

COUNTDOWN TO THE CROWN

SEASON 9 WEEK 2 – January 10, 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 wearing short-shorts. If you wiggle too much, you just might expose yourself.

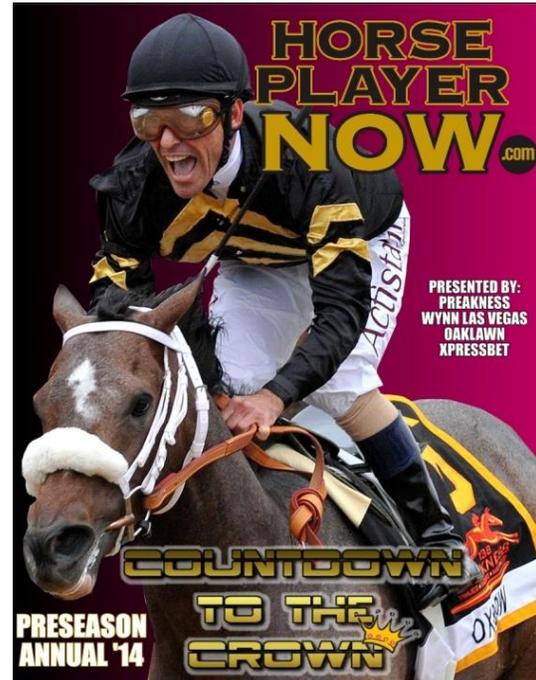
1. Just because someone charges you for information doesn't insure it's worth the price. By the same token, free doesn't equal cheap. Handicap your info like you do a race – consider all of your key factors.
2. Given a Phipps/Janney-Calumet-Dogwood flashback sweep of last year's Triple Crown, forgive the iPods for blaring hits from the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Maybe this year we'll get totally modern with...you know...some Clay Aiken or something.
3. Call me crazy, but right now I like John Sadler's barn as much as any. This could be the respected trainer's breakout season in the Triple Crown series.

This Week's Fearless Forecast

This section previews the coming attractions in 3-year-old stakes and undercard races. As is custom, we'll outline some undercard races of note before diving into stakes analysis & picks.

Undercard Tilts

The opening day Friday (today) card at **Oaklawn Park** wastes no time getting us in the Arkansas Derby trail mood. A Race 5 maiden route is as deep of a MSW as you'll see, loaded with big-barn intrigue. **DYNAMIC IMPACT** (Mark Casse), **BRO RODRIGEAUX** (D. Wayne



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Lukas) and **HARBOR BOUND** (Garry Simms) all bring legitimate Kentucky resumes. Remington raiders **DENALI TIZ A PARK** (Tim Martin) and **BROTHER STACHYS** (Mike Biehler) have solid looks about them from the region, too. Meanwhile, Friday's Race 9 allowance at a mile pits **SON OF DIXIE** (Bret Calhoun) in his first two-turn challenge. He's a promising future stakes player on the OP roster from this eye. But **BOURBONIZE** (Kellyn Gorder) exits a decent debut Churchill win, albeit his company lines haven't been flattered by returnees from that race. Turfy **ALL CASH** (D. Wayne Lukas) tries winners/dirt while still a nibbling maiden.

Aqueduct opens the weekend today (Friday) with a Race 2 MSW route to eyeball. Two by Tiznow, stablemates **GENUINE FLARE** (Bill Mott) and **TOURIST** (Bill Mott), have long-range potential. The former is half-brother to Latent Heat. Add in the superbly named **JEREMY'S SONG** (Gary Contessa), a debut third who is by Unbridled's Song out of the outstanding G1 Spinster win machine Pampered Princess.

Later today (Friday) at **Sunland Park**, stakes winners **ALONSO** (Justin Evans) and **CLOUD HARBOR** (Henry Dominguez) audition for next month's Mine That Bird Derby in a Race 4

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allowance sprint. The field includes the 3-4-5 finishers from the Riley Allison Futurity.

A **Fair Grounds** allowance sprint Saturday in Race 8 may tell us all we need to know about DIVINE VIEW (Larry Jones). I loved his debut win at Churchill and he looked like five-million bucks on the track at Remington for the Springboard Mile prior to a mystifyingly flat performance. Big drills since indicate that if he's going to become something of note, we will find out Saturday. BIG SUGAR SODA (Steve Asmussen) picked up checks in New York's Hopeful and Futurity and provides a class gauge, while BE WELL (Steve Margolis) and KENDALL'S BOY (Tom Amoss) provide depth.

