

# COUNTDOWN TO THE CROWN

SEASON 9 WEEK 10 – March 7, 2014

By Jeremy Plonk  
Exclusive to  
Countdowntothecrown.com



*Editor's Note: The ninth season of Countdown to the Crown offers the most comprehensive scouting report of the 3-year-old scene. Countdowntothecrown.com is the home each Friday from Jan. 3 through the Belmont Stakes, and Countdown keeps you apprised of the rising stars of the sophomore class from the maiden ranks through the Grade 1 stakes.*

## Three Things You Won't Read Anywhere Else

Opinions are like a Top 40 hit. All you need is a decent chorus; nobody listens to the rest.

1. That NEW YEAR'S DAY, SHARED BELIEF and BOND HOLDER trifecta of G1 winners from California at age 2 sadly has all but faded from the memory by March. That makes CANDY BOY look all the stronger, especially if no stars emerge from Saturday's San Felipe (post-BAYERN).
2. Javier Castellano seemingly averages 5 wins every Saturday at Gulfstream, but has been beaten at short prices in the Fountain of Youth, Swale and Palm Beach in recent 3YO stakes. That's angst from a fantasy owner (me) who drafted him as the first jockey off the board.
3. Thanks to those who've put the *Countdown to the Crown Preseason Annual* OVER the **58,000 reader mark!** Quite a debut! Keep checking in each week for key prep info.

## This Week's Fearless Forecast

This section previews the coming attractions in 3-year-old stakes and undercard races. As is custom in *Countdown* each season, once the calendar flips to March, we focus exclusively on stakes races and only touch on undercard races in exceptional circumstances.

BOBBY'S KITTEN (Chad Brown), No. 11 in my *Countdown* Top 20 this week, makes his anticipated 3YO debut in a **Tampa Bay Downs** Race 6 turf mile allowance Saturday that could pose as a G3 stakes and no one would blink. G3 Generous winner GLOBAL VIEW (Tom Proctor)



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and stakes winners COOL COWBOY (Dale Bennett) and MIGHTY BROWN (Tim Ice), not to mention sharpie RIDE AWAY (Graham Motion), make this as tough of any allowance as you'll see anywhere this season.

There are no Triple Crown nominees in Saturday's **\$250,000 Al Bastakiya Stakes at Meydan** in Dubai. The UAE Derby tune-up is led by EMIRATES FLYER (Saeed bin Suroor), runner-up in the G3 UAE 2000 Guineas.

Saturday's **Aqueduct** card features the **\$100,000 Capossela Stakes** for 3YO sprinters. Winkfield Stakes 1-2 finishers HOT HEIR SKIER (Ben Perkins Jr.) and OLIVER ZIP (Kelly Breen) re-match. The winner ran a bit distressed late in the Winkfield and took more than a month to return to the workout tab. I'll be curious to see how he looks before the race. Also Saturday at **Aqueduct**, G2 Jerome and G3 Withers third-place finisher SCOTLAND (Tony Dutrow) drops back into the maiden ranks in Race 3.

To get more of Jeremy's horses to watch in the allowance and maiden ranks, be sure to purchase the Horse Player NOW BUZZ report, where he blitzed through Jan-Feb with a sensational ROI of \$3.18 for more than 50 runners entered back and competing!

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## - Tampa Bay Derby - (Saturday/Tampa Bay Downs)



Lacking a standout like we saw in 2013 with Verrazano, **Saturday's G2 \$350,000 Tampa Bay Derby** appears capable of producing only a fringe player on the Triple Crown scene to this eye. Potential favorite CONQUEST TITAN (Mark Casse), after all, was a 48-1 outsider when last of 13 in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile and an overlooked 11-1 when a distant second to CAIRO PRINCE (Kieran McLaughlin) in his "signature" second in the G2 Holy Bull.

