

COUNTDOWN TO THE CROWN

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.



ALSO: FOLLOW CANADA'S BEST EACH WEEK IN COUNTDOWN TO THE QUEEN'S PLATE

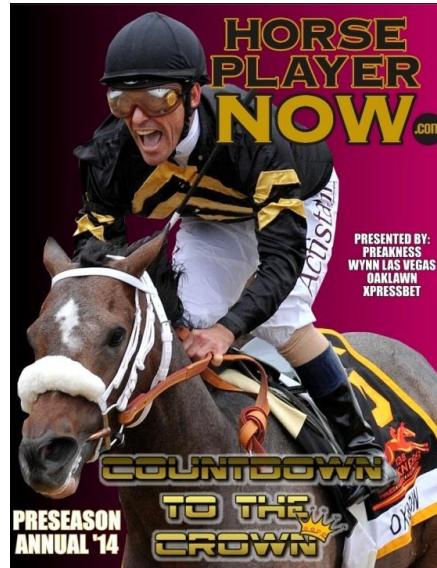


Three Things You Won't Read Anywhere Else

Opinions are like trackside commentary from Johnny Weir and Tara Lipinski. The easiest statements to make are fashion statements.

1. CALIFORNIA CHROME enters the Kentucky Derby on a historic streak. His 4 consecutive wins by 5 lengths or more has not been matched by any Kentucky Derby hopeful since my past performance collection begins, dating to 1906. Not Citation, not Secretariat, not Affirmed, not even Arazi. Never in at least 108 years, if ever. Let me know if you have a set that pre-dates 1906.
2. Horse X is owned by the reigning Eclipse Award-winning owner, trained by the reigning champion trainer, and ridden by the Eclipse-toting jockey coming off the all-time earnings record season in the saddle. Despite all that hardware, WE MISS ARTIE will be 25-1 in the Kentucky Derby. If ever a case for how much horseplayers loathe the challenges synthetic surfaces present, I think we've uncovered the poster boy.
3. Loved the candid conversations with clockers Mike Welsch and Gary Young in Tuesday's Night School session regarding workouts. Drills take the major spotlight as the Derby approaches, but as these guys reminded us, there's a reason why you don't see many clockers parking their Rolls Royce in valet on the way up to the lookout point. Firm answers come far less frequently than questions in this process we all adore.

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COUNTDOWN'S DERBY PICKS EDITION TO BE RELEASED WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30!

This Week's Fearless Forecast

It's become our annual tradition to break format on this week before the Kentucky Derby and do a comparable match-up to this season's contenders with those who have come before them. History repeats itself often in sports, and horse racing may offer no bigger correlation between past and present. We use this trip down memory lane to project forward how each of the Derby 140 contenders may fare.

Let's kick off our annual comparisons in alphabetical order.

BAYERN: Meet Dunkirk, the Todd Pletcher trainee of 2009, who romped in his first 2 in Florida with a well-bred pedigree and flashy style. Dunkirk then lost the Florida Derby at 6-5, and, in doing so, lost his rider Garrett Gomez to Pioneerof The Nile. Sound familiar Bayern fans and Gary Stevens fans? Similarly, both runners went from 7F MSW wins to route ALW wins to a G1 placing that disappointed a smidge – both not debuting until January of their 3YO seasons. Dunkirk was not professional enough to overcome gate trouble in the Derby, ran well up the track, and came back to validate his talents when second in the Belmont in a more manageable situation. Bayern backers might expect the same, maybe with the Preakness a more logical target, based on history and his resume.

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CALIFORNIA CHROME: Two names draw my eye when researching similarities to this year's favorite, and they started next to each other in the 2006 Derby. The more obvious, fellow California-bred Brother Derek, and the less obvious Lawyer Ron. Like California Chrome, neither started off dominating their completion – Brother Derek was 2-4 before running off 4 straight romping wins; Lawyer Ron opened 0-5 at one point before storming home 6 straight times on top leading into his Derby date. Both were trained by regional veteran horsemen (Dan Hendricks, Bob Holthus) not circling the first Saturday in May the moment a horse comes into their care at age 2. Brother Derek was more one-dimensional in terms of pace to me than Lawyer Ron, and in that respect, I think California Chrome actually rates much more like Lawyer Ron with his versatility. The real Lawyer Ron, who was dealing with a floating knee chip that was removed the summer after the Derby, wasn't the horse who showed up in Louisville. He went on to become a champion 4-year-old and validate just how good he was, despite running 12th in Louisville. I recall going into the 2006 Kentucky Derby with a very firm opinion that the winner only could be 2 horses, Lawyer Ron or Barbaro. I think you have to take a similar feel of confidence into this year's Derby with California Chrome, knowing he's got the talent of Lawyer Ron – and apparently free of any issues.