Gulfstream presents a pair of 3YO heats Saturday. The much anticipated debut of HARTFORD (Todd Pletcher) takes place in a Race 4 MSW sprint. The full-brother to Dance Card meets a field loaded with intriguing rookies and experienced foes alike. Stablemate CONSTITUTION (Todd Pletcher) and ATHENS (Bill Mott) offer intrigue with the latter a younger brother to G1 sprinter Pomeroy with big-time Payson drills for this outfit. JUBA (Jimmy Jerkens) could be best of those who have run and has some upside from this eye. As for the Race 6 MSW turf route, NOTABILITY (Dale Romans) drops out of his mid-pack fifth in the G2 Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes to meet import CAN'THELPBELIEVING (Graham Motion), who struck me as a run-all-day type in his runner-up at Keeneland. DOUBLE WHAMMY (Kiaran McLaughlin) was live in an even debut and should stretch out. BLARP (Bill Mott) is a half to Newsdad & should appreciate the surface/distance more than his debut.

Saturday's Race 9 MSW turf sprint at **Santa Anita** may give us a good barometer on a horse I like a lot named BOURNE HOT (Doug O'Neill). His 2-3 pursuers from Dec. 15 return, ARCTIC CODE (Mike Harrington) and HOME RUN KITTEN (David Hofmans). They will have to overcome MELATONIN (Jeff Bonde), who exits a pair of solid company lines at Hollywood.

Oaklawn's Saturday Race 9 maiden sprint comes at a good time if you're evaluating LONG STATION (Kenny McPeck). You'll get to see his Churchill conqueror BOURBONIZE (Kellyn Gorder) return the day prior at OP in allowance company to get a line on him. FLAT IRISH (Bret Calhoun) has been sizzling the local strip in the a.m. for his anticipated debut, as has

DISCIPLINE (Chris Richard). But it's the sharp-pedigreed STREET STRATEGY (Randy Morse) I have my eye on among the rookies. He's by Street Sense out of a sister to both Spoken Fur and Unbridled's Note – quite a female family.

ALEX INC (Butch Reid) was among the best juveniles I scouted at **Parx** in '13 and his allowance mile bid on Saturday in Race 7 comes with much interest. He'll meet UNDERTAKER (John Servis), who wheels back on short rest. Read about that one in our review section below in this edition of *Countdown*.

At **Turfway Park** on Saturday, CUT THE NET (Mike Maker) is an interesting first-time starter. The Giant's Causeway colt is out of Essence, a 2-time winner on dirt at 9 furlongs, including a G3 stakes in Maryland.

Sunday's offerings include a Race 6 **Oaklawn** allowance sprint. G2 Best Pal Stakes-placed GUNS LOADED (Cody Autrey) makes a wise return to the one-turn ranks in this event. He'll meet ballyhooed early season 2YO returnee RIDE ON CURLIN (Bill Gowan), who was third in the G1 Champagne. QUICK DAGGER (Kelly Von Hemel) made a good impression in his Remington debut for owner Toby Keith.

Gulfstream's Sunday card boasts a Race 9 turf route allowance where my Breeders' Cup Juvenile upset pick MEDAL COUNT (Dale Romans) returns to action. He seems to have found a "no excuses" field for this track/level.

Fair Grounds offers a Race 7 turf MSW route Sunday in which More Than Ready debut artist ROYAL GUARDIAN (Louie Roussel III) may be worth watching. He's a grandson of the awfully good racemare Ruby's Surprise.

Also in a turf route MSW Sunday, **Tampa Bay Downs'** Race 8 features the second start for regally bred debut third HERTZALOT (Arnaud Delacour), a son of Smart Strike-Megahertz.

HPNOW BUZZ

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- Sham Stakes - (Saturday/Santa Anita Park)



The week's only major stakes lured a field of six, and that's a moral victory considering there were only a few entries in the box before the Santa Anita racing office went into a hard sell to fill it. At a mile on dirt, the G3 \$100,000 Sham kicks off the Santa Anita Derby trail and it offers one rep each from the West's key 3YO barns – Baffert, O'Neill, Sadler & Hollendorfer.

