

Kentucky Derby Update: The Derby Dispatch for Thursday, March 20, 2025

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Brisnet Past Performances:

Jeff Ruby Steaks: https://www.brisnet.com/image/Ruby25_f6757c1e1a.pdf

Louisiana Derby: https://www.brisnet.com/image/LA_Derby25_b17981e14a.pdf

Inside the Kentucky Derby Podcast: <https://www.kentuckyderby.com/horses/news/inside-the-kentucky-derby-jeff-ruby-steaks-and-louisiana-derby-preview/>

LUKAS, AMERICAN PROMISE MAKE THEIR DERBY MOVE;

DERBY TRAIL HEATS UP WITH LOUISIANA DERBY, JEFF RUBY STEAKS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, March 20, 2025) – The Road to the 151st Kentucky Derby kicks into high gear Saturday with the season’s first 100-point qualifying races – the \$1 million TwinSpires.com Louisiana Derby (Grade II) and \$777,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII).

One week ago, American Promise put himself into the Derby conversation with a determined victory in the Virginia Derby, giving Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas a legitimate contender at age 89.

The Louisiana Derby at Fair Grounds features a competitive field of 10, led by Sam F. Davis Stakes winner John Hancock. Meanwhile, Turfway Park hosts the \$777,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII), headlined by Remsen (GII) winner Poster, who will square off against John Battaglia Memorial victor California Burrito in an over-subscribed field of 12 with one also-eligible.

With just six weeks remaining until Derby Day, preparations are ramping up at Churchill Downs. On Tuesday, the backstretch reopened, and horses have begun settling into their spring home ahead of the Spring Meet, which kicks off Saturday, April 26.

SAM DAVIS WINNER JOHN HANCOCK LEADS 10-HORSE \$1 MILLION LOUISIANA DERBY – A competitive field of 10 3-year-olds, led by Sam F. Davis Stakes winner John Hancock, will take center stage in the \$1 million TwinSpires.com Louisiana Derby (Grade II) Saturday at Fair Grounds Race Course & Slots.

The 1 3/16-mile race, the longest North American Derby prep to date, will award 100-50-25-15-10 qualifying points to the top five finishers for a spot in the starting gate in the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI) on Saturday, May 3 at Churchill Downs. The 112th running of the Louisiana Derby headlines a stakes-filled closing weekend, which also features the \$400,000 Fasig-Tipton Fair Grounds Oaks (GII) and offers 200 Road to the Kentucky Oaks qualifying points. The Louisiana Derby goes as Race 12 at 6:42 p.m. (all times Eastern).

Owned by CHC & WinStar Farm, John Hancock has been installed as the 7-2 morning-line favorite for trainer Brad Cox. The son of Constitution solidified his Derby credentials in the Sam F. Davis at Tampa Bay Downs where he went gate-to-wire to defeat eventual Tampa Bay Derby (GIII) winner Owen Almighty. Flavien Prat retains the mount and will guide John Hancock from the rail.

Cox, the meet's leading trainer, also will saddle Instant Replay, a Gary and Mary West homebred who exits a five-length allowance victory at Fair Grounds. The Maximum Security colt made a powerful move from last under Florent Geroux, who returns to ride from post 9. Cox is aiming for back-to-back Louisiana Derby wins after taking last year's edition with Catching Freedom.

The 9-2 second choice on the morning line is Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners' Built, a consistent player on the Fair Grounds Derby prep circuit. Trained by Wayne Catalano, Built

won the Gun Runner Stakes, finished second in the Lecomte (GIII) and was third in the Fasig-Tipton Risen Star (GII). Jose Ortiz, the meet's leading rider, will ride the Hard Spun colt, who will break from post 6.

Risen Star runner-up Chunk of Gold returns for trainer Ethan West and owner Terry Stephens, seeking to add to his 25 Derby qualifying points. The Preservationist colt, who started his career at Turfway Park, will be ridden again by Jareth Loveberry from post 2.

Hall of Fame trainer Wayne Lukas will be represented by Caldera, the Sunland Derby (GIII) runner-up, who is listed at 5-1. Tyler Gaffalione picks up the mount on the Runhappy colt, who will break from post 5.

