ARKANSAS DERBY WINNER CLASSIC EMPIRE RETURNS TO CHURCHILL DOWNS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Monday, April 17, 2017) – Classic Empire, last year’s champion 2-year-old who won Saturday’s Arkansas Derby (Grade I), arrived at Churchill Downs on Monday morning to prepare for the Grade I, $2 million Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands on Saturday, May 6.

Classic Empire, who is expected to vie for favoritism in the Kentucky Derby after his half-length Arkansas Derby triumph, was bedded down in trainer Mark Casse’s Barn 36 shortly after 10 a.m. Saturday’s race was his first in 10 weeks.

“It was incredibly rewarding to see Classic Empire return to his full potential,” assistant trainer Norm Casse said. “It was extremely frustrating and challenging this winter with his antics but it means so much to our team that he returned the way he did.”

The 3-year-old son of Pioneerof the Nile owned by John C. Oxley has amassed $2,120,220 in earnings with a record of 7-5-0-1, which includes a win in the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile (GI) to close out his 2-year-old campaign. Classic Empire is expected to return to training Thursday or Friday at Churchill Downs.

Note: Norm Casse will be at Barn 36 from 3-3:30 p.m. Monday for media availability.

SUNLAND DERBY WINNER HENCE BREEZES AT CHURCHILL DOWNS – Calumet Farm’s Sunland Derby (Grade III) winner Hence breezed five furlongs in 1:00.40 Monday morning at Churchill Downs for Hall of Fame trainer Steve Asmussen in preparation for the Kentucky Derby (GI) on Saturday, May 6.

Hence breezed in company over the “fast” track at 6 a.m. with Local Hero (1:00.40) in fractions of :13, :25,40, :37 and :48.60, before galloping out three-quarters of a mile in 1:13.40 and seven furlongs in 1:27.

“It’s very comforting to see Hence doing well again over the Churchill surface,” Asmussen said.

The 3-year-old son of Street Boss has a lifetime record of 6-2-1-1 with earnings of $462,601.

BLUE GRASS FOURTH-PLACE FINISHER J BOYS ECHO RETURNS TO WORK TAB – Kentucky Derby contender J Boys Echo recorded a half-mile move in :49.20 Monday morning at Churchill Downs for trainer Dale Romans, his first breeze since running fourth in the Blue Grass (Grade II) on April 8 at Keeneland.

The 3-year-old colt by Mineshaft and winner of the March 4 Gotham (GIII) began his workout at the three-furlong pole under Tammy Fox, who recorded splits of :12.20, :24.60 and :36.80.

“I think this is the best he’s looked over the track,” Romans said. “This morning we just wanted to get a solid maintenance breeze in him and we’ll do something more serious next week.”

J Boys Echo has accrued $349,600 with a lifetime record of 6-2-1-1. He is stabled in Barn 4.

DOWN THE STRETCH – Blue Grass (Grade II) third-place finisher McCraken has been training regularly over the Churchill Downs surface and is scheduled for a breeze in the first or second set of horses between 6-6:30 a.m. on Tuesday. … Gazelle (GII) winner Miss Sky Warrior, trained by Kelly Breen, is scheduled to van from Keeneland to Barn 43 at Churchill Downs on Monday afternoon to begin final preparations for the $1 million Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI) on Friday, May 5. … Kentucky Oaks contender Ever So Clever returned to Steve Asmussen’s Barn 36 Monday morning following her win in Friday’s Fantasy (GII) at Oaklawn Park. … Longtime Churchill Downs and Kentucky Derby-winning trainer Lynn Whiting returned to the track Monday morning – his first visit to Churchill Downs since suffering a stroke this winter. Whiting won the 1992 Kentucky Derby with Lil E. Tee – 25 years ago.