Still, CONQUEST TITAN offers worthy anticipation. He has the pedigree and running style to continue on in races and distances that will trip up many 3YOs. His G2 Holy Bull second got decided form flattery when INTENSE HOLIDAY (Todd Pletcher) improved upon his third-place run to beat an intersectional field in the G2 Risen Star. No doubt CONQUEST TITAN appears the best Kentucky Derby prospect among the field assembled Saturday; but even at that, he projects to be a longer-price type if he dances all the way to Louisville.

The Tampa Bay Derby field of 10 includes three of the top four finishers from the G3 Sam F. Davis Stakes last month. Winner VINCEREMOS (Todd Pletcher) could be in line for a \$1 million bonus from Tampa if he were to win Saturday and then again in the Kentucky Derby. While that's not a million-to-one possibility in reality at this point, it remains a pretty far-fetched dream after watching how average Davis runner-up HARPOON (Todd Pletcher) looked last week when he reappeared in the Gotham.

And therein lies a dilemma. The Davis has been a tremendous supplier to the Tampa Bay Derby of late, providing five of the last eight winners of this race. Local Tampa preppers have won this TB Derby five times in the last six years, in fact. But do we trust a Davis in which four runners finished within a single length, and one of those already has returned to lay an egg?

VINCEREMOS has a nasty habit of lugging into the rail in his last two starts, but twice managed to survive and win those by a head and a nose. The margin of error is scant for a horse like that

and now he faces a bit bulkier field size and against more quality. If you didn't get him at 12-1 in the Davis, I'm not sure you want to marry the likely 4-1 (or less) price on Saturday.

Pacesetter COUSIN STEPHEN (Chad Brown) ran hard in the Davis when overtaken late to be third. He has lost some ground in the stretch in each of his three losses and doesn't have a pedigree that projects out much farther than this 1-1/16 miles trip. This is a horse who was an 8-5 favorite against TOP BILLING (Shug McGaughey) and COMMISSIONER (Todd Pletcher), and he could be in the 8-1 to 10-1 range Saturday. The move back to top national pilot Javier Castellano signifies to me that this could be "Derby Day" for COUSIN STEPHEN in that it's his best chance to win a rich major. Castellano jumps off SURFING USA (Todd Pletcher) to ride. Both of these horses figure to be part of the early pace, which looks fairly manageable up front.

CONQUEST TITAN will lead the brigade of closers, which also should include G2 Fountain of Youth fourth EAST HALL (Bill Kaplan), back on two weeks' rest. He'll be making his fourth start of the year and 12<sup>th</sup> lifetime bid, proving to be a hard-knocking gelding who always keeps it honest. HY KODIAK WARRIOR (Marcial Navarro) gets another crack at UNCLE STEVEN, having out-finished that rival late in the aforementioned key Jan. 3 allowance. He's been working strong at Calder and would not surprise to run a good one Saturday. RING WEEKEND (Graham Motion) goes for highly respected connections and is well-drawn.

*Get more historical trends and significance on the Tampa Bay Derby by visiting page 93 of the Countdown to the Crown Preseason Annual simply by [clicking this link](#).*

### Tampa Bay Derby selections:

- W) UNCLE STEPHEN;
- P) CONQUEST TITAN; S) VINCEREMOS.

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## - San Felipe Stakes - (Saturday/Santa Anita Park)



Much starch came out of Saturday's **G2 \$300,000 San Felipe Stakes at Santa Anita** following Thursday's announcement that BAYERN (Bob Baffert) would be scratched due to a foot bruise. As mentioned at the top of this week's *Countdown*, the wealth of sidelined firepower on the west coast – and CANDY BOY (John Sadler) sitting this one out – makes the San Felipe a more inviting race to would-be challengers. We still have a field of nine.

The obvious benchmarks in the San Felipe now come in the form of three-time stakes winner CALIFORNIA CHROME (Art Sherman) and G3 Sham Stakes 1-2 finishers MIDNIGHT HAWK (Bob Baffert) and KRISTO (John Sadler). The remaining six-pack offers a similar, proving-ground situation.

