FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CLASSIC EMPIRE PUTS IN FINAL TRAINING AT CHURCHILL DOWNS FOR PREACKNESS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Sunday, May 14, 2017) – John Oxley’s Classic Empire completed his Preakness Stakes preparations at Churchill Downs with a gallop over the main track on Sunday morning. The Kentucky Derby fourth place-finisher is scheduled to depart Barn 36 on Sunday at 5 p.m. (all times Eastern) for a van ride to Pimlico Race Course.

“He’s been doing great,” assistant trainer Norm Casse said. “Coming out from the Derby he really wasn’t that tired. We dealt with the small issue in his eye but he’s been doing very well out of the race.”

Classic Empire’s major training for the Kentucky Derby was hampered this winter when the colt refused to train on multiple occasions. Casse made the decision to bring in exercise rider Martin Rivera from their farm in Ocala, Florida to work out the kinks with the 2-year-old champion. Since then, Rivera hasn’t left Classic Empire’s side.

“He’s a happy horse,” Rivera said. “He’s been doing better each day of training and feels great moving over the track.”

Rivera galloped Classic Empire 1 ½ miles Sunday at 6 a.m. and immediately jumped in his car to drive to Pimlico prior to the colt’s arrival later this evening.

“We’re all excited to give Classic Empire another shot in the Preakness,” Casse said. “His trip was compromised in the Derby after the start and hopefully we’re in a much better spot going into the first turn next Saturday then we were in the Derby.”

ASMUSSEN DUO PREPPING FOR FINAL PREACKNESS BREEZE – Trainer Steve Asmussen’s duo of Lookin At Lee and Hence galloped Sunday morning at Churchill Downs and are expected to breeze early Monday morning before shipping to Pimlico on Tuesday for Saturday’s Preakness Stakes (GI).

Lookin At Lee was a fast-closing second in the Kentucky Derby, which gave jockey Corey Lanerie the feeling he was a Derby winner.

“Turning for home I thought we were going to win the race,” Lanerie said. “I kept him close to the rail which was playing the best throughout the weekend and once the speed started backing up we were in the perfect position. I’ve tasted what it’s like to think we are going to win the Kentucky Derby. Now hopefully we can get the job done in the Preakness.”

Asmussen’s other hope is Sunland Derby (GIII) winner and 11th place finisher in the Kentucky Derby, Hence. The 3-year-old son by Street Boss will be ridden again by jockey Florent Geroux, who is excited to give it another try in the second jewel of the Triple Crown.

“In the Derby I sat behind Corey (Lanerie) because I could see he was loaded with horse,” Geroux said. “I thought I’d follow him throughout the turn but my horse didn’t really respond to the track like his. Hopefully with a better track we can run well.”

Both horses are scheduled to arrive at Pimlico on Tuesday.

FRANCO OUT SIX TO EIGHT WEEKS WITH BROKEN WRIST – Jockey Geovanni Franco is expected to miss six to eight weeks with a fractured wrist after being displaced from his mount, Marine Pilot, in Race 8 at Churchill Downs on Saturday, according to his agent James Giannone.

“It’s definitely a bummer,” Giannone said. “He’s in good spirits and we’re glad it wasn’t worse.”

Franco, a native of Mexico, rode at Oaklawn Park this winter prior to coming to Kentucky for the Spring Meet.

MENA AVOIDS SCARY SITUATION IN SATURDAY’S EIGHTH RACE – Jockey Miguel Mena displayed outstanding horsemanship and courage during Saturday’s eighth race at Churchill Downs while helped aid loose rival Marine Pilot on the far turn of the 1 1/8-mile turf race.

Marine Pilot dropped his rider Giovanni Franco when he appeared to clip heels with another rival as horses exited the first turn and headed into the backstretch. As a result, the reins were dangling loose in front of Marine Pilot’s front legs as he continued on rider-less in mid-pack.

“I could see the reins dangling beneath him,” jockey Brian Hernandez Jr., rider of ninth-place finisher Datths Our Guy, said. “I told Miguel ‘Watch out for that horse. His reins are going everywhere.’”

Mena, who was rallying on the outside under Archangel Rose, rode up along the side of Marine Pilot at the three-eighths pole and, amazingly, flipped the reins back over Marine Pilot’s head with his left hand to prevent the reins from getting tangled in the horse’s legs.

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“He was a true hero,” Kentucky Horse Racing Commission Chief Steward Barbara Borden said. “It was an amazing display of horsemanship done with the safety of the horses and his fellow riders in mind.”