CANDY BOY: In 2009, a son of Candy Ride took 4 tries to break his maiden, peaked in the winter months and wound up with a placing in the Santa Anita Derby for a veteran west coast trainer not known as a Derby dynamo. The story of Chocolate Candy sounds a lot like this year's Candy Boy tale, subbing John Sadler for Jerry Hollendorfer, fittingly since they just tied for the Santa Anita meet training title. And if Gary Stevens makes the difference on Candy Boy, lest we forget Chocolate Candy had his Hall of Fame partner in Mike Smith. Chocolate Candy wound up a decent fifth in the sloppy mousse behind Mine That Bird.

CHITU: A fast-rising 3YO for a power barn can send a trainer packing for a road date trying to spread out his arsenal, and that was the case with Todd Pletcher's Bandini in 2005. He rose from MSW to ALW to a Fountain of Youth second on the class rise that said "just maybe" we have something here. Instead of wheeling back in the Florida Derby for a rematch with High Fly, Bandini was sent to the Blue Grass, where he promptly scored his 3rd win in 4 starts. Fast forward to 2014, and Bob Baffert's Chitu made that same fast class ascension and lost his stakes/route debut with a good placing in the Lewis Memorial. Instead of staying home for the SA Derby, he went on to the easier spot in the Sunland Derby, where he also won. Bandini failed to muster much in Louisville when 19th before being sidelined for nearly 10 months.

COMMANDING CURVE: You don't need a way-back machine or to look very far for this one. Stablemate Golden Soul, last year's Derby runner-up, fits the bill and actually has been this horse's morning training partner in recent weeks. The CURVE is 6: 1-1-2, while Golden Soul was 5: 1-2-

0 going into the big Derby. They got small slices in the Louisiana Derby (CC 3rd, GS 4th) with the same late-running style. What's more? They both ran narrow runner-ups in 1-turn mile MSWs at CD during their 2YO seasons while running out of real estate. Will the pupil learn from the teacher and finish second in the Derby? Crazier things have happened under the Twin Spires.

DANCE WITH FATE: The public has a history of holding grudges with 17-1 shots from the BC Juvenile when they feel he's nothing more than a synthetic or turf performer. Two years it ago it was Dullahan, whose dirt form wasn't terrible, but his brilliance on Polytrack at Keeneland clouded any opinion that he could do anything else. Welcome in Dance With Fate, also 17-1 in the BC Juvenile, and despite having career placings on all 3 major surfaces, no one thinks he can do much on the dirt. Their records are similar; their Beyer Speed Figures are similar for their Blue Grass dominations (98-97); and here's betting you get every bit or more of Dullahan's 12-1 from Derby 138. Dullahan ran third in the Derby, and then after a disappointment in the Belmont, everyone patted themselves on the back again for being so certain about his inability on dirt.

DANZA: Don't go crazy because this is the first Derby winner to make the comparison on the list, but this one's trajectory harkens to I'll Have Another. Both were summer debut winners at 2 thrown right into the Saratoga stakes mix. Both went to the sidelines with injuries that weren't major, but enough to stunt their juvenile seasons and get them off to a later start at 3. Then, in their first major test at 3, both ran complete holes in the wind that few saw coming. I'll Have Another crushed the Lewis at 43-1, while Danza rocked the Arkansas Derby at a similar 41-1 wattage. Now comes the difference. Many handicappers – including me – were of the thought that the comeback race was so out-of-nowhere, so good, that I'll Have Another would bounce in this next start, the Santa Anita Derby. He won again – and again in Louisville, and again in Baltimore. Danza is a stakes race behind I'll Have Another in his form cycle as he hits the Derby. Again, we wonder if he bounces or makes another leap forward? And while Joe Bravo may not be a household Derby name that you remove the rubber band from the billfold for this time of year, I'll raise you a Mario Gutierrez from post 19. Danza has that same first or last kind of feel I had for I'll Have Another in the 2012 Santa Anita Derby – just on a much, much bigger stage. As I wrote in the April 6, 2012 Countdown edition: "To be frank, I have no idea what to do with I'LL HAVE ANOTHER ... He could win Saturday or regress mightily." What an exciting decision we have to weigh on this one!

GENERAL A ROD: Give me a super-consistent runner known for close finishes and some Dynaformer in his pedigree, and you have the makings of one of my all-time favorites, Perfect Drift. The 2002 Derby third-place finisher was 6: 3-3-0 lifetime with those losses by 1-3/4 combined lengths going into the first Saturday in May. Here's General a Rod, 5: 2-2-1 with his 3 losses by a total of 3-3/4 lengths.