The Sham rematch could take on a different look in terms of pace. That tiny, four-horse field was a jockeys' race and mind game. With UNSTOPPABLE COLBY (D. Wayne Lukas) bringing some front-end intent to the lineup, the MIDNIGHT HAWK-KRISTO showdown will be more about their true abilities this time than the monkey-see, monkey-do we saw in January. I've been high on KRISTO since his breakout maiden win Oct. 31. At 1 1/16 miles, and this time not being the pace target, I project KRISTO to handle MIDNIGHT HAWK in their matchup.

Beating CALIFORNIA CHROME might prove a tougher chore. He's been visually sharp this winter and he pummeled next-out G3 El Camino Real Derby champ TAMARANDO (Jerry Hollendorfer) in his Jan. 25 local score that now looks even better in review. But there's a reason why he debuted in 4-1/2 furlong races in May of his 2YO year, and his fairly common, sprint-laden pedigree could eventually trip him up against classic horses as classic distances. He can handle 1 1/16 miles, no doubt. It's just a matter if any of these San Felipe rivals are truly classic horses? We'll find out soon enough.

Of the others in the San Felipe, the one I'm most intrigued by is RPRETTYBOYFLOYD (Denise Breuer). True, he's a maiden. And his third in the G2 San Vicente was a distant run behind a

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dominant winner while beating only three others. But he was flying at BAYERN in their debuts and has some good historical facts in his favor. Five of the last six San Felipe winners were stretching out from a sprint to a route, and nine of the last 10 winners of this race exited a top 4 stakes finish. If you go through this field, the only horse with a stakes sprint placing last time ... RPRETTYBOYFLOYD.

**San Felipe Stakes selections:**  
W) KRISTO; P) CALIFORNIA CHROME;  
S) R PRETTYBOYFLOYD.

Get more historical trends and significance on the San Felipe Stakes by visiting page 94 of the *Countdown to the Crown Preseason Annual* simply by [clicking this link](#).

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**\$3.18 ROI this year.**

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## - Private Terms Stakes - (Saturday/Laurel Park)



The Preakness path stretches out to 1 1/8 miles Saturday in the **\$100,000 Private Terms Stakes at Laurel Park**. A year ago, Mr. Palmer used a strong run here as a springboard to the G1 Wood Memorial, and I'd expect some influence on that key NYRA prep to come out of this year's Private Terms as well.

New York invaders BARATTI (Kiaran McLaughlin), MATUSZAK (Bill Mott) and CLASSIC GIACNROLL (Lisa Guerrero) bypassed last week's Gotham for an easier spot. But the Private Terms won't be a "gimmee" for those shippers when they meet

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fleet ROMAN FIRE (Tony Dutrow) and local stalwart JOINT CUSTODY (Jerry Robb).

ROMAN FIRE easily dispatched the very credible Parx-based ALEX INC (Butch Reid) on Jan. 19 and comes into the Private Terms fresh. That win looked even better when ALEX INC returned to recently dazzle in allowance company in Philly. ROMAN FIRE owns two wins in three career routes and ran a solid second over this Laurel track routing in his lone defeat around two turns. From a race-shape standpoint he appears to be lone speed Saturday in the Private Terms. So while his pedigree may lean a bit shorter than this trip, ROMAN FIRE has every shot to wire the field if the early challenges are as limited as they appear – only JOINT CUSTODY stands to warm him up early.

BARATTI did wire his maiden breaker Jan. 10 at Aqueduct on a modest pace, but does not appear to be nearly as quick early as ROMAN FIRE. He climbed a bit until settling into stride and then re-broke like a cannon in his maiden breaker while running first-time Lasix. If he brings this kind of performance again, BARATTI will be difficult to deny. The caveat would be a front-end heist by ROMAN FIRE that appears plausible on paper.

MATUSZAK lacks any early foot and will need the pace to come back to him some to have a chance at the big prize. He's been an under-achiever to this point and even with the Mott stable tutelage, I think he would be susceptible to any horse who turns in something close to brilliant. He would need a meltdown kind of race in which the distance tripped up his challengers.

