

Kentucky Derby Update: The Derby Dispatch for Thursday, March 27, 2025

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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ALL EYES ON GULFSTREAM, OAKLAWN AS CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES HEATS UP

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, March 27, 2025) – Only six Championship Series races remain on the Road to the Kentucky Derby and two of them take center stage Saturday with major preps at Gulfstream Park and Oaklawn. At Gulfstream, Godolphin's promising colt Sovereignty tops the field in the \$1 million Florida Derby (GI) and, at Oaklawn, Southern California-based newcomer Cornucopian ships in for a showdown with local hero Coal Battle in the \$1.5 million Arkansas Derby (GI).

Last weekend saw the emergence of two longshots into the Derby picture: Tiztastic, who pulled a 7-1 upset in the \$1 million TwinSpires.com Louisiana Derby (GII) and Final Gambit, who shocked bettors at 15-1 in the \$777,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII). Both runners earned 100 qualifying points and have secured their spots in the starting gate for the first Saturday in May.

Overseas, the Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby culminates early Saturday morning with the Fukuryu Stakes at Nakayama Racecourse. A field of 15 3-year-olds is entered, led by Luxor Cafe, who looks to clinch Japan's invitation to the Derby.

With five weeks remaining until the 151st running of the Kentucky Derby, four horses currently in the Top 20 of the point standings have arrived at Churchill Downs to begin their final preparations: Tiztastic, Built, John Hancock and Burnham Square.

DAZZLING DEBUT WINNER CORNUCOPIAN LEADS FIELD IN GRADE I, \$1.5 MILLION ARKANSAS DERBY – Cornucopian, a dazzling debut sprint winner last month at Oaklawn, leads a field of nine 3-year-olds entered in Saturday's \$1.5 million Arkansas Derby (Grade I), the fourth and final Kentucky Derby qualifying race at Oaklawn.

Trained by Bob Baffert, Cornucopian was an impressive 5 ³/₄-length debut winner on Feb. 23, blazing six furlongs in 1:09.02. The \$1.1 million yearling purchase will attempt to give Baffert his sixth Arkansas Derby win from post No. 9 under John Velazquez.

Chief among Cornucopian's top rivals is Norman Stables' Rebel Stakes (GII) winner Coal Battle, who has already amassed 70 qualifying points on the Road to the Kentucky Derby. Trained by Lonnie Briley and ridden by Juan Vargas, Coal Battle has been based at Oaklawn.

for the past six weeks with Briley targeting this race, the April 5 Blue Grass (GI) at Keeneland or even training him up to the Kentucky Derby. Coal Battle drew post 8 in the Arkansas Derby.

Another top local contender entered is D. J. Stable, St. Elias Stable, West Point Thoroughbreds and CJ Stables' multiple graded stakes placed colt Sandman. Under the care of Mark Casse, Sandman finished second in the Southwest (GII) and third in the Rebel (GII). Prior to both of those starts, he won a first-level allowance contest at Oaklawn. Jockey Jose Ortiz will have the mount from post 6.

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

Brereton's Baytown (Marshall Mendez, Paul McEntee, 30-1)

First Division (Brian Hernandez Jr., Kenny McPeck, 20-1)

Publisher (Flavien Prat, Steve Asmussen, 6-1)

Bestfriend Rocket (Nik Juarez, Wayne Lukas, 20-1)

Speed King (Rafael Bejarano, Ron Moquett, 15-1)

Sandman (Ortiz, Casse, 3-1)

Monet's Magic (Luan Machado, Ben Colebrook, 20-1)

Coal Battle (Vargas, Briley, 7-2)

Cornucopian (Velazquez, Baffert, 7-5)

The 1 1/8-mile Arkansas Derby is the featured 13th race on Oaklawn's 14-race program. Post time is 7:48 p.m. (all times Eastern).

Brereton's Baytown, First Division and Bestfriend Rocket are not nominated to the Triple Crown but can become eligible with a \$6,000 late payment due Monday, April 7.

FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH WINNER SOVEREIGNTY RETURNS TO GULFSTREAM PARK FOR GRADE I, \$1 MILLION FLORIDA DERBY – Godolphin's Sovereignty, a powerful last-to-first winner of last month's Fountain of Youth Stakes (Grade II), returns to Gulfstream Park on Saturday to face nine rivals entered in the \$1 million Florida Derby (GI).