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The Dynaformer here on the damside vs. the topside for Perfect Drift. Neither was afraid of a fight, but also had the character flaw of not wanting to put horses away. Both ran out their preps only at one circuit (GP-TP), doing so with 3 natural, progressing distances. Top riders Eddie Delahoussaye and Joel Rosario accepted the calls.

HARRY'S HOLIDAY: Former and fellow Mike Maker trainee With a City ran his eyes out winning the 2006 Spiral and then totally tanked next out when last of 13, beaten 51 lengths in Arkansas Derby. Both of these Maker protégés are former maiden claimers who got right at Turfway on Poly and both show a lot of sprint in the pedigree. With A City unfortunately never made it to the Derby.

HOPPERTUNITY: This one reminds me a bunch of 2011 Derby runner-up Nehro, who was outrun sprinting at 10-1 in his debut and didn't make it to the races until late in his 2YO season. Nehro got better as the distances progressed, and still managed to run 4 route preps at age 3. He was second by a neck in the Louisiana Derby and the Arkansas Derby with a keep-coming style – showing the ability to be a midpack/presser or a deep closer. Hoppertunity has had 4 preps this year, and won a close battle in the Rebel while adding a solid second in the Santa Anita Derby. He, too, has that keep-coming style while a late developer. And, like Nehro, he showed stakes mettle in big races on more than one circuit, proving he could take his race to different tracks before heading to Louisville.

INTENSE HOLIDAY: The resume comparison here with 2011 Derby third Mucho Macho Man fascinates. Both had to leave New York to break their maidens at Monmouth before getting minor checks in the Nashua and Remsen. Mucho Macho Man was a late fall nibbler in New York who could only muster fourth in the Holy Bull at Gulfstream before being shipped around for some easier pastures in Louisiana. He won the Risen Star and then was the beaten favorite in the Louisiana Derby. Are you getting this, Intense Holiday fans? Macho ran 8 times before Louisville, never worse than 5th; Intense Holiday has made 8 starts, none worse than 4th.

MEDAL COUNT: Prince of Thieves needed a big run on 15 days' rest at Keeneland in 1996 for D. Wayne Lukas and delivered with a second in the Lexington Stakes, washing away the bad taste of a pair of poor trail showings. Medal Count, fifth in the Fountain of Youth, needed things to go right at Keeneland this spring and delivered with a Transylvania win and then a Blue Grass second on just 8 days' rest. Both horses were debut winners by 6 lengths and boast similar turf route stamina pedigrees – while also a penchant for throwing in a clunker. Prince of Thieves rallied from 14th to be third in Grindstone's Derby.

PABLO DEL MONTE: Few Keeneland Spring 2YOs elicit Derby Dreams 13 months later, but this guy and Mission Impazible in 2010 fit the bill. After a win-early career was unleashed, Mission Impazible came back from a layoff and nibbled in the Southwest, before winning the Louisiana

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Derby at a distance farther than his PPs suggested he'd go. Pablo Del Monte nearly did same in the 9-furlong Blue Grass. Mission Impazible managed a ninth-place run behind Super Saver in 2010, but turned out to be a quality, middle-distance handicap runner.

RIDE ON CURLIN: Yes, the Mine That Bird theatrics will play to some with Calvin Borel riding for Bronco Billy Gowan. And with the "50-1" movie this spring, why not have some fun? That said, the comparison here on performances is that of Noble's Promise. Both were Ellis Park juveniles who rose to become quality G1 2YOs in the fall. Both had troubled trips while nibbling in the Rebel and Arkansas Derby. But a weakness in both lies in damside pedigrees that lean to sprints. These horses have a short, exciting burst in them that the rider must wait, wait and wait some more before unleashing at the perfect time. Noble's Promise led the 2010 Kentucky Derby at top of stretch, lest we forget, and wound up fifth. I recall standing with Kenny McPeek as he watched the replay and shouted, "Too soon, Willie (Martinez), too soon!" Calvin Borel, and some additional Curlin stamina on top of this pedigree, might be enough to push him further ahead than Noble's Promise.

RING WEEKEND: The 2010 field seems to match up with many of these, and this guy compares closely to Line of David. Both horses were entered exclusively for turf and synthetic races early in their careers. When finally tried on dirt, each caught a front-running flyer to upset a major prep. Line of David tallied the Arkansas Derby at 17-1, while Ring Weekend registered the Tampa Bay Derby at 14-1. Both hailed from highly respected barns (John Sadler, Graham Motion) and for versatile, young sires (Tapit & Lion Heart). But fairly you wonder if they can repeat those kind of efforts while taking more heat in a tougher and bigger field. Line of David tired to 18th in Louisville.

