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## **THE PARTY GOES ON THE MORNING AFTER AT MCPEEK BARN FOLLOWING KENTUCKY DERBY-KENTUCKY OAKS SWEEP**

**LOUISVILLE, KY (May 5, 2024)** – Standing outside his barn at Churchill Downs on Sunday morning, trainer **Kenny McPeek** was asked to sum up his feelings about **Mystik Dan's** victory in the 150th running of the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI) just about 12 hours earlier.

“Wow,” was all the Lexington native could say.

**Lance Gasaway, 4 G Racing and Daniel Hamby III's** **Mystik Dan**, ridden by **Brian Hernandez Jr.**, pulled off an 18-1 upset in Saturday's Run for the Roses, finishing a nose ahead of 4-1 **Sierra Leone** and **Tyler Gaffalione**, who was another nose in front of 7-1 **Forever Young (JPN)**, with **Ryusei Sakai** aboard.

Wow was what many of the 156,710 were saying as Hernandez used a ground-saving trip before guiding **Mystik Dan** through a tiny space that opened along the rail to the front. They passed a tiring **Track Phantom**, with **Joel Rosario**, then staved off a closing rush from his competition in the field of 20 3-year-olds.

“Brian Hernandez gave him the ride,” a joyous but sleep-deprived McPeek said. “Look, he doesn't win the race without the job Brian did.”

The Derby victory came a day after the pair teamed up win the \$1.5 million Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI) for 3-year-old fillies Friday afternoon at Churchill Downs before a crowd of 107,236.

“I was fortunate to ride for Kenny,” said Hernandez about the Derby. “He and the owners entrusted in me to have the daring trip that we had. And we were fortunate to have a horse that trusted us, and he went through a couple of tight spots, and never thought twice about doing it. It was like, ‘No problem,’ and did it. It's a big team effort, more than anything.”

The victory in 2:03.34 for the mile-and-a-quarter was worth \$3.1 million. The most recent time the Derby was decided by a nose was in 1996 when **Grindstone** edged **Cavonnier**. To have three horses finish a nose apart in a photo finish, you have to go back to 1947, when **Jet Pilot** finished a head in front of **Phalanx**, who was another head in front of **Faultless**.

McPeek put a call on speaker from Pimlico Race Course officials of the invitation to run **Mystik Dan** in the Preakness in just 13 days.

While accepting the invite, McPeek said, “We're not committing. When I ran him back in two weeks (at Churchill Downs last November), it completely backfired. And we skipped the Rebel (at Oaklawn Park) because it was too short as well. So we'll watch him over the next week, and probably decide then. It will be a last-minute decision. We'll let him tell us.”

In one of the most exciting Derby finishes, Hernandez found just enough room to squeeze **Mystik Dan** through along the rail. “It got pretty tight,” Hernandez admitted. “Going around the second turn, I was watching those horses to the outside, and the thing about a race like that, everyone starts to make their moves. They can just stack and stack and stack, but we were just sitting there waiting. And the minute that Joel (Rosario, riding 41-1 **Track Phantom**) made a half a step to go meet those horses, we're shooting through. When we did that, he (Joel) tried to come back down, but by then, **Mystik Dan** was already through there.”

After slipping into the lead, **Mystik Dan** appeared headed to victory by a comfortable margin, but fast-closing **Sierra Leone** and **Forever Young** made it unbelievably tight at the wire.

“We kind of busted through there right before we straightened up and headed for home, Hernandez said. “And **Mystik Dan** switched leads, and spurted off, it was like, hurry up and get to the wire as fast as we can. It was just rolling. When we got to the eighth pole, I was thinking, wow, we're about to win the Kentucky Derby. And then, right at the wire, it was like, maybe we got beat. He never stopped running. It was the first time they were going a mile-and-a-quarter, those horses were getting to him late, but he was there for us.”

Both Hernandez and McPeek won the Oaks and Derby for the first time. McPeek became the first trainer since **Ben Jones** in 1952 to win both the Oaks and Derby. “I wish I could have met him,” McPeek said.

“For three weeks, I've felt that we had a shot at winning both races,” McPeek said. “Both horses have been doing fantastic. There was never any little issue, anywhere or anytime, with either horse. It was always all systems go.”

Two members of the partnership that owns **Mystik Dan** were at the McPeek barn on Sunday, checking out the horse, talking to the news media, and accepting the presentation of WWE championship title belts that the fight organization is presenting to winners at various sporting events this year.

When asked how many trips to the Kentucky Derby they've made, both **Lance Gasaway** and **Sherilyn Gasaway**, wife of Lance's cousin **Brent**, made a startling admission.