Sprint-bred JOINT CUSTODY carries the flag for the Marylanders in the Private Terms. The grey gelding had a remarkable 2YO season that saw him win four times despite debuting for a claiming tag. He figures to press the issue chasing ROMAN FIRE to his inside, and that chase and fade storyline would appear a probable scenario. His chances for success would greatly improve in the unfortunate instance that ROMAN FIRE would scratch.

**Private Terms Stakes selections:**

W) ROMAN FIRE; P) BARATTI; S) MATUSZAK.

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We keep ourselves honest here all season long with our most recent and cumulative stats for top choices (starts: wins-seconds-thirds).

HARPOON (Todd Pletcher) missed the mark completely in the Gotham, while our second pick SAMRAAT (Rick Violette) proved best. NO NAY NEVER (Wesley Ward) and STORMING INTI (Chad Brown) ran second and third, respectively, in the Swale and Palm Beach, while POKER PLAYER (Wayne Catalano) was second-best in the Battaglia Memorial. This has been the story of a very frustrating stakes handicapping *Countdown* season. We're strongly rating and grasping the maiden and allowance ranks, but missing the big picture in the stakes. When you can't get NO NAY NEVER home at 2-5 after HAVANA scratched, you just kind of grin and bear it.

Last week's selections: 4: 0-2-1

Season selections: 20: 3-6-3.

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**\$3.18 ROI this year.**

### Everyone's a Critic

This section reviews the week that was in the 3-year-old ranks. As with our preview section, now that we're in March, it takes an exceptional performance or noteworthy tie to include maiden or allowance races.

#### Stakes Races



Saturday's **G3 \$500,000 Gotham at Aqueduct** provided all the theater you could ask for, but not before the jockeys in the race made you wonder which script they had been reading. A

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matchup that projected a way faster pace than what played out, the cat-and-mouse game continued for the entire 1 1/16 miles and made for a wild finish. SAMRAAT (Rick Violette) emerged with the curtain call, but not before best supporting actors UNCLE SIGH (Gary Contessa) and IN TROUBLE (Tony Dutrow) also earned rave reviews.

IN TROUBLE made the lead as projected from the rail in his first start since winning Belmont's G2 Futurity in September. But he needed only 23.85, 24.45, 24.00 splits to reach 6 furlongs in a tepid 1:12.30. That kept eight of the nine entrants within just 6 lengths going into the far turn. The pace didn't quicken, but didn't fall apart either. A fourth quarter in 25.26 and final sixteenth in 6.88 were decent enough at face value, but should have been after the rhythmic opening three-quarters of a mile.

While the Gotham final time was indeed about 3 lengths faster than red-hot distaffer Teen Pauline ran in the same-day Top Flight Handicap, note the super slow pace in the filly's race. She ran the final five-sixteenths of a mile about 3 lengths faster than the boys when it was time to pick it up.

Jockey Corey Nakatani on UNCLE SIGH allowed IN TROUBLE to dictate the tempo and did not attack aggressively early in the race. While that was a bit of a form reversal for UNCLE SIGH, you can't fault an early March prep as a place to find out if you can sit and pounce. Unbridled speed rarely wins the classics and Contessa learned quite a bit about his colt even if settling early didn't pan out with a victory.

SAMRAAT lost ground on both turns to his rivals UNCLE SIGH and IN TROUBLE. He finished determined and professional and worked hard to notch his fifth straight win without a blemish. There's not much to fault here at all. Was he brilliant? No. But he's proven brilliant when the situation has arisen. Now we know he's battle-tested and capable of brilliance. That's a pretty favorable set of traits in past Triple Crown success stories. He's safely in the Derby field and growing in stature among the national perspective with justifiable cause.

