (GIII) at Del Mar. Following his runner-up finish to fellow Santa Anita Derby contender Wynstock in the Los Alamitos Futurity (GII), D'Amato shipped Stronghold to Sunland Park where he gamely defeated seven rivals in the Feb. 18 Sunland Derby and earned 20 Road to the Kentucky Derby qualifying points.

Wynstock is one of two horses in the Santa Anita Derby field trained by Bob Baffert, who is ineligible to compete in the Kentucky Derby because of a Churchill Downs Incorporated suspension. Baffert's other trainee, Imagination, is the 8-5 morning line favorite who enters the race after winning the San Felipe Stakes (GII) against three rivals.

Here is the field for the Santa Anita Derby from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and morning line odds): Curlin's Kaos (Diego Herrera, Antonio Garcia, 20-1); Tapalo (Umberto Rispoli, John Sadler, 5-1); Stronghold (Antonio Fresu, Phil D'Amato, 5-2); Imagination (Frankie Dettori, Baffert, 8-5); Wynstock (Juan Hernandez, Baffert, 8-1); Tessuto (Kazushi Kimura, George Papaprodromou, 10-1); Mc Vay (Hector Berrios, John Sadler, 5-1); and E J Won the Cup (Mike Smith, Doug O'Neill, 15-1).

#### BLUE GRASS QUOTES

Brad Cox, trainer, Just a Touch and Encino: "Just at Touch is a very talented horse. He's shown talent from Day One. He was a little late to get to the races but it was by design. He covers a lot of ground in his stride and is a very classy horse. I think we're in a good spot with him for the Blue Grass. I targeted this race for a while. He raced a little wide in the Gotham and got some good experience only going a mile. I think he can build off that. (Dornoch and Sierra Leone) got to the races a little bit earlier so obviously they have more seasoning. I think this horse is one of our better 3-year-olds. I'm excited against running against these colts. Hopefully we can stack up against him. It's a Grade I with very talented horses. It looks to be one of the better Derby preps to date. ... Encino's had a couple works on the dirt at Keeneland after the Battaglia at Turfway. We actually picked him up last fall and he went directly to Turfway. So, we never really saw him work on the dirt before but was training on it before we got him. He handed the dirt fine in those moves. He drew outside in the Blue Grass but he drew outside in the Battaglia as well and was able to overcome that. He's a horse that's improved over the last couple months. He seems to get better as time goes on. He's bred to handle the distance and the dirt and we'll see if he can on Saturday."

John Ennis, trainer, Epic Ride: "I thought the extra two weeks between races (from the Battaglia Memorial to the Blue Grass) would help him. He's definitely filled out and matured. He moved super over the track. He's an ultimate professional horse. Mentally he is a complete pro."

Danny Gargan, trainer, Dornoch: "I think post four is a good spot. He came out of the three-hole in the Fountain of Youth and Remsen. He will come out of there running and make his way through."

#### WOOD MEMORIAL QUOTES

Christophe Clement, trainer, Deterministic: "He's trained very well all year long and came back very well. All his works have been very good and he's a very athletic kind of horse – the most beautiful mover. He barely touches the ground and moves like a cat. He's good mentally, too. ... The Gotham was a very good race and a good field over a wet track – he handled the whole thing well. It will be interesting to see him going two turns. We'll just go one step at a time. You never know until you try but his style of racing and the way he trains makes you believe he should stay."

Butch Reid Jr., trainer, Uncle Heavy: "He's a natural route horse – a big, strong horse. He's got a great

head on his shoulders and he doesn't worry about anything. He doesn't use a lot of energy except in his races. If anything, it did him good to have some time between races. He got away from the rigamarole of the racetrack and it really helped him. He looks great and is coming into the race real fresh. It was a blessing in disguise, and it forced us not to try and fit another race in there, which was the smartest thing."

Linda Rice, trainer, El Grande O: "He's doing well. He has experience, fitness and he's won a couple stakes at a flat mile but maybe his best race was at a mile-and-an-eighth in the Withers when he got beat three inches. It's a big field so I'm sure the experience of previously dealing with that will help him."

Todd Pletcher, trainer, Tuscan Sky, Protective: "(Tuscan Sky) has done really well. It's always a challenging situation in a short field with only three horses (when he broke his maiden) and generally those type of situations turn into a match race and the edge goes to the pacesetter. He was able to track Nash, who is a really nice horse, and beat him under those circumstances which I thought was really encouraging. We thought the Wood Memorial made sense for him. He broke his maiden over the track there and I like the mile-and-an-eighth for him. I'm hoping it all comes together. ... We like the way Protective has been training. He was very good at Tampa. We've worked him with blinkers twice since then and it seemed to make a difference. I thought his last couple works were quite good. It's ambitious but he's shown talent all along and we think he'll appreciate the mile-and-an-eighth."