"Just one," Lance and Sherilyn said in unison, as she held up her index finger to signify 1.

Mystik Dan is a bay colt by the sire Goldencents, out of Ma'am, a Colonel John mare that the partners had raced. The breeding to the Spendthrift Farm sire was a match made in heaven.

"Kenny's the one who suggested it," Sharilyn Gasaway said.

Whether he races in the Preakness on May 18 or not, the Derby winner will ship directly the Saratoga in upstate New York, prepping for the June 8 Belmont Stakes. McPeck and his wife have a house there, and he said they'd accompany Mystik Dan while getting the house ready for the Belmont meeting at the track, and the regular Saratoga meet.

McPeck said Thorpedo Anna could be headed to the Acorn Stakes (GI) on June 7, and noted that he would have reservations against running her in the Belmont Stakes against Mystik Dan.

"I couldn't have Brian riding both horses," he said.

**SIERRA LEONE (2<sup>nd</sup>)/DOMESTIC PRODUCT (13<sup>th</sup>)** – Trainer **Chad Brown** is always purposeful with his thoughts and words, mindful of his phrasing and the fact that perspective can shift on a dime in Thoroughbred racing. The morning after watching Grade I winner **Sierra Leone** come up a nose short of Kentucky Derby winner **Mystik Dan** during a thrilling three-horse finish on the wire, the four-time Eclipse Award winning conditioner was introspective as he sorted out the gamut of emotions running through him after his classic near-miss.

Brown checked on Sierra Leone first hand Sunday morning, reporting that the son of Gun Runner was tired but all good following his achingly close runner-up finish in the first leg of the Triple Crown. After showing off the colt to co-owner **Derrick Smith**, who was on hand to also admire his gritty charge, Brown discussed what might be next for the Blue Grass Stakes (GI) victor after running a winning race that didn't yield the result to match.

"He's good, but he's not going to the Preakness," Brown said of Sierra Leone. "I'm going to take him to Saratoga tomorrow and he's going to train there for the Belmont (Stakes). He's a little tired. He's a real laid back horse but when we brought him he out, was a little more tired than he normally is after his races. I think giving him the five weeks to the Belmont is definitely the right thing to do."

Sierra Leone indeed expended tremendous energy in the Kentucky Derby as he rallied from 18th early on, made a wide, sweeping move off the far turn, traded bumps with third-place finisher **Forever Young (JPN)** in the lane and still only came up inches short. Brown said Sierra Leone does have a tendency to lean in and that jockey **Tyler Gaffalione** was trying to keep the colt straight in tight quarters with Forever Young without accidentally striking that rival with his stick.

"There was so much bumping going on there," Brown said. "When horses are fatigued, they have a tendency to lean in a bit like he did with his last two wins and it's going to be more exaggerated when they're more tired. He had so much to do and by the time he got to the eighth pole, he was leaning in a bit.

"What Tyler was attempting to do is make room for his left stick, which the horse really respects, and keep him straight. And he was looking for sort of a pathway to use his left stick. But with the bumping, the tight duel between those two horses, it disarmed him with the stick. All he had was a rein to pull on and it really hurt his momentum. He couldn't use it because he had no room to use his left stick without hitting his horse. He didn't want to do that either. So he was trying create a path not only to straighten out my horse who really respects that, he was trying not to foul the other horse with the stick."

Given the amount of ground Sierra Leone had to make up and the traffic he had to work his way through, Brown believes his protege ran the kind of race that further validates his belief that he brought the best horse into the 10-furlong classic.

"I'm very proud of the horse. I'm disappointed with the result, but I'm so proud of the horse, Brown said. "In my mind, he ran the best race. That's no disrespect to the winner. It's just, it's a hard race to win, everything has to go right. With the winner, the horse showed up and was prepared right and he ran terrific. You have to have a trip where everything goes right.

"It's not (Mystik Dan's) fault the doors opened for him, I wish that would have happened for me. But I don't think lesser of the winner's performance. It's just an example of two trips. But that's what has to happen here. For us, I don't think we had a bad trip. But our horse was very far back on a track that favors speed and he had to go around a lot of horses and he had a ton of ground to make up. To almost get there despite all that, I really feel he ran the best race. We'll see going forward the rest of the year where he stacks up with the entire body of work."

Brown added that his other Kentucky Derby starter, **Domestic Product**, emerged from his 13<sup>th</sup>-place run having lost a shoe and grabbed a quarter.