SAMRAAT: The temptation to call him Funny Cide exists because he's New York-bred, but the performances and paths aren't all that similar. Samraat rates closer to 2006 contender Sharp Humor, yet another NYB from the apple. The state-bred stakes winner ventured into open company in the G2 Swale of 2006 and won a slugfest, not dissimilar to the rock'em sock'em bouts Samraat had earlier this year with Uncle Sigh. Then Sharp Humor stepped up again in the G1 Florida Derby and ran his eyes out to be second by a half-length behind Barbaro. He proved he belonged, but in doing so peaked in his career with his best performance. Samraat also exits a career-best speed number in a tough defeat, this time in the Wood Memorial. Might we've seen his top (and with a trip to the hyperbaric chamber after that final prep for expediting his recovery)? By comparison, Sharp Humor tired to 19th in the Derby.

SOCIAL INCLUSION: He could go down as the next Rock Hard Ten of 2004, who rates easily the best horse ever to enter and be excluded from the Kentucky Derby. Both of these runners won their first 2 starts and then finished third in their G1 big spring preps to put their status in jeopardy.

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Rock Hard Ten came back to be a major factor behind Smarty Jones in the Preakness, and Social Inclusion might be better off for his career if that fate finds him.

TAPITURE: The resume here played out very similar with Any Given Saturday in the class of 2007. Both were very good Churchill fall 2YOs, Tapiture winning the Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes and Any Given Saturday second in that race 7 years prior. Both easily won their 3YO returns before being gutted in a tough second start – Any Given Saturday in a driving battle with Street Sense in track record time at Tampa; Tapiture in a rough-and-tumble Rebel loss to Hoppertunity. Following those gut-wrenchers, both turned in very flat final Derby preps, Any Given Saturday splitting a 6-horse field in the Wood, while Tapiture mustering only 4th in his Arkansas Derby bid most recently. Both hailed from top barns, but had pedigrees that may tap out around 1-1/16 miles to 1-1/8 miles. Any Given Saturday was 8th in the Derby and went on to win the 9-furlong Haskell later.

UNCLE SIGH: The “other” New York-bred to Samraat in this class, it’s his resume that rings much closer to Funny Cide. Both Uncle Sigh and Funny Cide broke their maidens by 14+ lengths only to go 0-3 in open company preps and have plenty of traffic and trip issues each time. Both had veteran trainers (Barclay Tagg-Gary Contessa) and were sired by miler-types Indian Charlie and Distorted Humor – but with damside stamina. Funny Cide was 5-6 in exacta, Uncle Sigh 4-5 heading into the Kentucky Derby. Both have owners you couldn’t help root for, from the Sackatoga gang on the yellow school bus to Uncle Sigh’s connections raising money for wounded warriors. I’m not sure if Larry Collmus has called Tom Durkin to borrow the “gritty, gutty Uncle Sigh” line, but it sure would be a neat sequel.

VICAR’S IN TROUBLE: Dominate a midseason prep by 6 lengths, bounce from that effort as a heavy favorite, and then bounce back to front-end your final prep by 3 lengths. That’s been the tale for Vicar’s In Trouble, but also an eerily identical story for 2007 Derby runner-up Hard Spun. Both horses wintered at Fair Grounds for similar-profile Kentucky barns (Larry Jones-Mike Maker). The big difference between the two from my eye is the pedigree for Hard Spun would seem to get him farther down the path in Louisville than Vicar’s In Trouble – but the campaigns do shadow.

VINCEREMOS: He harkens to past contender Cool Coal Man, who won the ’08 Fountain of Youth on dirt for a respected Triple Crown barn (Nick Zito). But then he ran SO bad on Poly in the Blue Grass (9th by 10-3/4) that it was hard to trust him. Vinceremos had excellent dirt form at Tampa, but evaporated to 14th and last in the Blue Grass on synthetic. How do you trust that coming into the big day? Both horses were bred with stamina up top and speed on the bottom, reverse of what I prefer to see for the classics. Cool Coal Man ran 15th under Julien Leparoux, whom I expect would be named on Vinceremos for this year’s Derby.

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WE MISS ARTIE: In 2004, we had an inconsistent runner from world-class connections, dabbling with a pedigree that leaned half-dirt, half-turf. He had a Kentucky Derby winner close up in his pedigree, but the past performances of Birdstone were up and down. He had 3 wins, but 2 well-beaten losses, the last of which sent Hall of Fame jockey Jerry Bailey off to ride Wimbledon instead. Now comes We Miss Artie, from the Eclipse-winning J-T-O combo, and equally as capable of running first (3 times) as sixth (3 times). He, too, loses a Hall of Fame jockey as John Velazquez opts to ride stablemate Intense Holiday. Birdstone wound up 8th at 21-1, but would later upset Smarty Jones. I don’t think you’re going to hear a deflated Durkin lip, “*And We Miss Artie wins the Belmont...*” but it could very well end up a Dan Loiselle call at Woodbine in the Queen’s Plate.