UNCLE SIGH now has lost two narrow decisions to SAMRAAT, each time holding a narrow margin over his rival until late in the going. You wouldn't be floored if he turned the tables at

some point, perhaps even in their next start. I'm not sure he's shown a race yet that could win a classic, but he's perilously close to getting the necessary points to give the Kentucky Derby a whirl, and could get there with perhaps as low as a fourth-place finish in the Wood Memorial. If he accomplishes that in the Wood, he will have more than earned the right to play.

IN TROUBLE was a very difficult read if you followed trainer Dutrow's comments before the race. Depending on the interview, he was anywhere from sandbagging his chances to excited with no excuses. The real concern now after a truly remarkable comeback effort will be how IN TROUBLE responds. Super-taxing races after a layoff often send horses into regression (aka "the bounce") in their next starts, and if IN TROUBLE is going to be a Triple Crown performer, his next start will tell the tale. You want to see him back on the workout tab in the next 8-14 days if he has bounced out of the Gotham in good order. He doesn't need to win the Wood to get to the Derby, a second-place finish would suffice and a third might still make it. It's how he accomplishes that placing that will tell us where he's at in his form cycle. Plus the 9-furlong Wood will give us a better sense of how far he can run as his damside pedigree doesn't scream classic distances.

As for the others in the Gotham, HARPOON (Todd Pletcher) raced wide throughout and was beaten 5 3/4 lengths while from a bad draw. Still, he didn't show anything of note while just evenly outrun and his performance did nothing to flatter the Sam F. Davis Stakes form heading into this weekend's Tampa Bay Derby.

EXTRASEXYHIPZSTER (Mike Trombetta) looked fantastic pre-race, but broke in a slight tangle, became rank and never got back into the mix while finishing eighth. NOBLE CORNERSTONE (Wesley Ward) does not have his mind on running. A bit startled in the gate again, he made a dubious, wide backstretch blitz and came up completely empty in last. He's better than that, but right now simply nowhere near ready for the big time.

*Check out the historical significance of the Gotham Stakes by visiting page 91 of the Countdown to the Crown Preseason Annual. [Click here.](#)*

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Saturday's grassy **G3 \$150,000 Palm Beach Stakes at Gulfstream** turned out to be one of the more difficult reviews of the season, regardless of surface. Post-time favorite **STORMING INTI** (Chad Brown) got the inside speed trip you'd expect, and over a course favoring speed much of the winter, his inability to seal the deal late proved concerning.

But closer inspection of the splits makes this a very difficult race to digest. Easy opening quarters in 23.90 and 24.35 did give way to a rapid acceleration and sustained drive five furlongs from the wire. The field sped to 23.17, 23.15 and 11.62 splits over the final five-eighths in a sizzling 57.94.

The top five finishers hit the wire within 3 lengths, and **GALA AWARD** (Todd Pletcher) emerged with the brass ring. The younger brother to front-end dynamo Stormello showed more patience than his accomplished sibling. **GALA AWARD** broke swift but quickly settled in hand for John Velazquez and was able to track the pace from third while losing some ground on the first turn. But he wound up in a perfect spot on the far turn as longshot **MY STORM TROOPER** (Herman Wilensky) did the dirty work between horses and kept **STORMING INTI** from getting any breaks.

**MR. SPEAKER** (Shug McGaughey) made a hell-bells, premature move down the backstretch under Jose Lezcano. It was the kind of move that can leave a horse empty late, but **MR. SPEAKER** to his credit kept coming even with a green run in the lane. Trakus caught him in 34.35 over the final 3 furlongs, truly sensational given how early he moved. With is pedigree, there's no reason to think he won't be a major force to be reckon with in the Blue Grass at Keeneland – where you can almost be sure to find **GALA AWARD** next. The strong run here by **MR. SPEAKER** only enhances the stock of Holy Bull winner **CAIRO PRINCE** (Kiaran McLaughlin).

The Palm Beach really came home too fast for the closers to have much shot. **PLEUVEN** (Chad Brown) ran even-steven and had every chance while improving some off of his US debut in the Dania Beach. He looks to have some quality,

but may have done the least with the best chance on Saturday. He'll stay turfing.