Carded as the finale on the 14-race card, the Florida Derby field will go to post at 6:42 p.m.

Sovereignty, trained by Hall of Famer Bill Mott, made his seasonal debut in the Fountain of Youth, rallying from last to collar River Thames by a neck under Junior Alvarado. As a 2-year-old, he closed from far back to win the Street Sense (GIII) at Churchill Downs by five lengths. Alvarado was recently sidelined with a minor injury and jockey Manny Franco will take over the mount on the 8-5 favorite and break from post No 10.

Second choice on the morning line at 7-2 is Madaket Road, runner-up in the Rebel (GII) at Oaklawn Park for Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert and owners SF Racing, Starlight Racing, Madaket Stables, Stonestreet Stables, Dianne Bashor, Determined Stables, Robert Masterson, Tom Ryan, Waves Edge Capital and Catherine Donovan. Madaket Road will remove blinkers in the Florida Derby and break from post 8 under Hall of Fame jockey Mike Smith, who will replace Tyler Gaffalione after he broke his left ankle Wednesday in a starting gate mishap during Gulfstream Park's fourth race.

Trainer Todd Pletcher, who owns a record eight Florida Derby victories, is set to saddle Disruptor. The Gun Runner colt, a \$1.15 million Keeneland September yearling purchase, enters off a 9 ¼-length maiden victory on the Fountain of Youth undercard. Irad Ortiz Jr. has the return call from post 4.

Tappan Street, runner-up in the Holy Bull (GIII), returns off a six-week freshening for the Florida Derby. Trained by Brad Cox, the lightly raced son of Into Mischief drew post 9 and will be ridden by Luis Saez.

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

Neoequos (Edgard Zayas, Saffie Joseph Jr., 10-1)

Cool Intentions (Javier Castellano, Jorge Delgado, 20-1)

Smoken Boy (Edgar Perez, Cheryl Winebaugh, 30-1)

Disruptor (Ortiz, Pletcher, 4-1)

Indecisiveness (Jorge Ruis, Ruben Sierra, 30-1)

Jimmy's Dailys (Joel Rosario, Brian Lynch, 12-1)

Enterdraggon (Dylan Davis, Jose D'Angelo, 30-1)

Madaket Road (Gaffalione, Baffert, 7-2)

Tappan Street (Saez, Cox, 5-1)

Sovereignty (Alvarado, Mott, 8-5)

Cool Intentions and Indecisiveness are not nominated to the Triple Crown but can become eligible with a \$6,000 late payment due Monday, April 7.

HYACINTH WINNER LUXOR café LEADS FIELD OF 15 ENTERED IN FUKURYU STAKES –

Koichi Nishikawa's Hyacinth Stakes winner Luxor Cafe leads a field of 15 3-year-olds entered in Saturday's Fukuryu Stakes at Nakayama Racecourse, the final leg of the Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby.

Trained by Noriyuki Hori, the talented Luxor Café scored a narrow victory in the Feb. 23 Hyacinth Stakes under jockey Rachel King. A son of Triple Crown winner American Pharoah,

Luxor Cafe sports three wins from five lifetime starts including a win in the Kurochiku Sho at Nakayama on Jan. 11. King will be back aboard Luxor Cafe in the Fukuryu.

Other Triple Crown nominees entered in the race are Berber Compass (JPN), Coche Deli (JPN), Danon Vestal (JPN), Golden Cloud, Isana (JPN), Olive Green (JPN) and Yamanin Bouclier (JPN).

The Fukuryu Stakes will go to post early Saturday at 1:10 a.m. ET in Race 10. For more information, visit: [Fukuryu Stakes](#).

ARKANSAS DERBY QUOTES

Coal Battle (trainer Lonnie Briley): “He’s feeling good and everything. I kind of need a race in him. It would be 10 weeks before the (Kentucky) Derby if I wouldn’t have done it. It was either the Arkansas Derby or the Blue Grass. The Blue Grass, to me, would have been a little close. And this one’s kind of in the middle.”

Sandman (trainer Mark Casse): “He worked good (on March 19). I guess there was a fairly significant headwind (in the stretch), which makes it a little more difficult for the rider to know exactly how fast they’re going. But Cristian (Torres) said he worked well. He said he actually thought he was going faster than what he was, but he finished nice and galloped out strong.”