WICKED STRONG: We made the Sea Hero comparison in this space following his Wood Memorial win, and the line to the 1993 Derby winner remains strong. They both were about 30% winners in their inconsistent pre-Derby campaigns with both going 0-2 in Florida before coming north. Both were 1-turn mile Belmont maiden breakers in the fall for veteran, patient horsemen who had to endure 3-4 race losing streaks between wins. Only the right horse would bring MacK Miller or Jimmy Jerkens to the Kentucky Derby; it’s not in their DNA. I won’t be surprised if this one realizes a similar, successful fate.

WILDCAT RED: Give me a horse with a sprint sire, never out of the exacta, trained by a South American conditioner and one that you keep waiting to get tripped up by distances. If you said Gayego, the 2008 pace battler for Paulo Lobo, you’d also be profiling Wildcat Red. Gayego sported a 5: 3-2-0 mark into Louisville off a very game up-front performance in the Arkansas Derby. Wildcat Red goes 7: 4-3-0 off his determined bid to wire the Florida Derby that came up just short. Paulo Lobo waved the Brazilian flag, while Jose Garoffalo and connections will be the toast of Venezuela if successful. Gayego tired to 17th under Mike Smith, but went on to become a G1-winning sprinter.

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Column will be inserted INSIDE
the new May issue of
Horse Player NOW Magazine!



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By Jeremy Plonk
Exclusive to Countdowntothecrown.com
and Woodbineracetrack.com

Editor's Note: The debut season of Countdown to the Queen's Plate comes on the heels of the ninth year of its sister scouting report, Countdown to the Crown. Fans can visit Countdowntothecrown.com for weekly updates through the Woodbine Oaks, Queen's Plate and the US racing Triple Crown. Both reports are updated each Friday.

This Week's Fearless Forecast

This section previews the coming attractions in 3-year-old stakes and undercard races for the Queen's Plate and Woodbine Oaks contenders. To watch Woodbine live racing, click here any racing day:

<http://www.woodbineentertainment.com/Woodbine/Racing/Pages/LiveRacing.aspx>.

The weekend gets off to a fast start later today (Friday) at Woodbine with a trio of races on the trail. Race 1 puts Oaks hopefuls AS NOTED (Robert Tiller) and HURRICANE MIMI (Ross Armata Jr.) back in action for the 3YO debut of each. The Race 3 split division of that turf sprint also includes Woodbine Oaks nominee I SCREAM SUNDAY (Robert Tiller) in her career unveiling for the daughter of Silent Name. Also Friday, Oaks nominees are in action in a Woodbine Race 4 allowance at 7 furlongs. Sharp April 12 winner CRISTINA'S HALO (Vito Armata) wheels back quickly off her 7-1/2 length maiden win opening weekend. She'll meet CRAIGIE HILL (Roger Attfield), away since her second-start MSW breaker in September.

Queen's Plate nominees take to the track in Friday's Race 8 at Woodbine, a 7-furlong allowance for open company. MANCAVE (Ashlee Brnjas), a two-time winner late in the season before finishing sixth in the Display, meets MONEY TALKS (William Tharrenos), who swooped the field impressively to win a Dec. 7 route allowance when last seen. These 3YOs are well-regarded in the field despite facing older rivals in open company.

Friday's Race 7 at Pimlico is an open maiden special weight route on the dirt. Stronach Stables' BOURBON MAN (Jose Corrales) makes his second lifetime start following a troubled debut fourth in Baltimore. The Touch Gold colt adds Lasix for the first time in a race that pedigree fans may enjoy seeing. Not only do you have this colt from the female family of Chief Bearhart, but the Breeders' Cup influence also extends to first-timer Giant Reward. That son of Giant's Causeway-Spain looms among the challengers to the field's lone QP nom, BOURBON MAN.



Join the Horse Player NOW team at this year's Queen's Plate once again to learn the game!

Saturday's Woodbine card also has a trio of races on the trail. Race 4 is a 7-furlong turf MSW featuring the debut of Queen's Plate nom EAST SIDE (Mark Casse), as well as the quick return of Curlin colt FIREBALL MERLIN (Mike Keough) off his April 12 rallying second at 5 furlongs. Meanwhile a Race 5 turf sprint MSW includes debut QP nom THE GREAT GIZMO (Robert Tiller). And that Tiller barn will be busy as well in Race 7 when a first-level allowance turf allowance sprint includes lone QP nom PROROGUING (Robert Tiller). The Silent Name colt rallied wide to take his debut in September and has trained forwardly for the return.