“My horse ran a very good second and if I didn’t get the reins back on the loose horse, he could’ve tripped and fell.”

Marine Pilot was corralled after the race by Churchill Downs’ outriders and returned safely to trainer John Ortiz’s barn.

To view the full replay click here: https://www.churchilldowns.com/racing-wagering/toteboard

HERNANDEZ JR. PILOTS FOUR WINNERS ON SATURDAY’S CARD – Jockey Brian Hernandez Jr. added four wins to his belt Saturday at Churchill Downs, which brought his victory total to 11 through the first nine days of the 38-day Spring Meet.

“It was a great day,” Hernandez said. “It’s always fun to get on a roll like that. Hopefully we can keep the streak going.”

Hernandez piloted the first two winners on Saturday’s card: Tarpy’s Surprise ($8) and Miss Cobblestone ($15.60). In the fifth race, the Louisiana native rode Fifth Title ($12.60) to a ½-length victory on the turf and continued his winning ways in the seventh, which gave trainer Tim Glyshaw his 400th career victory with Louies Flower ($12.40).

Hernandez has three mounts on Sunday’s card.

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR TRAINER LYNN WHITING SET FOR MONDAY AT 2 P.M. – The memorial service for late Kentucky Derby-winning trainer Lynn Whiting has been set for Monday (May 15) at 2 p.m. EDT and will be held in Churchill Downs’ Triple Crown Room in the Jockey Club Suites.

Whiting, a second-generation horseman who raced primarily at tracks in Kentucky and Arkansas best-known for his victory in the 1992 Kentucky Derby with W.C. Partee’s Lil E. Tee, died April 19 in Louisville at age 77 only days after his return to his Barn 18 at Churchill Downs following weeks of hospital and rehabilitation care.

A native of Great Falls, Mon., the soft-spoken Whiting was highly-regarded by his peers as a patient, skilled and accomplished horseman who possessed a keen eye for potential in young horses. His Kentucky Derby winner was the best-known example of the latter, as he was purchased privately by Partee during the colt’s 2-year-old season for $200,000.

Whiting, who saddled 319 winners at Churchill Downs to rank 16th all-time at the Louisville, Ky. racetrack, learned his craft from his father, Lyle Whiting, a one-time jockey and longtime trainer.

Overall, Lynn Whiting won 1,279 races and $23.9 million in prize money from 6,113 starts as trainer since he saddled his first winner in February of 1969 at the now-defunct Lincoln Downs in Rhode Island. His final victory came with Jury Wise on March 10 at Oaklawn Park.

Whiting is survived by his wife, Nell, and daughters Carrie and Lori.

STAKES PROBABLES – Saturday will mark the 80th running’s of the $100,000 Matron Stakes (GIII), for fillies and mares 3-years-old and upward at 1 1/16 miles, and the $100,000 Louisville Handicap (GIII), for 3-year-olds and upward at 1 ½ miles on the Matt Winn Turf Course. Below are the probable entrants:

Matron Stakes – Crooked Stick, Lady Fog Horn, Tiger Moth, Walkabout, Weep No More.

Louisville Handicap (with assigned handicap weights) – Bullards Alley (116 lbs.), Generous Kitten (115), Street Fashion (115), Patrick's Day (114), Grey Wizard (113), Nessy (111).

Saturday will be the first time that the Matron Stakes will be run at Churchill Downs. It was previously run at Arlington Park.

WORK TAB – There were 86 horses on Churchill Downs work tab Sunday morning headlined by the speedy Whitmore, who recorded a bullet work for trainer Ron Moquett, clipping through a half-mile in :46.40. … Ben Ali (GIII) runner-up Eagle breezed four furlongs in :48.20 for trainer Neil Howard. … Southwest (GIII) runner-up Petrov worked a half-mile in :48.80. … Kentucky Oaks (GI) ninth-place finisher Ever So Clever had an easy half-mile maintenance work in :51 for trainer Steve Asmussen. … There were four horses who breezed on the Matt Winn Turf Course at 9:30 a.m. with American Oaks (GI) runner-up Sassy Little Lila working the fastest of the group with a half mile in :48.80. …

For the full Churchill Downs work tab, click here: https://www.churchilldowns.com/horsemen/racing/workouts.

DOWN THE STRETCH – The Single 6 Jackpot has a carryover of $14,762 that gets underway in Race 5 on Sunday. The $1 Super Hi-5 also has a carryover of $20,219 in Race 10. … From all of us at Churchill Downs, Happy Mother’s Day!