I know I've been high on him since last fall, but **CAN'THELPBELIEVING** (Graham Motion) really ran much better than his fifth-place finish will attest. He came home in 11.37 the final furlong after a 23.08 fourth quarter and galloped out like a monster. He simply didn't quicken quite as well as **MR. SPEAKER**, which is understandable with his run-all-day European pedigree and style. I was hoping he was a Triple Crown horse to transfer to the Polytrack and see about the dirt. I still have little doubt few 3YOs in America would do as well at 10-12 furlongs than this horse. But he'll need to run 1-2 in a major Polytrack prep race to do so, and I'm not sure the connections would press on to that given a fifth in the Palm Beach. If he shows up in the Blue Grass or Spiral, give him a long, long look if the track is playing fair.

*Check out the historical significance of the Palm Beach by visiting page 92 of the Countdown to the Crown Preseason Annual. [Click here.](#)*



A quarter-crack kept **HAVANA** (Todd Pletcher) from **Saturday's G3 Swale Stakes at Gulfstream Park**, and deflated most all of the race's tepid Triple Crown trail intrigue. And while unbeaten globetrotter **NO NAY NEVER** (Wesley Ward) provided a bright marquee, he's not being groomed for the American classics – and following a shocking defeat at 2-5 odds, that was underscored.

The big takeaway from the Swale is that you can eliminate **HAVANA** from the 2014 Triple Crown discussion. A sardine-can cram job of one prep could get him to the Derby, where he'd be a complete toss-out off that plan. Pletcher rarely runs anything in the Preakness, and no one ever has considered **HAVANA** to be Belmont Stakes-distance capable. The plan now becomes: How do you get him to the King's Bishop at Saratoga and Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile at Santa Anita?

It is required typing to mention the Swale winner, so here goes: **SPOT** (Nick Zito). He picked up the pieces in a race that fell apart. Look at these splits over seven furlongs: 22.24,

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22.25, 25.19 and 12.76. When a race goes 37.96 on the back end of a one-turn sprint, I'm disinterested in the alumni trying to go longer. Trakus caught SPOT in 24.04 and 12.76, which is at least more encouraging and his pedigree suggests more distance is not impossible. But there was zero behind him Saturday when NO NAY NEVER folded. Zito has a new shooter in his barn via Jimmy Divito and would be wise to keep this one around one turn and pursue the Derby Trial at Churchill Downs on the last Saturday in April or the Bay Shore on Wood Day at Aqueduct.

This may be a rousing case for the new Derby points system over the old graded stakes method. No points were awarded vs. the days when \$120,000 in graded earnings would have put SPOT's connections in the tempting spot to force him into being something he's not.



Saturday's **\$100,000 John Battaglia Memorial Stakes at Turfway Park** turned out to be an episode of Wayne's World. Stablemates SOLITARY RANGER and POKER PLAYER dusted the competition as trainer Wayne Catalano offered a powerful 1-2 punch with early speed and late rallying ability.

SOLITARY RANGER just dominated on the front end with inside speed under Florent Geroux. He ran the competition off their feet in 23.47 and 23.61 opening quarters and spread-eagled a field that appeared very speed-laden on paper. It turned out nearly 18 lengths from first to fourth with only the late move by POKER PLAYER to get within 4 ¾ lengths.

SOLITARY RANGER did slow considerably late with 25.35, 27.62 and 7.16 splits, giving less sparkling reviews than the visuals implied. That should encourage out of town raiders for the March 22 G3 Spiral, where you can once again expect a big field of challengers. Both Catalano charges earned the right to be considered in the Spiral, but could have their hooves full with the traditional Florida turf power that comes north for the Spiral each spring.