Also exiting the Risen Star is Vassimo, trained by Todd Pletcher, who made a strong late run to finish fourth in his first stakes try. Irad Ortiz Jr. rides from post 7.

The Louisiana Derby field from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and morning line odds):

John Hancock (Prat, Cox, 7-2)

Chunk of Gold (Loveberry, West, 8-1)

Tiztastic (Joel Rosario, Steve Asmussen, 8-1)

Yinzer (Ben Curtis, Steve Asmussen, 12-1)

Caldera (Gaffalione, Lukas, 5-1)

Built (Jose Ortiz, Catalano, 9-2)

Vassimo (Irada Ortiz Jr., Pletcher, 12-1)

Furio (Luis Saez, Joe Sharp, 12-1)

Instant Replay (Geroux, Cox, 6-1)

Hypnus (Brian Hernandez Jr., Ken McPeck, 12-1)

GRADE II WINNER POSTER FACES LOCAL STANDOUT CALIFORNIA BURRITO IN \$777,000

JEFF RUBY STEAKS – Poster, last year's Remsen Stakes (Grade II) winner, and California Burrito, the John Battaglia Memorial victor, headline a competitive field of 12 3-year-olds and one also-eligible entered in next Saturday's \$777,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII), the richest race in history at Turfway Park Racing & Gaming.

The 1 1/8-mile Jeff Ruby Steaks serves as a key stop on the Road to the Kentucky Derby, offering qualifying points on a 100-50-25-15-10 scale to the top five finishers for a spot in the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI).

The Jeff Ruby Steaks is Race 12 on Turfway Park's blockbuster 13-race program, which features six stakes contests, including the \$300,000 Bourbonette Oaks (Listed) on the Road to the Kentucky Oaks; \$300,000 TwinSpires Kentucky Cup Classic (GIII); \$250,000 Latonia (Listed); \$250,000 Animal Kingdom; and \$250,000 Rushaway. First post is 12:45 p.m. (all times Eastern) with the Jeff Ruby Steaks scheduled for 6:25 p.m.

Poster, a homebred for Godolphin, trained by Eoin Harty, closed out his 2-year-old season with a determined victory in the Remsen at Aqueduct. The son of Frosted returned with a fast-closing third-place finish in the Sam F. Davis at Tampa Bay Downs, finishing behind TwinSpires Louisiana Derby (GII) entrant John Hancock and eventual Tampa Bay Derby (GIII) winner Owen Almighty. Hall of Fame rider John Velazquez will be in the irons from post No. 9

California Burrito, owned by Aaron and Victoria Haberman and trained by Tommy Drury Jr., secured his spot in the Jeff Ruby Steaks with a gutsy victory in the John Battaglia Memorial, holding off favored Baby Max. The son of Army Mule was dominant in his prior start, rolling to a 7 ¼-length allowance victory at Turfway. Irving Moncada will have the call from post 3.

Among the other top contenders entered in the Jeff Ruby Steaks is Charlie's to Blame, who captured the Kitten's Joy Stakes on the Gulfstream Park for owners BG Stables, Roadrunner Racing, SAF Racing, West Coast Stables, Barbara Evenson and Jeffrey Lambert. The Peter Eurton trainee could be one of the early pacesetters in the Jeff Ruby Steaks and will be ridden by Juan Hernandez from post 2.

The field also features several other accomplished 3-year-olds, including He's Not Joking, winner of Woodbine's Grey Stakes (GIII); Baby Max, the Leonatus Stakes winner; Innovator, who finished third in the Lecomte Stakes (GIII) at Fair Grounds; and Flying Mohawk, an impressive last-out allowance winner.

