News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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BARN FAVORITE THE PLAYER SEEKS FIRST STAKES VICTORY IN SATURDAY’S GRADE III, $100,000 ACK ACK AT CHURCHILL DOWNS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017) – Some horses hold favoritism over others around the barn and those sentiments are echoed nearly every day in trainer William “Buff” Bradley’s shedrow with 4-year-old colt The Player, the 5-1 co-third choice in Saturday’s 25th running of the $100,000 Ack Ack (Grade III) at Churchill Downs.

“He’s such a funny horse around the barn,” Bradley said. “He literally acts like a dog sometimes. He sits in his stall, which you don’t see a horse do. As he’s grown up, he’s always had quite the personality. One of the funny things he does is lie down in his stall with his head sticking out below the webbing to make sure he isn’t missing anything walking by him.”

Owned and bred by Bradley in partnership with Carl Hurst and Buff’s late father Fred, the 4-year-old son of Street Hero comes from a deep-rooted home-grown pedigree. The Player is out of the broodmare Hour Queen, whose mother, Town Queen, was Bradley’s first stakes winner.

“I’ve had a lot of horses with this type of pedigree,” Bradley said. “Town Queen’s mother (Regal Export) produced King of Speed and Chief Export. All three are black-type horses. The family matures late so we’re hoping that is the case with (The Player).”

The Player first tested stakes company in the 2016 Indiana Derby (GII) and was narrowly defeated by the Bob Baffert-trained Cupid. Almost a year on the sidelines thereafter, The Player finished third in the $70,000 Kelly’s Landing on closing night of the Spring Meet at Churchill Downs. After a disappointing sixth-place effort in the $200,000 West Virginia Governor’s Stakes, the colt received a confidence-booster on Aug. 27 in a one-mile allowance race at Ellis Park and comfortably defeated a field of seven by two lengths in 1:35.16, finishing less than a second off the track record of 1:34.41.

“He’s really been training great since that race,” Bradley said. “I think the outside post will actually help us Saturday so I’m pretty pleased with that. If he runs like he’s training I think he’s sitting on a big effort.”

Jockey Calvin Borel, who has a record four victories in the Ack Ack, has the call on The Player.

The race for 3-year-olds and up over the track’s one-turn mile distance is one of three stakes events scheduled on the penultimate racing program of the 11-day September Meet. Also on the Saturday schedule are the fifth running of the $200,000 Lukas Classic (GIII), a 1 1/8-mile race for 3-year-olds and up, and the $100,000 Jefferson Cup (Listed), a 1 1/8 mile event for 3-year-olds on the Matt Winn Turf Course. The Ack Ack is scheduled as the 10th of 11 races on the program that begins at 12:45 p.m. (all times Eastern). Post time for the Ack Ack is scheduled for 5:20 p.m.

The field for the Ack Ack from the rail out (with jockey, assigned weight, and morning line odds): Harmac (James Graham, 118, 30-1), Conquest Big E (Florent Geroux, 121, 4-1), Etruscan (Jesus Castanon, 121, 30-1), Awesome Slew (Corey Lanerie, 121, 6-5), Warrior’s Club (Jon Court, 121, 5-1), Pinson (C.J. McMahon, 121, 20-1), The Player (Borel, 121, 5-1), Zulu (Channing Hill, 121, 9-2) and Gray Sky (Chris Landeros, 121, 30-1).

EAGLE SEEKS REDEMPTION VS. HONORABLE DUTY IN SATURDAY’S LUKAS CLASSIC – William Farish’s homebred Eagle is set for a rematch against DARRS Inc.’s Honorable Duty in Saturday’s fifth running of the $200,000 Lukas Classic (GIII) at Churchill Downs.

“He’s been doing great in his training up to this point,” trainer Neil Howard said. “I have a lot of trust in Brian (Hernandez Jr.) and he’ll hopefully run as well as he did two starts ago.

“Brian has such a hard work ethic. Not only is he an accomplished rider, he works hard and is extremely loyal. He’s a true student of the game and knows many facets of what goes into training horses.”

Howard and Hernandez have teamed up 335 times for 42 wins, 55 seconds and 47 thirds. Hernandez has ridden Eagle in 18 of his 22 starts.

Eagle, a 5-year-old horse by Candy Ride (ARG), squared off with Honorable Duty this winter at Fair Grounds in the Feb. 25 Mineshaft (GIII) and April 1 New Orleans Handicap (GII) but only managed a fourth-place effort in both starts.

Honorable Duty, the 6-5 morning line favorite, has not been seen since a runner-up finish to early Breeders’ Cup Classic favorite Gun Runner in the $500,000 Stephen Foster Handicap Presented by GE Appliances (GI).
“He’s been training really great since the Stephen Foster,” Walsh said. “We kept him at home this summer and he put his first published breeze since the race in early August. He worked six furlongs (in 1:12.60) the other morning [Sept. 23] with Corey (Lanerie) aboard and he just did it so effortlessly. He loves this surface and I think he’ll fit this race well coming back off the layoff.”