"Domestic Product lost a shoe leaving the gate and grabbed his quarter pretty good," Brown said. "Then he was a bit keen down the backside. **Irad (Ortiz Jr.)** was trying to tuck in and he was pulling and stuff like that. He was just never happy, he never really relaxed. I'm going to throw that race out. I do like that horse and hopefully he comes back good."

From Brown, Sierra Leone's defeat marked the third time he has sent out a horse who finished in the top three of the Derby. Brown saddled champion Good Magic to a runner-up finish behind eventual Triple Crown winner Justify in 2018 and had Zandon come home third to long shot winner Rich Strike in 2022.

“I really felt I had the best horse,” Brown said of Sierra Leone. “Nobody was really going to convince me otherwise. I wasn’t going to broadcast it, but I knew what I had. But I also went in prepared for the worse because it’s such a hard race to win. Little things can change fate. It can be brutal dealing with the agony of defeat sometimes.”

**FOREVER YOUNG (JPN) (3<sup>rd</sup>) – Susumu Fujita’s Forever Young (JPN)** was scheduled to return to Japan on Tuesday starting with a van trip to Chicago and then a flight to Narita.

Fujita left Louisville after the race Saturday night but told **Hiroshi Ando**, racing manager for trainer **Yoshito Yahagi**, that he “enjoyed the massive atmosphere and proud of his horse’s performance.”

Ando said that Yahagi was disappointed that Forever Young lost, but “how he ran his race made us so proud.”

Yahagi, who left Louisville early Sunday morning, noted that Forever Young’s third-place finish was the best result for a UAE Derby (GII) winner in the Derby and even after traveling first to Saudi Arabia where he won the Saudi Derby (GIII) and then to Dubai and on to Kentucky, “it shows that you can do it.”

While winner **Mystik Dan** was getting the golden run along the rail, Forever Young and **Sierra Leone** were exchanging bumps. Jockey **Ryusei Sakai** did not claim foul.

“Claims of foul do not happen much in Japan,” Ando said. “It is the stewards’ call, not us.”

**CATCHING FREEDOM (4<sup>th</sup>)/JUST A TOUCH (20<sup>th</sup>)** – It was a much quieter scene at Barn 22 Sunday morning than the rest of Kentucky Derby Week with both **Catching Freedom** and **Just a Touch** enjoying an easy day in the shedrow.

Both horses came out of the Derby fine and next plans are still to be determined, according to trainer **Brad Cox**.

**T O PASSWORD (JPN) (5<sup>th</sup>) – Tomoya Ozasa’s T O Password (JPN)** was scheduled to return to Japan on Tuesday starting with a van trip to Chicago and then a flight to Narita.

Ozasa left Louisville after the race Saturday night and trainer **Daisuke Takayanagi** was on an early flight Sunday morning back to Japan.

After the race, Takayanagi told his racing manager Hiroshi Ando that T O Password “got a lot of experience for just his third race and was proud of his horse’s performance. It was a great experience for adapting to racing in North America.”

Stopping by the Quarantine Barn this morning was jockey **Kazushi Kimura**.

“He’s good this morning, no problems but he is tired,” said Kimura of T O Password, who was cut off at the start when Track Phantom came inward after the break. “It is what it is. He missed the first step and from there I followed Sierra Leone. He tried hard all the way.”

**RESILIENCE (6<sup>th</sup>)** – Wood Memorial Stakes (GII) winner **Resilience** was none the worse for wear after his sixth-place run in the Kentucky Derby, but will not go on to the Preakness Stakes (GI) trainer **Bill Mott** said.

“He had absolutely a great trip,” Mott said. “I think he tried. By the looks of it, he might not have handled the 10 furlongs. He actually ran a very good race. Leaving the quarter pole, he looked like he could win as well as anybody but he just couldn’t finish it off. I’d say at this point, we wouldn’t go (to the Belmont) either.”

**STRONGHOLD (7<sup>th</sup>)** – The California-based colt **Stronghold**, who had checked in seventh in Saturday’s Derby 150, was looking fine and feeling a little frisky at Barn 48 on the Churchill backstretch Sunday morning.

Trainer **Phil D’Amato** and his wife and chief exercise rider **Sherri Alexander** had caught an early flight west to their Santa Anita headquarters but stable assistant Julie Witt was overseeing activity and noted that all was well.

“He (Stronghold) got a little hot after running yesterday, but he’s fine and feeling good this morning,” she noted. “He’ll go back to California at some point in the next week I’d guess.”

“We had five horses run here this week and Stronghold and **Elm Drive** will go back west. The others are going to stay and they’ll be joined by a few other runners currently over at Keeneland. Phil keeps a string here.”