Dallas Stewart, trainer, Gettysburg Address: "He's doing very well since he got to Belmont. He's a real good-looking horse and he had a really good work at Churchill – it was push-button. We put the blinkers back on in the work and we'll put them back on for the race. He's won with them previously, so we'll see how it plays out."

Brisnet Past Performances:

Wood Memorial: <http://www.brisnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/WoodMemorial24.pdf>

Blue Grass: <http://www.brisnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/BlueGrass24.pdf>

Santa Anita Derby: <http://www.brisnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/SADerby24.pdf>

**FIERCENESS** made solid 7-2 FAVORITE IN POOL 6 OF KENTUCKY DERBY FUTURE WAGER – The final pool of the Kentucky Derby Future Wager began its three-day run Thursday where Repole Stable's recent Florida Derby (Grade I) winner Fierceness was tabbed as the solid 7-2 favorite in the field of 39 individual horses plus a 40th option for "All Other 3-Year-Olds" not listed.

Unlike the first five Future Wager pools, Pool 6 of the Kentucky Derby Future Wager will close Saturday at approximately 4 p.m. ET prior to the \$750,000 Wood Memorial (Grade II), \$1 million Blue Grass (GI) and \$750,000 Santa Anita Derby (GI).

Pool 6 will feature \$2 Win and Exacta wagering. Fans can wager via [www.TwinSpires.com](http://www.TwinSpires.com) along with simulcast and ADW outlets from around the country.

Fierceness, the champion 2-year-old and Breeders' Cup Juvenile (GI) winner, had his final prep prior to the 150th running of the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI) when he

dominated eight rivals by 13 ½ lengths in last Saturday's Florida Derby (GI). The talented Todd Pletcher trainee is expected to arrive at Churchill Downs soon to begin his preparation for the "Run for the Roses."

Wagering on #34 Timberlake was suspended before Pool 6 opened after his trainer Brad Cox stated the colt would not compete in the Kentucky Derby in favor of running at shorter distances.

Here is the complete field for Pool 6 of the Kentucky Derby Future Wager (with trainer, sire and morning line odds): #1 Be You (Todd Pletcher, Curlin, 90-1); #2 Catalytic (Saffie Joseph Jr., Catalina Cruiser, 50-1); #3 Catching Freedom (Brad Cox, Constitution, 8-1); #4 Common Defense (Kenny McPeck, Karakontie, 80-1); #5 Deterministic (Christophe Clement, Liam's Map, 15-1); #6 Domestic Product (Chad Brown, Practical Joke, 40-1); #7 Dornoch (Danny Gargan, Good Magic, 12-1); #8 El Grande O (Linda Rice, Take Charge Indy, 50-1); #9 Encino (Brad Cox, Nyquist, 50-1); #10 Endlessly (Michael McCarthy, Oscar Performance, 40-1); #11 Epic Ride (John Ennis, Blame, 60-1); #12 Evening News (Mike Pino, Nyquist, 99-1); #13 Fierceness (Todd Pletcher, City of Light, 7-2); #14 Forever Young (JPN) (Yoshito Yahagi, Real Steel, 10-1); #15 Good Money (Chad Brown, Good Magic, 90-1); #16 Grand Mo the First (Victor Barboza Jr., Uncle Mo, 99-1); #17 Hades (Joe Orseno, Awesome Slew, 50-1); #18 Honor Marie (Whit Beckman, Honor Code, 20-1); #19 Just a Touch (Brad Cox, Justify, 30-1); #20 Just Steel (Wayne Lukas, Justify, 25-1); #21 Lat Long (Kenny McPeck, Liam's Map, 90-1); #22 Mc Vay (John Shirreffs, Constitution, 99-1); #23 Merit (Saffie Joseph Jr., Mastery, 99-1); #24 Mystik Dan (Kenny McPeck, Goldencents, 30-1); #25 No More Time (Jose D'Angelo, Not This Time, 90-1); #26 Resilience (Bill Mott, Into Mischief, 99-1); #27 Seize the Grey (Wayne Lukas, Arrogate, 50-1); #28 Sierra Leone (Chad Brown, Gun Runner, 6-1); #29 Society Man (Danny Gargan, Good Magic, 99-1); #30 Stronghold (Phil D'Amato, Ghostzapper, 60-1); #31 T O Password (JPN) (Daisuke Takayanagi, Copano Rickey, 60-1); #32 Tapalo (John Sadler, Tapiture, 90-1); #33 Tessuto (George Papaprodromou, Munnings, 99-1); #34 Timberlake (Brad Cox, Into Mischief, 30-1); #35 Top Conor (Chad Brown, Twirling Candy, 80-1); #36 Track Phantom (Steve Asmussen, Quality Road, 30-1); #37 Tuscan Sky (Todd Pletcher, Vino Rosso, 30-1); #38 Uncle Heavy (Butch Reid, Social Inclusion, 50-1); #39 West Saratoga (Larry Demeritte, Exaggerator, 60-1); and #40 "All Other 3-Year-Olds" (30-1).