Five last-out maiden breakers join Fresno stakes winner LIFE IS A JOY (Jerry Hollendorfer). All five MSW graduates won at different distances and/or surfaces, making this a unique melting pot. ONTOLOGY (Simon Callaghan) had a breakout win on turf just two weeks ago and would seem to be hustled into this spot. While he has a seasoning and distance edge, he could very well bounce in this spot after a taxing run.

The Sham would seem a showdown between dominant MSW performers KRISTO (John Sadler) and MIDNIGHT HAWK (Bob Baffert), of which I firmly lean to the former. KRISTO rates one of my most promising 3YOs on this '14 trail after a nibbler-breaks-out kind of maiden demolition at the end of the Santa Anita meet. His first two-turn bid was a gem. His pedigree may not scream 10 furlongs, but it is dynamite for middle distances and this is one of the few Sham entrants specifically pointed this way.

MIDNIGHT HAWK, no doubt impressive in the debut, is out of the talented, but distance-limited Miss Wineshine. The son of champion sprinter Midnight Lute really has the feel of a future Baffert sprint star more so than a router. But Baffert got a mile out of Secret Circle with aplomb on the trail a few years ago before resuming a sprint career.

TOP FORTITUDE (Kory Owens) is younger brother to the accomplished Uh Oh Bango, who ran for these same connections. He's bred to appreciate a mile, and his 6-furlong workout Dec. 27 was encouraging. I'LL WRAP IT UP (Doug O'Neill) twice was offered for a claiming tag before breaking his maiden in his fifth start in an off-the-turf race situation that I rarely respect at face value. But his second to next-out

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stakes winner ENTERPRISING (Tom Proctor) two starts ago indicates some ability to be sure.

Get more historical trends and significance on the Sham Stakes by visiting p. 62 of the Countdown to the Crown Preseason Annual simply by [clicking this link](#).

Sham Stakes selections:

W) KRISTO;P) MIDNIGHT HAWK;
S) I'LL WRAP IT UP.

Last week's selections:

0: 0-0-0.

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

Season selections: 0: 0-0-0.

Everyone's a Critic

This section reviews the week that was in the 3-year-old ranks. My official annual start date for the Countdown scouting season is Dec. 26, so given this is our first weekly report of the season, we'll reach back to the day after Christmas in this evaluation.

Stakes Races



Last Saturday's two-turn Jerome Stakes ([VIDEO](#)) at Aqueduct provided a classic example of your eyes and the clock seeing the same thing. The Jerome splits withered as the mile and 70 yards progressed (24.07, 24.27, 25.16, 27.13, 4.45). And anyone watching this race had to see NOBLE MOON (Leah Gyarmati) and runner-up CLASSIC GIACNROLL (Lisa Guerrero) really labor through the lane.

NOBLE MOON, despite the visual discredit, has shown versatility in running style and sports a router's pedigree. Sire Malibu Moon was rep'd in roses last year with Orb, and damsire Kingmambo is one of his generation's best route influences. The win here helps flatter the form of the Nov. 3 Nashua Stakes, won by

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CAIRO PRINCE (Kieran McLaughlin), who figures to be one of Florida's finest this spring.

CLASSIC GIACNROLL raced 5-6 wide on the clubhouse turn, a place where most two-turn races are won and lost yet horseplayers rarely pay enough attention at that point. He remained 3-wide on the far turn and was gassed with his head high through the stretch run. Given it was the son of '05 Derby winner Giacomo's first route attempt, that's forgivable and he grades out higher in the Jerome for me than the winner. Third-place SCOTLAND (Tony Dutrow) remains a nibbling maiden and could drop back in to MSW company and get a confidence boost, then reappear for something like the Gotham.

MATUSAK (Bill Mott) belatedly picked up fourth and marginally galloped out best of a tired bunch. He obviously will run all day; just not particularly fast at this point. On pedigree, he remains the most appealing horse in this field. Disappointments included seventh-placed MASTER LIGHTNING (Todd Pletcher), now overmatched in three stakes bids after handling business in maidens/allowances.