**HONOR MARIE (8<sup>th</sup>)** – Trainer **Whit Beckman** lamented the trip his Derby runner **Honor Marie** had Saturday in Kentucky Derby 150.

“He had the worst of the worst trips,” Beckman said. “He passed a lot of horses, he was making his run. You ask **Kenny McPeck**, you look at how many Derbys he’s been in and I’m sure he’s had a lot of bad trips. He got a beautiful trip, and that’s what it takes. Hopefully we keep showing and doing this again because it was a fun week.”

**ENDLESSLY (9<sup>th</sup>)** – The Kentucky Derby ninth-place finisher, **Amerman Racing’s Endlessly**, was doing fine at Barn 35 on the Churchill Downs backstretch Sunday morning as trainer **Michael McCarthy** and assistant **Justin Curran** went about the business of dealing with their string of Kentucky horses.

McCarthy was booked on a flight to California for around 9 a.m. He had horses to run Sunday afternoon at Santa Anita from his California stable.

Both men indicated that they were pleased with the effort their son of Oscar Performance had given in his first attempt on a dirt surface.

“He certainly gave it a good try,” McCarthy said. “We beat more than half the field and that’s not bad.

“But it’s in the cards now for all concerned that the horse will go back to the grass. That’s where he wants to be.”

The horse is headed back to California, too, probably on a plane with other California runners in the next few days.

**DORNOCH (10<sup>th</sup>)/SOCIETY MAN (16<sup>th</sup>)** – **Pricilla Schaefer**, exercise rider for **Danny Gargan**, reported that all was good with **Dornoch** and **Society Man** following their 10<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-place finishes, respectively in the Kentucky Derby.

Schaefer gave both colts tons of affection Sunday morning, stressing that the fact they both came back well was the best takeaway from their efforts.

“That’s the most important thing,” Schaefer said. “You should have seen us walking back yesterday, we were laughing, smiling. We were just happy to be there and happy that they came back safe and sound. That always comes first.”

**WEST SARATOGA (12<sup>th</sup>)** – **Harry Veruchi’s West Saratoga** was scheduled to return to trainer **Larry Demeritte’s** base at The Thoroughbred Center in Lexington, Kentucky, later today.

Sitting in his tack room at Barn 42 after the race last night, Demeritte said that West Saratoga came out of the race good.

Demeritte was not at the barn today because he attends a 9:45 a.m. weekly church service in Lexington.

**EPIC RIDE (14<sup>th</sup>)** – **Welch Racing’s Epic Ride** returned to The Thoroughbred Center in Lexington, Kentucky, Saturday night after the race.

Trainer **John Ennis** reported via text that all was good with Epic Ride this morning.

“My plan was always to try and run in the Derby and give him some time off and bring him back at a mile in the summer,” Ennis said. “Maybe even Kentucky Downs.”

**FIERCENESS (15<sup>th</sup>)** – The Kentucky Derby favorite – at odds of just over 3-1 – **Fierceness** was resting in Barn 39 at Churchill Downs Sunday morning after a disappointing effort that saw him among the leaders for the first mile of the mile and a quarter, but then lacking in punch for the run through the lane.

The City of Light colt wound up 15<sup>th</sup> in the 20-horse field.

“The colt seems fine this morning,” trainer **Todd Pletcher** said. “He cooled out fine and scoped clean and he’s doing OK.

“I haven’t had a chance to discuss what’s next with **Mike (Repole)**, but I think we will take a couple of weeks and let the dust settle before we make any decision.

“I believe he’ll ship up to Saratoga in the next week.”

**JUST STEEL (17<sup>th</sup>)** – **Sebastian "Bas" Nicholl**, assistant to trainer **D. Wayne Lukas**, said **Just Steel** emerged in good order from his 17<sup>th</sup>-place finish.

**GRAND MO THE FIRST (18<sup>th</sup>)** – **Granpollo Stables’ Grand Mo the First** is scheduled to return to his base at Gulfstream Park on Monday.

“I don’t have a clear plan now (for what’s next),” trainer **Victor Barboza Jr.** said via text. “We will check the horse out the next few days and decide on a new race.”

**CATALYTIC (19<sup>th</sup>)** – **Tami Bobo, Julie Davies and George Isaacs’ Catalytic** came out of the Derby in good shape after finishing 19<sup>th</sup> with **Jose Ortiz**, trainer **Saffie Joseph Jr.** reported. “All is well. He will go back to Florida,” Joseph said.

#### **ABOUT CHURCHILL DOWNS RACETRACK**

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