There are no refunds in the Kentucky Derby Future Wager. Should Churchill Downs officials determine during the duration of this week's three-day pool that one of the wagering interests has experienced an injury, illness or other circumstance that would prevent the horse from participating in the Kentucky Derby, betting on the individual horse will be suspended immediately. Pool 6 will be final pari-mutuel opportunity to wager on the Kentucky Derby prior to the race.

More information, Brisnet.com past performances and real-time odds on the Kentucky Derby Future Wager is available online at <https://www.kentuckyderby.com/wager/future-wager>.

CATCHING FREEDOM, ENDLESSLY, HONOR MARIE, TRACK PHANTOM SCHEDULED TO WORK AT CHURCHILL DOWNS – Kentucky Derby contenders Catching Freedom, Endlessly, Honor Marie and

Track Phantom all have scheduled works between Friday and Sunday at Churchill Downs to begin their serious preparation for the first Saturday in May.

TwinSpires Louisiana Derby (GII) winner Catching Freedom, trained by Brad Cox, is slated to work Friday at 5:30 a.m.

On Saturday at 7:30 a.m., Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII) hero Endlessly will have his first work over the Churchill Downs surface. And, 24 hours later, Louisiana Derby runner-up Honor Marie along with Risen Star runner-up Track Phantom have scheduled works.

At this time, no other Kentucky Derby contenders have arrived at Churchill Downs.

'INSIDE CHURCHILL DOWNS' RETURNS FRIDAY FOR 10TH SEASON – "Inside Churchill Downs" will launch its 10th season on ESPN Louisville's ESPN 680/105.7 with a 32-week run starting Friday at 6 p.m. ET.

The weekly one-hour, live, commercial free, horse racing radio show will be co-hosted by Churchill Downs Racetrack's Communications Team: Darren Rogers and Kevin Kerstein. They will be joined each week by members of Churchill Downs Racetrack's handicapping team: Joe Kristufek, Kaitlin Free, Tony Calo and Kevin Kilroy. The program will feature a variety of guests including jockeys, trainers, well-informed handicappers and other industry experts.

Friday's show will highlight this weekend's Road to the Kentucky Derby and Oaks Championship Series events.

Listeners outside the Louisville radio market can listen live online at [www.espnloouisville.com](http://www.espnloouisville.com) or via podcast on the station's website.

## DOWN THE STRETCH

The European Road to the Kentucky Derby will conclude Saturday at Chelmsford City for the \$100,000 Woodford Reserve Cardinal Condition Stakes. No horses in the field are nominated for the Triple Crown.

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The Road to the Kentucky Oaks Championship Series continues to wind down and will feature a stellar matchup Friday at Keeneland for the Ashland (GI) between champion Just F Y I and undefeated Impel. On Saturday, 10 3-year-old fillies will take the stage in the Gazelle (GIII) at Aqueduct. In California, the talented Kopion will face Kinza in the Santa Anita Oaks (GII). All three races will award the top five finishers qualifying points for the \$1.5 million Longines Kentucky Oaks on a 100-50-25-15-10 scale. ...

Louisville St. Xavier High School alumni Whit Beckman is gearing up to saddle his first starter in the Kentucky Derby. Louisiana Derby (GII) runner-up Honor Marie has been training at Churchill Downs and is scheduled for his first work on Sunday. "It's pretty exciting even this far out. We'll gradually increase

what we do in our works before the Derby. This first one won't be too much, if really anything. He just ran not too long ago," Beckman said. Jockey Ben Curtis has the mount in the Kentucky Derby. ...

A total of nine horses were made late Triple Crown nominees with a \$6,000 late payment that was due Monday. Among the nominees was Hronis Racing's Santa Anita Derby (GI) contender Tapalo.

#### UPCOMING ROAD TO KENTUCKY DERBY RACES

April 13 (three weeks out) – \$400,000 Lexington (GIII), 1 1/16 miles, Keeneland (Top 5 points: 20-10-6-4-2)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Dilger (IRE) (Saffie Joseph Jr.); Secret Chat (Roderick Rodriguez)

Note: The possible fields for upcoming Kentucky Derby Championship Series races are fluid as owners and trainers vie for points. Known possible horses mentioned to be under consideration for each race are based on published news reports and other sources. Horses listed in italics are possible for multiple races.