The Jeff Ruby Steaks field from the rail out (with jockey and trainer):

Calling Card (Adam Beschizza, Mike Maker, 20-1)
Charlie's to Blame (Hernandez, Eurton, 15-1)
California Burrito (Moncada, Drury, 7-2)
Final Gambit (Luan Machado, Brad Cox, 6-1)
Flying Mohawk (Joe Ramos, Whit Beckman, 15-1)
Baby Max (Abel Cedillo, Kelsey Danner, 5-1)
Giocoso (Jaime Torres, Keith Desormeaux, 30-1)
Innovator (Nik Juarez, Wayne Lukas 30-1)
Poster (Velazquez, Harty, 3-1)
Maximum Promise (Frankie Dettori, Kenny McPeck, 5-1)
Curvino (Gerardo Corrales, Peter Miller 20)
He's Not Joking (Rafael Hernandez, Josie Carroll, 15-1)
AE: Candytown (Velazquez, Pletcher, 30-1)
LOUISIANA DERBY QUOTES

Chunk of Gold (trainer Ethan West): “He impressed us in the Risen Star with how he was able to handle adversity in the race having to start and stop his motion. This was the next logical spot to take him after running second in the Risen Star. We are based at Turfway so we kept the Jeff Ruby Steaks as an option but I think this racetrack suits him a little better for his late-running style because of the longer stretch. There looks to be a lot of pace in front of him that should allow him to come with his late run. He’s done everything right after the Risen Star so that always gives you confidence in a young horse.”

Instant Replay (trainer Brad Cox): “The Louisiana Derby made the most sense for his next start after his performance over this track in his last start. I was most impressed by how he physically looked after that race.”

Tiztastic (trainer Steve Asmussen): “I was a little disappointed in his race in the Southwest. He was set up to move forward and I thought ran a fairly even race. He trains better at the Fair Grounds than Oaklawn. I thought his work with Clever Again was the best he’s ever had. I have a feeling he prefers the surface at Fair Grounds compared to Oaklawn.”

Yinzer (trainer Steve Asmussen): “Yinzer put in a very fast maiden win on the Risen Star undercard and deserves this opportunity. He put in a very nice work in company going into the Louisiana Derby. It was a big step up. If the racetrack plays like it did in the Risen Star, he’ll obviously have a say in it.”

JEFF RUBY STEAKS QUOTES

Baby Max (trainer Kelsey Danner): “He ran well in the Battaglia but just couldn’t quite get by the winner late. We are adding blinkers for this start and hoping will help him stay more focused to run down the leaders late in the race.”

California Burrito (trainer Tommy Drury Jr.): “I don’t expect the pace to be nearly as slow as it was in the allowance or Battaglia. We’ll leave it up to (jockey) Irving (Moncada) to see where he’s placed early in the race. We’ll bounce out of there pretty good but Irving knows the horse well and can sit off of horses if need be.”

Flying Mohawk (trainer Whit Beckman): “Win or lose, we know one day he’s going to be a very special horse on the turf. We are taking a try at the big time.”

Poster (trainer Eoin Harty): “I think this is a sneaky good race overall on Saturday. He’s coming into the race as good as we could ask of him. He’s still growing into that 3-year-old frame. He’s a big, good-looking horse. He was that way as a 2-year-old, filled out some this year already.”

HOW TO WATCH THE JEFF RUBY STEAKS, LOUISIANA DERBY

Watch the Jeff Ruby Steaks and Louisiana Derby on CNBC’s Road to the Kentucky Derby coverage with Ahmed Fareed, Jerry Bailey and Randy Moss. Live streaming is available on Peacock.

FanDuel TV will have live, on-site coverage at Fair Grounds and Turfway Park.

Stream live on TwinSpires.com, the official wagering provider of Churchill Downs Incorporated and the Kentucky Derby.

KEY RACES TO WATCH TO WATCH – This weekend there are several races around the world that could have implications on the Kentucky Derby and Kentucky Oaks. Here are some of the key races:

Saturday

TP, R8 (4:13 p.m.), \$250,000 Rushaway, 3yo, 1 1/16 M

TP, R11 (5:43 p.m.), \$300,000 Bourbonette Oaks (Listed), 3yo f, 1 1/16 M

FG, R11 (6:08 p.m.), \$400,000 Fasig-Tipton Fair Grounds Oaks (GII), 3yo f, 1 1/16 M

TP, R12 (6:25 p.m.), \$777,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII), 3yo, 1 1/8 M

FG, R12 (6:42 p.m.), \$1 million TwinSpires.com Louisiana Derby (GII), 3yo, 1 3/16 M

DOWN THE STRETCH – The Road to the Kentucky Oaks continues Saturday at Fair Grounds with the \$400,000 Fasig-Tipton Fair Grounds Oaks (GII) and Turfway Park's \$300,000 Bourbonette Oaks (Listed). The Fair Grounds Oaks, featuring undefeated Good Cheer, will award the top five finishers qualifying points on a 100-50-25-15-10 scale toward a spot in the \$1.5 million Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI) on Friday, May 2 at Churchill Downs. The Bourbonette Oaks awards qualifying points to the top five on a 50-25-15-10-5 scale. ...