FLORIDA DERBY QUOTES

Enterdraggon (trainer Jose D’Angelo): “We know that he’s a much better horse on the grass but I would just like to see how good he can handle the dirt and take it from there to help us make the final decision and put him in the right spot. He ran one time on the dirt and he didn’t run bad. He looks good. That race also he was wearing blinkers. [Three] races ago I took off the blinkers and he’s improving. He can go long so easy.”

Jimmy’s Dailys (trainer Brian Lynch): “After his first start at Churchill, he had an unusual injury that we had to give him time for. He’s owned by the Dizneys, so we sent him down here to their farm in Florida. He probably wasn’t in the form that we’d have liked but we wanted to try to get him on the Derby program. So, he probably wasn’t as ready for his first start as he could have been but he’s really come on from that. I thought he ran very gritty his first start around two turn. He got inside pressed after breaking from the one hole – he was committed. He was pressed by that horse of Todd’s (Grande), who got the jump on him. I liked the way when he got to the outside of that horse that he boxed on and tried to make up ground. It gave me some confidence that he can go a little bit further. You have to think second time around two turns he’s going to get better.”

Sovereignty (jockey Junior Alvarado): “I think plans changed when he won the Fountain of

Youth. Ideally if he would have finished second or third, he probably would have gotten the extra week and shoot for the Wood Memorial or the Blue Grass to make sure he was good going into those races to pick up the points. But now that we picked up the points, I think running here makes more sense because then you have one extra week going into the Derby. Mr. Mott is in the Hall of Fame for a reason.”

HOW TO WATCH THE ARKANSAS/FLORIDA DERBY

Watch the Arkansas Derby and Florida 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 Gulfstream Park and Oaklawn throughout the weekend.

Fox Sports will have live, on-site coverage at Oaklawn throughout the weekend with the Arkansas Derby airing on FS1.

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

GP, R9 (3:31 p.m.), \$250,000 Gulfstream Park Oaks (GII), 3yo f, 1 1/16 M

GP, R14 (6:42 p.m.), \$1 million Florida Derby (GI), 3yo, 1 1/8 M

OP, R12 (7:02 p.m.), \$750,000 Fantasy (GII), 3yo f, 1 1/16 M

OP, R13 (7:48 p.m.), \$1.5 million Arkansas Derby (GI), 3yo, 1 1/8 M

DOWN THE STRETCH – The Road to the Kentucky Oaks continues Saturday at Gulfstream Park with the \$250,000 Gulfstream Park Oaks (GII) and \$750,000 Fantasy (GII) at Oaklawn. Both races will award qualifying points based on a 100-50-25-15-10 scale to the top five finishers for a spot in the starting gate in the \$1.5 million Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI) on Friday, May 2 at Churchill Downs. ...

Winchell Thoroughbreds, Mrs. John Magnier, Michael Tabor and Derrick Smith’s TwinSpires.com Louisiana Derby (Grade II) winner Tiztastic arrived at Churchill Downs early Tuesday morning from Fair Grounds to Hall of Fame trainer Steve Asmussen’s Barn 38, where he’ll begin his preparations for the “Run for the Roses.” ...

CHC Inc. and WinStar Farm’s John Hancock, who finished fourth in the Louisiana Derby, arrived at Churchill Downs from Fair Grounds early Tuesday to trainer Brad Cox’s Barn 22. He was joined by Godolphin’s Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI) likely favorite Good Cheer. ...

Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners' Built, who finished fifth in the Louisiana Derby arrived at Churchill Downs from Fair Grounds early Monday to trainer Wayne Catalano's Barn 14. ...

Terry Stephens' Chunk of Gold, runner-up in the TwinSpires.com Louisiana Derby (GII), arrived at Turfway Park on Sunday night and will complete most of his Kentucky Derby (GI) preparations at the Florence, Ky. racetrack, according to trainer Ethan West. ...

UPCOMING ROAD TO KENTUCKY DERBY RACES

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); Chancer McPatrick (Chad Brown); East Avenue (Brendan Walsh); Owen Almighty (Brian Lynch); River Thames (Todd Pletcher)

April 5 (four weeks out) – \$500,000 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.); Grande (Todd Pletcher); Hill Road (Chad Brown); My Mitole (Carlos Marton); Omaha Omaha (Michael Gorham); Sand Devil (Linda Rice); Statesman (Shug McGaughey)

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.