- Derby Trial Stakes - (Saturday/Churchill Downs)



Saturday's Derby Trial at Churchill includes Queen's Plate nominee MATADOR (Mark Casse) as that barn hopes to continue a strong spring run. Last week Dynamic Impact shipped to Hawthorne to win the Illinois Derby, and Casse remains locked in a tight race for the Keeneland training title down to the meet's final day on Friday.

Last year's Cup and Saucer winner on turf has yet to win in 4 subsequent starts, but the Malibu Moon colt has kept superb company lines on dirt. Still, he may be more effective when he returns to turf and synthetic north of the border. Sixth in the G1 Florida Derby, his apparent drop in class to the G3 Derby Trial comes against a pretty legitimate G1 favorite in



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Bayern, the Bob Baffert trainee who led most of the Arkansas Derby before finishing third.

At the one-turn mile distance on dirt, expect MATADOR to drop out the back end of the field and try to make one run. With Bayern's sharp speed, that could be a good scenario as those chasing in pursuit could become discouraged and fold. Patient-riding Julien Leparoux, a multiple champion jockey at Churchill, would appear a good fit.

Get more on the Derby Trial by visiting page 111 of the Count-down to the Crown Preseason Annual [here](#).

Derby Trial Stakes selections:
W) BAYERN; P) MATADOR; S) MYOSITIS DAN

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

Top choice Appreciating finished off the board in the Star Shoot Stakes, while top choice Divine Oath was 2nd in the Lexington at Keeneland with some QP crossover appeal.

Last week's C2QP selections: 2: 0-1-0
Season selections: 3: 1-1-0.

Everyone's a Critic

This section reviews the week that was in the 3YO ranks. Horse Player NOW racing analyst Brian Nadeau joins Jeremy Plonk to look at the runners making moves toward the Queen's Plate and Woodbine Oaks each week.

- Star Shoot Stakes -
(Saturday/Woodbine)



The highlight of the weekend at Woodbine was **Saturday's \$125,000 Star Shoot**, which was loaded with talented open runners, as well as plenty who have their sights set on the Oaks later in the year. While the win went to the talented Kentucky-bred Zensational Bunny, runner-up PALADIN BAY (Harold Ladouceur) showed she could be a major Oaks player this year in what was her first start since winning the Ontario Lassie December 14. The daughter of Sligo Bay (IRE) was a busy 3-for-9 as a 2-year-old, which also include a local win in the Princess Elizabeth in November and showed Sunday she's intent on picking up where she left off in 2013. Arch rival LEXIE LOU (John Ross), who finished behind 'Bay

in the Lassie and Queen Elizabeth but beat her when winning the South Ocean in November, was 4th in a start she surely needed. Another daughter of Sligo Bay, she was 3-for-8 as a 2-year-old and deserves a much longer look in her next start. Ontario Debutante winner SKYLANDER GIRL (Alexander Patykevich) was 6th in her first start since running 3rd in the local Fanfreluche October 26 and is another who should improve off this tightener and with some class relief next time. The daughter of Stroll was 2-for-7 last year and may simply be a cut below the two who bested her in the Star Shoot.

- Lexington Stakes -
(Saturday/Keeneland)



AMI'S HOLIDAY (Josie Carroll), who made some waves as a 2-year-old, returned at 3 in a tough spot, **Saturday's G3 Lexington at Keeneland**, but showed his talent with a 4th-place finish, in what was his first start since December. The son of Harlan's Holiday won his debut and then the G3 Grey at Woodbine in October but disappointed when 5th in the Coronation Futurity and 3rd in the Display, which closed out his juvenile campaign. AMI'S HOLIDAY reasserted himself in the Lexington, as he was in contention until deep stretch in an effort that should set him up for a big move forward in his next start and one that certainly solidifies his status as a major Plate contender later this summer.

Allowance Races

Saturday at Woodbine, ENDEAVOR'S DREAM (Nicholas Gonzalez) improved in his second start of the year, when he was 2nd in a N2L allowance going 7 furlongs over the Polytrack. The son of Endeavor flashed talent over the local surface last year, which culminated in a MSW score in his seasonal finale in December but was a modest 4th on the main track at Gulfstream Park March 30. Endeavor's Dream clearly likes the local oval and with El Prado (IRE) on the bottom of his pedigree, figures to relish every inch of the Plate's 1 1/4 miles. ON TOP OF THE BAY (Mario Maver), who was last seen winning a MSW over the track December 15, didn't fire in a 7th-place finish. The son of Paynes Bay has started only three times and likely needed Saturday's run, but will have to improve in a hurry in his next start to warrant Plate consideration.