The final time of 1:45.08 was more than 8 lengths faster than the same-day Busanda Stakes for the 3-year-old fillies. That might be a bigger indictment on the Busanda bunch.

NOBLE MOON had scratched from the G2 Remsen in November with a case of the hives. Next up for him figures to be the Withers (Feb. 1) or Gotham (March 1) with the latter the more likely target. I'll want to see more brilliance and finishing flair next time to get excited.

Check out the historical significance of the Jerome Stakes by visiting p. 61 of the Countdown to the Crown Preseason Annual simply by [clicking this link](#).



The stakes runner who impressed me most in this young *Countdown* season came in last Saturday's 7-furlong **Pasco Stakes** at Tampa Bay Downs. MIGHTY BROWN (Tim Ice) appears to have put it all together with back-to-back sprint wins that could land him back in the route mix where he had some success at age 2.

High-quality, fast sprinter COOL COWBOY (Dale Bennett) did what he was supposed to do from the rail and set a solid tone. For MIGHTY BROWN to be able to stalk a length or 1 ½ lengths behind him while 3-wide was very impressive for a colt who had seven route races as a juvenile. MIGHTY BROWN put away a legit sprint adversary in the final sixteenth. The time of 1:24.17 was about 4 lengths quicker than the same-day Gasparilla for sophomore fillies.

The win by MIGHTY BROWN bolsters the form of the Delta Jackpot; he's since 2-for-2 after a sixth-place run to RISE UP (Tom Amoss) in Louisiana. Look for MIGHTY BROWN to be a serious factor in the Sam F. Davis and Tampa Bay Derby, though Ice had success in Arkansas with Summer Bird and wouldn't be surprised to see them take a return shot to Hot Springs. The Tampa-Keeneland path also has been popular over recent years and this grandson of Chester House has a pedigree to handle the Polytrack on both sides of his gene pool.

COOL COWBOY should, and will, remain a sprinter. Circle races like the Hutcheson and Swale for him this winter in Florida. A horse he dispatched in the Inaugural, DUTY PROPER (Robert Raymond), returned to win a Dec. 27 Tampa allowance. Pasco third-place GIANCARLO (Efren Loza Jr.) provides yet another in a seemingly infinite line of Tapits on this year's trail, but will need to get much better to reverse rolls with MIGHTY BROWN.

GULFSTREAM PARK

The New Year's Day **Gulfstream Park Derby** ([VIDEO](#)) wasn't a surprise result, but certainly did not play out as expected. Kentucky raider GENERAL A ROD (Mike Maker) earned a hard-fought win while 3-wide much of the way to capture his stakes debut. But the complete no-show of multiple stakes winner BEST PLAN YET (Stanley Gold) and the spotty trip/performance by the speed-less PABLO DEL MONTE (Wesley Ward) make you hit the pause button before feeling too confident about what transpired over this mile.

GENERAL A ROD, a son of Roman Ruler out of a Dynaformer mare, has that kind of brilliant-top, stamina-bottom that I love to see in a classics contender. The Keeneland debut winner yet has tackled two turns, but gives a good

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indication on the track and on his pedigree page that he will appreciate the opportunity. He's earned his way to the Fountain of Youth, though the Holy Bull later this month would not be off the table of options given the timing.

The GP Derby held together nicely as front-running WILDCAT RED (Jose Garoffalo) was a hard-luck runner-up after splits of 23.14, 22.77, 24.34 and 25.59. The sprint-pedigreed colt saw his three-race unbeaten streak end but gained some stature in defeat. I'd prefer to see him shorten back for the Hutcheson and Swale.

None of the others earned big marks in pursuit of GENERAL A ROD. Third-place EAST HALL (Bill Kaplan) has proven a capable grinder and after nine starts we've seen where/how he fits. PABLO DEL MONTE wound up fourth in a herky-jerky race where he never seemed into the mix while making his dirt debut. I think you circle the Lexington at Keeneland at a middle-distance on Poly for him, then work backwards to make that your "Derby" day for Spring 2014.



Visual handicappers had to leave the Dec. 28 **Eddie Logan Stakes** (VIDEO) impressed with the turn of foot unleashed by ENTERPRISING (Tom Proctor). Despite a dawdling pace for the turf mile, the son of Elusive Quality flew home in the mid-22s the final quarter to beat a quality field.