## Minor Stakes

Countdown bet-back special TASHIR (Gennadi Dorochenko) proved a good one in which to keep the faith, winning Sunday's **\$100,000 Cool Air Stakes at Calder** while extremely live on the tote. Bet to 8-5 favoritism off his 6-1 morning line, he rolled in the lane for a daylight score over a pair of Todd Pletcher-trained invaders KING CYRUS and MONOPOLIZE. By Afleet Alex out of a Slewacide mare, TASHIR had the pedigree and brilliance to handle the mile and can be effective if well-spotted. He obviously handles Calder either sloppy or fast. KING CYRUS ran well in his first start since the Keeneland fall and may have earned a trip back there for the G3 Lexington, where he would fit.

IDE BE COOL (Henry Dunn) wired Louisiana-bred rivals Saturday at **Delta Downs** in the **\$75,000 Pelican Stakes** to advance his record to 6-for-6 lifetime. The son of Ide would be an interesting addition to the G2 Louisiana Derby for the home state with four weeks between starts if they decide to take a big bite.

IBAKA (Bret Calhoun) notched his second straight stakes win in Saturday's **\$50,000 Texas Heritage Stakes at Sam Houston**. He showed more speed than usual when wiring these open-company milers, including challengers for barns like Larry Jones, Steve Asmussen and Mike Maker. He could earn a date to something at Oaklawn; perhaps the Northern Spur on the Arkansas Derby undercard would fit nicely.

## Allowance Races

Last week's star allowance performers were THE TRUNK MONKEY (Larry Jones) at Fair Grounds routing and ANCHOR DOWN (Todd Pletcher) at Gulfstream sprinting. Pedigree suggests ANCHOR DOWN is a Tapit likely to be most effective going shorter out of an Orientate mare. He wouldn't interest me if thrown to the route wolves just yet.

THE TRUNK MONKEY, however, makes for an interesting tag team partner for ALBANO (Larry Jones). The sharp debut sprint winner nearly ran off down the backstretch in this short-field route, zipping the second quarter in 22.75. He speed-popped an overmatched bunch and was ridden out with zest by Rosie Napravnik while never in doubt. Yes, he tired some. And yes, his pedigree seems a bit short of major distances.

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But he's an exciting one. Tip the cap to announcer John G. Dooley when he said: The Trunk Money had them over a barrel.

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## ***Maiden Races***

Keep an eye on impressive Saturday **Gulfstream** MSW sprint winner PETER ISLAND (Shug McGaughey). The Hall of Famer's deep shedrow got deeper when this brother to Sightseeing impressed despite a green performance. You wouldn't expect this one to fire a big bullet the first time out sprinting, so he did it on pure ability with a lot of development still to come.

## **Just Wynn, Baby**



Here we divulge this week's movers and shakers in the Wynn Las Vegas Futures. [Full, updated odds here.](#)

CALIFORNIA CHROME is 35-1 in front of his serious class test Saturday. If he wins the San Felipe, he likely falls to the 15-1 range. SAMRAAT at 35-1 still is not being treated among the favorites after his Gotham win. ANCHOR DOWN (Todd Pletcher) dropped to 60-1 after a sharp victory.

When visiting Las Vegas, no one takes better care of horseplayers than John Avello and his staff at Wynn. Stop by and tell them *Countdown* sent you!

## **High Fives**

Jeremy Plonk's Top-5 rated performances by class so far this season (Dec. 26-present).

### Maiden Race

1. BAYERN (Santa Anita, 1/4)
2. HARTFORD (Gulfstream, 1/16)
3. HOPPERTUNITY (Santa Anita, 1/30)
4. TONALIST (Gulfstream, 1/18)
5. CAN'THELPBELIEVING (Gulfstream, 1/11-T)

### Allowance Race

1. TOP BILLING (Gulfstream, 1/25)
2. COMMISSIONER (Gulfstream, 1/3)
3. BAYERN (Santa Anita, 2/13)
4. CONSTITUTION (Gulfstream, 2/22)
5. THEROS (Gulfstream, 2/7-T)

### Stakes Race

1. CANDY BOY (Lewis Memorial, SA, 2/8)
2. CAIRO PRINCE (Holy Bull, GP, 1/25)
3. TAPITURE (Southwest, OP, 2/17)
4. SAMRAAT (Gotham, Aqu, 3/1) \* NEW \*
5. VICAR'S IN TROUBLE (Lecomte, FG, 1/18)

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# Jeremy Plonk's Top 20

Each horse name links to his Equibase.com biography and stats page.