THE IMPOSTER (Robert Tiller) made it 2-for-2 Sunday at Woodbine when he returned in a 5-furlong optional claimer in what was his first start since November 24. The gelded son of Wilko snuck through the maiden claiming ranks when winning his debut but doesn't figure to be offered for a tag anytime soon. The Imposter has shown plenty of tactical speed in his brief career and figures to get a stiffer test next



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time, when the distances and quality of competition will no doubt increase.

Maiden Races

If HOT HOT HEAT (Al Stall) wasn't on anyone's Plate radar before Saturday, he certainly was after his shocking 40-1 maiden special weight win over the Keeneland Polytrack. The son of Pulpit was 11th and last in his debut sprinting over the turf at Fair Grounds in January but looked like a new horse at Keeneland, setting a quick and contested pace before opening up and holding on late for a three-quarter-length win. Hot Hot Heat has a ton of upside, a wonderful pedigree and is in expert hands with Stall, who conditioned Horse of the Year Blame, among other stars and rates as an exciting newcomer to the Plate trail.

There's a new name to watch on the Plate scene, as ALPHA HIGH (Sid Attard) announced his presence after a 1-length maiden special weight win Sunday at Woodbine, in a race that was loaded with nominees. The son of Alphabet Soup made his debut at Gulfstream Park March 29 and finished a distant 5th going 7 furlongs on the main track but clearly relished the Polytrack going the same distance at Woodbine. Alpha High stalked the early pace before drawing clear late and is certainly bred to relish the Plate's 1 1/4 miles. Behind him were ONE DESTINY (Alec Fehr), MILWAUKEE FLASH (Michael Doyle) and KEEN GIZMO (Josie Carroll), who ran 3-4-5, respectively, and all warrant further inspection in their next starts. One Destiny is especially intriguing, as he was making his career debut and was beaten just a length. The son of Dance To Destiny set the early pace before relenting late and has a high cruising speed that could make him a serious danger when he stretches to two turns. Milwaukee Flash remains a maiden after six starts, but if you're a fan it is worth noting that dad Milwaukee Brew took some time to get going as well and was much better later in his 3-year-old season (and beyond). Keen Gizmo may not be as talented as the top-2, but the son of Giant Gizmo is in expert hands and, after just four lifetimes starts—and only two on Polytrack—is far too early to give up on him. If there was a major disappointment it would certainly be BEST COUNTRY (Roger Laurin), who flashed a ton of promise in all three of his juvenile starts but was 10th, beaten 14 3/4 lengths. The son of Best Of The Bests (IRE) hit the board in all of his starts last year but tired badly after pressing One Destiny for a half-mile and needs to wake up in a hurry if he wants to get back on the Plate trail.

Later on the Sunday card, ROB'S GIANT GIZMO (Michelle Love) returned running and broke his maiden in wire-to-wire fashion going 6 furlongs. The son of Giant Gizmo flashed plenty of promise in his lone start at 2, when he closed from 8th to get 2nd in a June MSW over the track and seemed like a much more polished individual Sunday. The win puts Rob's Giant Gizmo in line for a stretch out in distance in his next start and his versatile running style should come in handy. SNOWY LEGACY (John

Charalambous) lost nothing in defeat in his 2nd-place run and has now hit the board in both lifetime starts. The son of Milwaukee Brew was 3rd in his debut over the track in December, when he made a sharp middle move before flattening out late and certainly rates as one of the more intriguing under the radar Plate possibilities.

On the Oaks Side

Sunday at Woodbine fans were treated to a thrilling finish between THE IMPOSTER (Robert Tiller, see above) and WILD N CLEVER (Nicholas Gonzalez), with the former winning by a neck in a 5-furlong dash over the Polytrack. Wild N Clever, however, will garner plenty of Oaks support after this run, as she was testing males off a November layoff. The daughter of Offlee Wild hit the board in all three local starts last year and won her seasonal finale in November. Wild N Clever returned this winter at Gulfstream but failed to fire when 8th and 7th in a turf sprint and main track sprint, respectively, but showed Sunday that she clearly favors the Polytrack and offers plenty of upside moving forward.

High Fives

Jeremy Plonk's Top-5 rated performances by class so far this season for Queen's Plate nominees (Jan. 1-present).