The 1 1/8-mile Lukas Classic for 3-year-olds and up honors the iconic 82-year-old Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas. The four-time winner of the Kentucky Derby and Kentucky Oaks and conditioner of 26 Eclipse Award-winning champions has been based at Churchill Downs’ Barn 44 since 1989.

The Lukas Classic, which earned Grade III status for the first time and received a $25,000 purse increase to $200,000, is the centerpiece of a Churchill Downs stakes tripleheader that shares the spotlight with top milers in the $100,000 Ack Ack (GIII) and 3-year-olds in the $100,000 Jefferson Cup (Listed) at 1 1/8 miles on the Matt Winn Turf Course – the only stakes race on grass during the September Meet.

The complete Lukas Classic field from the rail out (with jockeys, assigned weights, and morning line odds): Seeking the Soul (Florent Geroux, 121, 8-1); Albano (Channing Hill, 121, 30-1); Fear the Cowboy (Jesus Rios, 123, 4-1); Flashy Jewel (Chris Landeros, 121, 12-1); Money Flows (Miguel Mena, 121, 5-1); Eagle (Hernandez Jr., 123, 3-1); and Honorable Duty (Lanerie, 123, 6-5).

MR. MISUNDERSTOOD LEADS THE CHARGE AS 7-5 FAVE IN JEFFERSON CUP – Stanton Flurry’s Flurry Racing Stables’ Mr. Misunderstood will remain in his Churchill Downs backyard as he seeks his third consecutive victory in Saturday’s $100,000 Jefferson Cup (Listed) for trainer Brad Cox.

“I think it’s good to keep him at home,” Cox said. “He ran a great effort in the Super Derby and he’s been training great since then.”

Named after the Eric Church hit, “Mr. Misunderstood”, the 3-year-old son of Archarcharch is perfect in five career starts over the turf course with the only blemishes in his career coming in dirt races.

“He looks great,” said Flurry, 27, a native of Hot Springs, Ark. “I’m heading to Churchill now for the race and I hope he runs like he’s been all summer.”

The complete Jefferson Cup field from the rail out (with jockey and morning line odds): Bronson (Corey Lanerie, 5-1); Giant Payday (Chris Landeros 9-2); Mr. Misunderstood (Florent Geroux, 7-5); Your Way (James Graham, 12-1); My Barley (Jose Valdivia Jr., 10-1); Guest Suite (Brian Hernandez Jr., 6-1); Mr Cub (Joe Rocco Jr., 8-1); and Adonis Creed (Shaun Bridgmohan, 8-1).

Mr. Misunderstood will carry 120 pounds while the others will tote 118.

CHURCHILL DOWNS TO SALUTE MEMBERS OF NEW ‘HONOR ROLL’ THURSDAY – Churchill Downs officials will salute the members of its new “Honor Roll” on Thursday during the races with a cocktail reception for the honorees and their families in The Mansion.

The “Honor Roll,” which is prominently displayed on a wall on the second floor of the Clubhouse as part of its recent $16 million renovation, recognizes the stellar careers and accomplishments of notable jockeys, trainers and owners in Churchill Downs’ storied history.

The members of the “Honor Roll” with criteria to be met are listed below:

Owners with 100 documented wins at Churchill Downs (1976-2016), 15 Churchill Downs stakes wins, five Churchill Downs trainer titles, three Kentucky Derby wins or a Churchill Downs-based Hall of Fame trainer: Tom Amoss; George “Rusty” Arnold II; Steve Asmussen; Bob Baffert; William Huntley Baker; Edward D. Brown; Sam Bryant; Doug Davis Jr.; William “Jinks” Fires; James “Sunny Jim” Fitzsimmons; MikeMaker; Shug McGaughey II; Paul McGee; Kenny McPeek; Angel Montano Sr.; Bill Mott; Carl Nafzger; Steve Penrod; Will Perkins; Todd Pletcher; Dale Romans; John F. Schorr; Herbert J. “Derby Dick” Thompson; Harry Trotseki; Jack Van Berg; Dave Vance; Elliott Walden; Lynn Whiting; Ian Wilkes; and Vester R. “Tennessee” Wright.

Jockeys with 500 wins at Churchill Downs, 20 Churchill Downs stakes wins, five Churchill Downs trainer titles, three Kentucky Derby wins or a Churchill Downs-based Hall of Fame trainer: Tom Amoss; George “Rusty” Arnold II; Steve Asmussen; Bob Baffert; William Huntley Baker; Edward D. Brown; Sam Bryant; Doug Davis Jr.; William “Jinks” Fires; James “Sunny Jim” Fitzsimmons; Mike Maker; Shug McGaughey II; Paul McGee; Kenny McPeek; Angel Montano Sr.; Bill Mott; Carl Nafzger; Steve Penrod; Will Perkins; Todd Pletcher; Dale Romans; John F. Schorr; Herbert J. “Derby Dick” Thompson; Harry Trotseki; Jack Van Berg; Dave Vance; Elliott Walden; Lynn Whiting; Ian Wilkes; and Vester R. “Tennessee” Wright.