With a female pedigree boasting of stellar turf performers, it is likely Proctor keeps ENTERPRISING grass-bound; he's not one to get Derby Fever and chase the roses. But the Polytrack awaits at Keeneland or Turfway, and this is a pretty serious racehorse developing for a horseman who is going as well now as ever.

OTHER STAKES:

JOINT CUSTODY (Jerry Robb) got a few shots of good news in recent weeks, winning the Dec. 28 **Maryland Juvenile Championship** at Laurel and then watching his allowance pursuer JUST CALL KENNY (Patrick McBurney) return to the races Jan. 4 with a 19-1 upset of the 6-furlong **Spectacular Bid** at Gulfstream Park. JUST CALL KENNY, unfortunately, exited the

'Bid with a left-front leg fracture and will be off the trail.

Meanwhile, GERMANIAC (Tim Tullock) ran roughshod over the **Frank Whiteley Stakes** (VIDEO) field Jan. 4 at Laurel, wiring the 7-furlong cast by 6 ½ lengths. It was GERMANIAC's third win in his last four starts, with the lone defeat during that time coming in a sixth-place effort behind the aforementioned JOINT CUSTODY. All of these Maryland marauders could get class tests in the Withers (Feb. 1) at Aqueduct.

The Sunland Derby trail has a New Mexico-bred worth watching named PROCEED (Joel Marr), an easy winner of both lifetime routes, including the Dec. 28 **Hedeman Mile**. PROCEED was wiped out on the clubhouse turn by a rival and still day-lighted this group. He's by the same sire, Desert God, and trainer, Joel Marr, as all-time NM legend Pepper's Pride. This could be a fun one locally.

Allowance Races

The best prospect I've seen hit the track during this period, Dec. 26-present, was Dec. 27 Fair Grounds route allowance victor GOLD HAWK (Steve Asmussen). The impeccably bred Empire Maker-Caressing colt was so professional and appears to be putting things together after having some pre-race mental issues in his debut. He swooped past a solid field going a mile and 70 yards here, bumped with a rival in upper stretch and went about his business. From this race, keep an eye on the good gallop-out from PURPLE SKY (Al Stall Jr.), a talented yet inconsistent horse, as well as the much-troubled ZANDER ZONE (David Carroll), who was wide and rank on first turn and sawed off in the upper-stretch by the eventual winner.

Jan. 3 Gulfstream route allowance winner COMMISSIONER (Todd Pletcher) has all the tools. To pound out 24s in a 1 1/8 miles early season route impresses, and he did so against what appears to be a strong field that included game runner-up TOP BILLING (Shug McGaughey). Consider the splits (24.38, 24.65, 24.78, 24.65) and a sensational 12.26 final furlong. That's serious stuff, and the top two both have pedigrees and connections to get them down the trail a long ways. This should be a key race moving forward, so highlight GP-9 from Jan 3. COMMISSIONER debuted at No. 9 in

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my *Countdown to the Crown Preseason Annual* rankings and this win moves him up this week.

CHITU (Bob Baffert) moved to 2-for-2 after a troubled start Dec. 27, but was a determined sprint winner at Santa Anita. The Henny Hughes colt has plenty of damside stamina, but failed to gallop out with any oomph here in an effort that would force me to take a stand-against in his first route attempt. Early season 2YO STREET ICON (Jerry Hollendorfer) ran promising enough in his first start since June.

One of my favorite horses in this crop, RIDE AWAY (Graham Motion, formerly Donnie K. Von Hemel), scored his second straight when he won a Tampa turf allowance Jan. 3 in nice-finishing style. He's still a bit green but loaded with talent, first identified in our Remington Park Friday Night School Live chats (it pays to go to School!). This Candy Ride colt is developing the right way and will get a stakes chance now past his first allowance condition.

Fleet Indiana-bred BISQUE (Tom Amoss) ventured back into open company to tally an off-the-turf Fair Grounds allowance dash Dec. 28. The grandson of Smart Strike and Blumin Affair is bred to route and already has won at a mile in restricted stakes company.