Four-time Kentucky Derby-winning trainer Wayne Lukas said Virginia Derby winner American Promise's next start is still to be determined. "I don't know if I'm a good enough trainer to train him from now till the Derby and get a good performance," Lukas said. "I have a tendency to want to run my horses periodically. They do better for me. But I'll let him get here and get settled in. We have the options of doing something different but also can be comfortable with the fact that we're in the Derby already." ...

Tampa Bay Derby (GIII) winner Owen Almighty is set to prep for the Kentucky Derby in the April 5 Blue Grass Stakes (GI), according to trainer Brian Lynch. Jose Ortiz, who rode Owen Almighty in his debut victory, will have the call. ...

Owner Mike Repole reported on X that impressive maiden special weight winner Disruptor would run in the March 29 Florida Derby (GI) while allowance-winning stablemate Grande would run in the April 5 Wood Memorial (GII). ...

About 200 horses arrived back at Churchill Downs on Tuesday morning following annual winter renovations. The first trainer to arrive was Cherie DeVaux followed by Mike Maker and Kelsey Danner.

UPCOMING ROAD TO KENTUCKY DERBY RACES

March 29 (five weeks out) – \$1 million Florida Derby (GI), 1 1/8 miles, Gulfstream Park (Top 5 points: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Disruptor (Todd Pletcher); Jimmy's Dailys (Brian Lynch); Neoequos (Saffie Joseph Jr.); Sovereignty (Bill Mott); Tappan Street (Brad Cox)

March 29 (five weeks out) – \$1.5 million Arkansas Derby (GI), 1 1/8 miles, Oaklawn (Top 5 points: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Coal Battle (Lonnie Briley); Getaway Car (Bob Baffert); Sandman (Mark Casse); Speed King (Ron Moquett)

April 5 (four weeks out) – \$1.25 million Blue Grass (GI), 1 1/8 miles, Keeneland (Top 5 points: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Burnham Square (Ian Wilkes); Coal Battle (Lonnie Briley); East Avenue (Brendan Walsh); Hill Road (Chad Brown); Owen Almighty (Brian Lynch); River Thames (Todd Pletcher)

April 5 (four weeks out) – \$750,000 Santa Anita Derby (GI), 1 1/8 miles, Santa Anita (Top 5 points: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Baeza (John Shirreffs); Barnes (Bob Baffert); Citizen Bull (Bob Baffert); Journalism (Michael McCarthy)

April 5 (four weeks out) – \$750,000 Wood Memorial (GII), 1 1/8 miles, Aqueduct (Top 5 points: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Captain Cook (Rick Dutrow Jr.); Chancer McPatrick (Chad Brown); Grande (Todd Pletcher); Hill Road (Chad Brown); Sand Devil (Linda Rice);

April 12 (three weeks out) – \$400,000 Lexington (GIII), 1 1/16 miles, Keeneland (Top 5 points: 20-10-6-4-2)

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.

ABOUT CHURCHILL DOWNS RACETRACK

Churchill Downs Racetrack ("CDRT"), the world's most legendary racetrack, has been the home of The Kentucky Derby, the longest continually held annual sporting event in the United States, since 1875. Located in Louisville, CDRT features a series of themed race days during Derby Week, including the Kentucky Oaks, and conducts Thoroughbred horse racing during three race meets in the Spring, September, and the Fall. CDRT is located on 175 acres and has a one-mile dirt track, a 7/8-mile turf track, a stabling area, and provides seating for approximately 60,000 guests. The stable area has barns sufficient to accommodate 1,400 horses and a 114-room dormitory for backstretch personnel. CDRT also has a year-round simulcast wagering facility. www.ChurchillDowns.com.