<b>1</b>	<b><u>CANDY BOY</u></b> Trainer: John Sadler Winter Home: Santa Anita (Cal.) 4 weeks until SA Derby reemergence.	<b>11</b>	<b><u>BOBBY'S KITTEN</u></b> Trainer: Chad Brown Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Long series of works, finds tough ALW Sat.
<b>2</b>	<b><u>CAIRO PRINCE</u></b> Trainer: Kiaran McLaughlin Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Bullet drill Sat in 59.95 & form flattered.	<b>12</b>	<b><u>VICAR'S IN TROUBLE</u></b> Trainer: Mike Maker Winter Home: Fair Grounds (La.) Sunland or La Derby next—sizzle or sink?
<b>3</b>	<b><u>STRONG MANDATE</u></b> Trainer: D. Wayne Lukas Winter Home: Oaklawn Park (Ark.) Slow early/strong late work Thurs + sign.	<b>13</b>	<b><u>KOBE'S BACK</u></b> Trainer: John Sadler Winter Home: Santa Anita (Cal.) If he runs top 3 in Rebel, he's a big timer.
<b>4</b>	<b><u>HONOR CODE</u></b> Trainer: Shug McGaughey Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Big 5F move Sun in 59.18—trending back.	<b>14</b>	<b><u>IN TROUBLE</u></b> Trainer: Tony Dutrow Winter Home: Fair Hill (Md.) Quality 2YO came back sharp in Gotham.
<b>5</b>	<b><u>TOP BILLING</u></b> Trainer: Shug McGaughey Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) No reason he won't be Fla Derby factor.	<b>15</b>	<b><u>CONQUEST TITAN</u></b> Trainer: Mark Casse Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Seems very well-spotted in Tampa Derby.
<b>6</b>	<b><u>TAPITURE</u></b> Trainer: Steve Asmussen Winter Home: Fair Grounds (La.) Sharp 5F Sun in 1:00.40 keeping primed.	<b>16</b>	<b><u>HOPPERTUNITY</u></b> Trainer: Bob Baffert Winter Home: Santa Anita (Cal.) Sunland route might not be bad idea.
<b>7</b>	<b><u>GENERAL A ROD</u></b> Trainer: Mike Maker Winter Home: Gulfstream Park (Fla.) Brings threat to "Prince" in Fla Derby.	<b>17</b>	<b><u>KRISTO</u></b> Trainer: John Sadler Winter Home: Santa Anita (Cal.) Chance to earn way in Saturday at SA.
<b>8</b>	<b><u>COMMISSIONER</u></b> Trainer: Todd Pletcher Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) His best fits in Wood vs. Gotham alumni.	<b>18</b>	<b><u>MEXIKOMA</u></b> Trainer: Rick Mettee Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Setback this week w/ fever, tightens table.
<b>9</b>	<b><u>INTENSE HOLIDAY</u></b> Trainer: Todd Pletcher Winter Home: Palm Meadows Doesn't need big La Derby effort now.	<b>19</b>	<b><u>UNCLE SIGH</u></b> Trainer: Gary Contessa Winter Home: Aqueduct (NY) Top 4 in Wood may earn enough points.
<b>10</b>	<b><u>SAMRAAT</u></b> Trainer: Rick Violette Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Unbeaten plays with house \$\$\$ in Wood.	<b>20</b>	<b><u>WILDCAT RED</u></b> Trainer: Jose Garoffalo Winter Home: Gulfstream Park (Fla.) Benefits if Fla Derby field is smaller.