Arlington-Washington Futurity winner SOLITARY RANGER (Wayne Catalano) scored a front-running Fair Grounds turf mile allowance win Jan. 5, but did so in almost a dirt-like fashion. The splits slowed each quarter like you see on dirt. But the pace was slow enough to hold off the rally of KIDS RULE (Mike Stidham), a well-bred runner-up who has been victimized in his last two by speedy winners on slow paces. Look for both of these horses to develop as legitimate Blue Grass contenders on Poly.

Maiden Races

BAYERN (Bob Baffert) was no secret, and proved no morning glory, when he debuted an eye-popping winner Jan. 4 at Santa Anita. The son of Offlee Wild rationed his speed, dispatched his duelers and drew away by more than three lengths. A 12.27 final furlong was very solid on the back end of a difficult seventh-eighths debut distance. This was a big-time effort and no coincidence Hall of Fame jockey Gary Stevens was hand-picked to partner. The grandson of Wild Again and Thunder Gulch should welcome distance. Look

for stablemate HOLD EVERYTHING (Bob Baffert) to stretch back out in distance and rebound from this disappointing one-turn try. Yet another barnmate, HOPPERTUNITY (Bob Baffert) goes squarely on your horses to watch list for a route race. He galloped out like a beast in this unveiling and was training like a horse who may want distance and not sprints.

HARPOON (Todd Pletcher) busted out with a razor-sharp mile MSW score at Gulfstream on Dec. 26 by 5 ½ lengths. This is a classic “nibbler breaks out” performance after a trio of seconds in New York, and I would expect him to pair up victories in allowance company next, with a chance to rise into the stakes ranks. He may tap out at middle-distances, but this Tapit colt has talent and the “now” factor. Keep tabs on HARPOON's pursuer TOUT (Bill Mott), a debuting half-bro to router Congrats who split the field, had excuses and will relish two turns.

COOL SAMURAI (John Shirreffs) sent notice of his big-time promise when he rallied from 10 lengths back Dec. 27 to win a Santa Anita MSW mile against just four rivals. Short fields don't behoove deep closers, and this First Samurai colt, who had debuted nicely in New York before returning west, reeled in odds-on favorite THE ADMIRAL (Bob Baffert). COOL SAMURAI is a big, lumbering, loping type and didn't corner particularly athletically, but he looks like he will run from here to Beijing with a fascinating ceiling if/when he puts it together.

Rookie MORNING CALM (Michelle Nehei) upended the very promising REACH FOR A KITTEN (Todd Pletcher) in what could turn out a key Dec. 28 Gulfstream MSW on the turf. MORNING CALM is from the same female family as the ever-versatile Switch, while REACH FOR A KITTEN is younger bro to last year's G1 Secretariat champ Admiral Kitten. Despite a wide trip and no pace help at all, MORNING CALM answered the alarm.

VINCEREMOS (Todd Pletcher) staved off the challenge of IMBETTERTHANGOOD (Kenny McPeck) in a Jan. 4 Gulfstream Park MSW mile on the dirt. A 27.43 final quarter-mile makes this fast-early, slow-late heat difficult to trust – not to mention a Keystone Cops start for many of these runners. Do note the narrow runner-up was exiting one of 2013's absolutely most key races at Churchill Downs. Take a wait-and-see on these runners the way this race played out. BUCK MAGIC (David Fawkes) certainly did not

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flatter the G2 Kentucky Jockey Club result when that stakes' fourth-place finisher returned to the maiden ranks and ran eighth of nine.

Few saw CHERUBIM (Simon Callaghan) coming when he upset a blue-blooded Santa Anita MSW sprint Dec. 28. Well-beaten by INDIANAPOLIS (Bob Baffert) at Hollywood, the 20-1 son of Henny Hughes was a different animal on this day. Among those in his wake were debut disappointment INDIAN SMOKE (Bob Baffert), the son of Zensational-Indian Blessing. Debut runner-up CHELIOS (Tom Proctor) sports a slick pedigree and won't be a maiden long.

On that same Dec. 28 card at Santa Anita, BC Juvenile Turf alum ONTOLOGY (Simon Callaghan) gave the barn two wins on the day with a solid class-drop and score. The Tapit colt responded nicely to forge by the talented KOZANI (John Sadler) in a race the runner-up ran too good to lose. Look for graduation next. A sharp final quarter in 23.44 was as good as it looked on the clock.