Trainers with 300 wins at Churchill Downs, 20 Churchill Downs stakes wins, five Churchill Downs trainer titles, three Kentucky Derby wins or a Churchill Downs-based Hall of Fame trainer: Tom Amoss; George “Rusty” Arnold II; Steve Asmussen; Bob Baffert; William Huntley Baker; Edward D. Brown; Sam Bryant; Doug Davis Jr.; William “Jinks” Fires; James “Sunny Jim” Fitzsimmons; Mike Maker; Shug McGaughey II; Paul McGee; Kenny McPeek; Angel Montano Sr.; Bill Mott; Carl Nafzger; Steve Penrod; Will Perkins; Todd Pletcher; Dale Romans; John F. Schorr; Herbert J. “Derby Dick” Thompson; Harry Trotseki; Jack Van Berg; Dave Vance; Elliott Walden; Lynn Whiting; Ian Wilkes; and Vester R. “Tennessee” Wright.

Thursday’s eighth race, which has a scheduled post time of 8:23 p.m., is named in honor of the “Honor Roll” members. The first race of the evening is 5 p.m.

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ROMANS VS. MOTT – With four days of racing remaining in the September Meet, trainer Dale Romans has five opportunities to overtake Bill Mott for the all-time leading trainer at Churchill Downs, trailing 701-700 wins.

   Mott and Romans both have three entries Thursday-Saturday at Churchill Downs.

   Romans: Jan One (Thursday, Race 8); Bandito (Friday, Race 7); Miss Stalwart (Friday, Race 8); Dance Rhythms (Saturday, Race 7); and Tizpure (Sunday, Race 10).

   Mott does not have any horses entered this week at Churchill Downs.

MILESTONE WATCH – Along with the heated-battle between Dale Romans and Bill Mott for the all-time leading trainer honors at Churchill Downs (701-700 wins), trainer Greg Foley (398) is two wins away from 400 career-victories beneath the historic Twin Spires while trainer Ian Wilkes is targeting 200 career victories at Churchill Downs (194 wins). … Trainer Mike Tomlinson is just one win away from 500-career victories. The Oklahoma native has 499 victories so far in his 28-year career.

MEET LEADERS – Corey Lanerie, a 13-time leading rider at Churchill Downs, holds a 12-7 win lead over Brian Hernandez Jr. and Florent Geroux. … Trainer Kenny McPeek remains the leader in the trainer standings with five victories. Brad Cox is just one win behind in second while Rudolphe Brisset, Mark Casse, Chris Hartman, Mike Maker and Ian Wilkes all have three. … Paul Fireman’s Fern City Stables holds the top spot in the owner’s standings with three victories.

FAMILY ADVENTURE DAY – Family Adventure Day Presented by Kroger, scheduled for Sunday’s closing day card at Churchill Downs, is a fun and affordable day at the track with more than 20 activities for kids under 12, access to a family viewing area to see the horses up close, family discounts on tickets and meals and 10 live races.

   Kids can enter a drawing for a chance to win a spot in the day’s stick horse race on the famous turf track. Other activities include bounce houses, petting zoo, miniature pony rides, and live science experiments on the Plaza Stage with the Kentucky Science Center.

   To purchase tickets visit: www.churchilldowns.com/familyadventureday.

DOWN THE STRETCH – Racing returns Thursday beneath the Twin Spires for the final Twilight Thursday card of 2017. Fans will enjoy $1 draft beer, live music by Otis Junior and The Jesse Lees, food trucks and receive wagering advice at the Racing 101 booth. Admission starts at $3 with the first of eight races kicking off at 5 p.m. … The 20-cent Single 6 Jackpot, which has a carryover of $40,207, kicks off in Race 3 with a scheduled post time of 5:58 p.m. (all times Eastern). … The “Who’s the Champ? Handicapping Contest” will be held Sunday. Interested participants can enter for $35 ($30 for TSC Elite members) for a chance to win the $1,000 cash voucher first prize by placing mythical $2 win and place bets on Races 3-8. Second place receives a $500 voucher and third place is worth a $200 voucher. Registration takes place those days between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on the Clubhouse second floor at the top of the Gate 17 escalators. … The 50/50 charitable gaming raffle closes Sunday, the final day of racing for the September Meet. Proceeds from the raffle will go towards charitable organizations that benefit from the Churchill Downs Incorporated Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that helps support the critical work of nonprofits in our industry, make a difference in important public health programs and provide meaningful opportunities in art and education. Visit www.derbygives.com to purchase tickets.

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