Maiden Race

1. HOT HOT HEAT (Keeneland, 4/19, 1st) *NEW*
2. MAJESTIC SUNSET (Keeneland, 4/6, 2nd)
3. MAJESTIC SUNSET (Gulfstream, 1/11, 3rd)
4. BUTTERFLY STRIKE (Keeneland, 4/12, 4th)
5. ALPHA HIGH (Woodbine, 4/19, 1st) *NEW*

Allowance Race

1. HEART TO HEART (Keeneland, 4/9, 1st)
2. EIGHTY NINE RED (Woodbine, 4/12, 1st)
3. RHYTHM BLUES (Keeneland, 4/13, 2nd)
4. RHYTHM BLUES (Gulfstream, 3/20, 3rd)
5. LATIN PIPER (Keeneland, 4/13, 3rd)

Stakes Race

1. WE MISS ARTIE (Spiral, TP, 3/22, 1st)
2. WE MISS ARTIE (Kitten's Joy, TP, 1/19, 2nd)
3. AMI'S HOLIDAY (Lexington, Kee, 4/19, 4th)
4. PALADIN BAY (Star Shoot, WO, 4/19, 2nd) *NEW*
5. COLTIMUS PRIME (Blue Grass, Kee, 4/12, 5th)

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155TH
QUEEN'S
PLATE

WOODBINE RACETRACK, JULY 6

April 25, 2014

Jeremy Plonk's Top 20

1	WE MISS ARTIE <i>Trainer: Todd Pletcher</i> <i>Javier Castellano named on 2-ride commitment for Ky Derby/Queen's Plate.</i>	11	SPADINA ROAD <i>Trainer: Robert Tiller</i> <i>Kingarvie winner danced the dances at 2 and progressed nicely; more ceiling?</i>
2	HEART TO HEART <i>Trainer: Brian Lynch</i> <i>Powerful turf mile score at Keeneland shows he's advanced nicely at age 3.</i>	12	MONEY TALKS <i>Trainer: William Tharenos</i> <i>Looking forward to his Friday return; Damside pedigree will take him long way.</i>
3	AMI'S HOLIDAY <i>Trainer: Josie Carroll</i> <i>Liked his return bid at Keeneland and sets him up well for the summer campaign.</i>	13	CLEARER VIEW <i>Trainer: Malcolm Pierce</i> <i>Disappointed in Thursday at Keeneland, but against best 3YO MSW field of meet.</i>
4	MAJESTIC SUNSET <i>Trainer: Mark Casse</i> <i>Failed to draw into Thurs Kee race from AE list; stakes-placed 2YO sitting on breakout.</i>	14	EIGHTY NINE RED <i>Trainer: Michael DePaulo</i> <i>Returned running Sat at Woodbine with 2nd straight win – now must pass distance test.</i>
5	COLTIMUS PRIME <i>Trainer: Justin Nixon</i> <i>Jumps Asserting Bear after a better-than-expected showing in Blue Grass – rising.</i>	15	RHYTHM BLUES <i>Trainer: Michael Matz</i> <i>2nd-best to Pletcher buzzsaw at Kee, though pedigree might fall short of classics.</i>
6	ASSERTING BEAR <i>Trainer: Reade Baker</i> <i>Coronation Futurity winner disappointed some in Blue Grass, but he's proven.</i>	16	MANGUSTA <i>Trainer: Michael Mattine</i> <i>Well-meant debut winner training well at Gulfstream for return; may be a runner.</i>
7	LLANARMON(f) <i>Trainer: Roger Attfield</i> <i>G2 Natalma champ has pedigree to play. Geared back up at Payson in Mar.</i>	17	BEAR'S REALITY <i>Trainer: Reade Baker</i> <i>2nd-best in opening day ALW return behind Eighty Nine Red – fond of the Poly surface.</i>
8	MATADOR <i>Trainer: Mark Casse</i> <i>Gets a nice pace set-up in Derby Trial against heavyweights Saturday.</i>	18	BUTTERFLY STRIKE <i>Trainer: Malcolm Pierce</i> <i>Sam-Son blueblood made positive impression at Kee; sitting on breakout win.</i>
9	ARAGORN AMI (f) <i>Trainer: Josie Carroll</i> <i>Unbeaten Martha Washington winner's worktab interrupted early March.</i>	19	INDIAN GUIDE <i>Trainer: Mark Casse</i> <i>Well-backed in troubled return at Kee, but has pedigree to achieve more – and soon.</i>
10	PALADIN BAY (f) <i>Trainer: Harold Ladaucer</i> <i>Good run 2nd in open company Star Shoot sprinting, setting table for longer tries.</i>	20	TOWER OF TEXAS <i>Trainer: Roger Attfield</i> <i>Troubled trip in return at Keeneland, but well-bred runner fits nicely vs. ONT-bred.</i>