Off the beaten path, but taking a backseat to no performance, acquaint yourself with FAVORITE TALE (Lupe Preciado). The Parx debut artist nearly broke the 6-furlong track record with a 1:07.66 blitzkrieg Jan. 4. Even though the track was playing fast, FAVORITE TALE did spread-eagle this field; that's usually a sign of a pretty legitimate time in terms of domination. The Tale of the Cat colt may love the Polytrack if he gets a shot, and as a maternal grandson of Grindstone, there's reason to ask him at least once for a route (even if the gallop-out here was modest). The female family is exceptional.

HOT HEIR SKIER (Ben Perkins Jr.) looks to be a nice, developing sprinter in Maryland after his Dec. 26 MSW dash romp over promising firster LOUD CAT (Tony Dutrow). HOT HEIR SKIER went about 4 lengths faster than same-day 3YO allowance winner PAX ORBIS (Tim Tullock).

GAMBLER'S GHOST (Eddie Kenneally) blitzed Gulfstream MSW sprinters Jan. 1 by 5 lengths in wire-to-wire fashion. The Ghostzapper colt was the well-beaten favorite in his Churchill debut to physical specimen DIVINE VIEW (Larry Jones) in his only other start. GAMBLER'S GHOST likely will be best sprinting out of a Two Punch mare. I like the look of runner-up BAY OF PLENTY (Kiaran McLaughlin), who figures to break his maiden next time out. On

the same card, IRONICUS (Shug McGaughey) graduated in his second start while moving to a turf route for the first time. The well-bred Distorted Humor-Meghan's Joy colt closed more than eight lengths into a slow pace. His dirt debut was a disaster in New York, so they may not be in a hurry to leave the green.

ELECTRIC EDDIE (Ben Cecil), second in the Real Quiet and fifth in the Hollywood Futurity, dropped into a Cal-bred MSW Jan. 2 at Santa Anita, but lost the route decision when disqualified from first. OH BILLY BILLY (Bob Baffert), a \$400k son of Unusual Heat, was put up for his diploma in career start No. 2.

XTRA LUCK (Danny Pish) caught a ride on a slow-paced carousel where speed held 1-2 to win a Jan. 3 Fair Grounds MSW route. Heavily favored SILENT RULER (Keith Desormeaux) closed belatedly without chance to be third.

UNCLE SIGH (Gary Contessa) obliterated a soft cast of New York-bred MSWs at Aqueduct on Dec. 27 by 14 ½ lengths in his second start. The Indian Charlie colt relished his stretch-out around two turns. Class tests remain.

WWE fans enjoyed the bashing UNDERTAKER (John Servis) gave his Parx foes Dec. 29 in a romping, two-turn MSW score. The Unbridled's Song colt is out of the good stakes winner Kris' Sis, making his dam a half-sister to Arlington Million winner Kicken Kris. The third start provided quite a wakeup call after two lackluster efforts. But caution: freakish runs on sloppy tracks often aren't repeated.

TAQUITO (Dane Kobiskie) wired Tampa MSW sprinters Dec. 29 in good fashion, outrunning a field that included a pair of Kentucky shippers. By Borrego out of a Petionville mare, this Ontario-bred should appreciate some distance and is an early 2YO runner who has come back from some issues with a brighter future.

ARTEMUS COALMINE (Mike Maker) debuted a winner Dec. 27 sprinting at Turfway Park, living up to a win-early female pedigree. The Mineshaft colt, owned by Ken Ramsey, was well-backed at 7-5 despite being a May foal. The same team also tallied a Jan. 1 Turfway MSW route with BIGGER PICTURE (Mike Maker), who came home a very strong final eighth routing in 12.24.

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Just Wynn, Baby



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

COMMISSIONER (Todd Pletcher) took a big drop to 35-1 following his Gulfstream allowance win. He opened at 60-1 in the fall and held firm there until his return win. BAYERN debuted a winner and soon after opened on the Futures at 125-1. GOLD HAWK continues to pick up steam, dropping from 40-1 to 35-1 again this week after opening at 100-1. SHARED BELIEF was raised to 12-1 after the initial action on his Hollywood Futurity score had him at 10-1.

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. COOL SAMURAI (Santa Anita, 12/27)
3. HARPOON (Gulfstream Park, 12/26)
4. FAVORITE TALE (Parx, 1/4)
5. MORNING CALM (Gulfstream Park, 12/28-T)

Allowance Race

1. GOLD HAWK (Fair Grounds, 12/27)
2. COMMISSIONER (Gulfstream, 1/3)
3. RIDE AWAY (Tampa, 1/3-T)
4. CHITU (Santa Anita, 12/27)
5. BISQUE (Fair Grounds, 12/28)

Stakes Race

1. MIGHTY BROWN (Pasco Stakes, Tampa, 1/4)
2. ENTERPRISING (Eddie Logan, Santa Anita, 12/28-T)
3. GENERAL A ROD (GP Derby, Gulfstream, 1/1)
4. GOLDEN MOON (Jerome, Aqueduct, 1/4)
5. JOINT CUSTODY (Md Juv Champ, Laurel, 12/28)

Jeremy Plonk is owner of the handicapping-based website [HorseplayerNOW.com](#) and [Countdowntothecrown.com](#). You can E-mail him at Jeremy@Horseplayernow.com.



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Jeremy Plonk's Top 20

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

1	<u>HONOR CODE</u> Trainer: Shug McGaughey Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Fountain of Youth-Florida Derby likely.	11	<u>TAPITURE</u> Trainer: Steve Asmussen Winter Home: Fair Grounds (La.) Regional option to tackle Oaklawn, too.
2	<u>STRONG MANDATE</u> Trainer: D. Wayne Lukas Winter Home: Oaklawn Park (Ark.) Southwest-Rebel-Ark Derby make sense.	12	<u>WRY</u> Trainer: Gary "Red Dog" Hartlage Winter Home: Oaklawn Park (Ark.) Pedigree for OP dirt & Kee Poly, options.
3	<u>SHARED BELIEF</u> Trainer: Jerry Hollendorfer Winter Home: Santa Anita (Cal.) Did a lot lately, but 'Dorf keeps 'em busy.	13	<u>KRISTO</u> Trainer: John Sadler Winter Home: Santa Anita (Cal.) Late bloomer seeks stakes barometer.
4	<u>CANDY BOY</u> Trainer: John Sadler Winter Home: Santa Anita (Cal.) Fit and tested, dances west's big routes.	14	<u>MEXIKOMA</u> Trainer: Rick Mettee Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Ran on well enough in BC Juv to inspire.
5	<u>GOLD HAWK</u> Trainer: Steve Asmussen Winter Home: Fair Grounds Will maneuver around Tapiture's plans.	15	<u>WICKED STRONG</u> Trainer: Jimmy Jerkens Winter Home: Gulfstream Park (Fla.) Part of deep bunch w/ FoY-FI Derby eye.
6	<u>COMMISSIONER</u> (up 3!) Trainer: Todd Pletcher Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Router personified defies usual TAP-type.	16	<u>CHAS'S LEGACY</u> Trainer: Patrick Byrne Winter Home: Gulfstream Park (Fla.) Can work his way up GP ALW ladder.
7	<u>BOBBY'S KITTEN</u> Trainer: Chad Brown Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Palm Beach-Blue Grass & get green light?	17	<u>BOND HOLDER</u> Trainer: Doug O'Neill Winter Home: Santa Anita (Cal.) If a freak emerges out west, he can travel.
8	<u>CAIRO PRINCE</u> Trainer: Kiaran McLaughlin Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) If NY weather mild, barn may travel back.	18	<u>CULPRIT</u> Trainer: Dale Romans Winter Home: Gulfstream Park (Fla.) 1 1/8-miles races where he starts to shine.
9	<u>UNKNOWN ROAD</u> Trainer: Al Stall, Jr. Winter Home: Fair Grounds (La.) Rising player in a deep New Orleans cast.	19	<u>RISE UP</u> Trainer: Tom Amoss Winter Home: Fair Grounds (La.) Lecomte, Smarty Jones both viable early.
10	<u>HAVANA</u> Trainer: Todd Pletcher Winter Home: Palm Meadows (Fla.) Speed and style ought to suit GP events.	20	<u>COOL SAMURAI</u> Trainer: John Shirreffs Winter Home: Santa Anita (Cal.) East-west experience with high ceiling.