WARRIOR’S CLUB CARRIES HOPES OF MORE THAN 200 CHURCHILL DOWNS RACING CLUB MEMBERS IN SATURDAY’S ACK ACK

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Friday, Sept. 29, 2017) – Churchill Downs Racing Club’s Warrior’s Club, winner of the 2016 $200,000 Spendthrift Stallion Stakes and recent Saratoga allowance victor, is ready for a chance to land his first graded stakes triumph in Saturday’s 25th running of the $100,000 Ack Ack Stakes (GIII) at Churchill Downs.

“Winning at Saratoga this summer was pretty special,” Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas said. “When you have a horse that is doing so well I want to give them a chance to step into stakes company. I think seven furlongs to one mile will fit him perfectly. When they’re doing good, you step out of the box. If it doesn’t work, we always have a great horse to fall back on.”

Warrior’s Club, listed as the 5-1 co-third choice on the morning line, defeated a field of 10 in a 6 ½-furlong allowance race on Sept. 2 at Saratoga by three lengths at odds of 7-1. The colt by Warrior’s Reward has now banked $293,299 with an overall record of 16-3-3-3.

“This horse runs hard every time he steps on the racetrack,” Lukas said. “He wins his share and is an absolute joy to train for the racing club.”

The Churchill Downs Racing Club was inaugurated in 2016 with 400 members split into two clubs with the goal to give a behind the scenes look into Thoroughbred ownership. The club has enjoyed exclusive club events for morning training, access to the paddock area for the horse’s races and complimentary admission to Churchill Downs.

“I never thought the club would be this successful,” Lukas said. “Now we have a horse who’s earned nearly $300,000. We have a situation where we have a very valuable horse and the club has really taken a life of its own. One of the nice things that has come out of this experience is the education. I try to share some very important industry insights with the group and bring them up to speed on what goes into training horses. I think it’s very important to give fans this perspective to grow the sport and bring in new owners.”

The Racing Club also has Party Club, a 2-year-old Sky Mesa filly who is scheduled to run in Saturday’s seventh race, a seven-furlong maiden special weight. Two weeks ago, Party Club finished a game second when she was caught late at the wire by Grats Road to lose by a head at odds of 8-1.

At least 15 members of the Racing Club have moved on to join other Thoroughbred ownership groups, according to Churchill Downs Racing Club Manager Gary Palmisano.

The Ack Ack, 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 track’s 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 Race 10 on Churchill Downs’ 11-race program with a scheduled post time of 5:20 p.m. (all times Eastern).

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 (Calvin Borel, 121, 5-1), Zulu (Channing Hill, 121, 30-1) and Gray Sky (Chris Landeros, 121, 30-1).

MULTIPLE GRADED STAKES WINNER BIRD SONG RETIRES – Bird Song, a multiple graded stakes-winning homebred for Marylou Whitney, has been retired, according to trainer Ian Wilkes.

“He’s been a special horse to us on the racetrack,” Wilkes said. “He’s retired happy, healthy and sound so that’s really what’s most important in this game.”

A five-time winner, Bird Song’s biggest victory came in the Grade II, $400,000 Alysheba Presented by Big Fish Casino on Kentucky Oaks Day.

“I still don’t think we saw his full potential,” Wilkes said. “This horse has won at all distances throughout his career. He was very versatile on the track.”

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Bird Song broke his maiden at Churchill Downs on June 26, 2016 in a six-furlong maiden special weight with a final time of 1:09.58. Following his maiden-breaking performance, Bird Song traveled with Wilkes’ string to Saratoga and was victorious in a six-furlong allowance race.

Wilkes closed Bird Song’s 2016 campaign with a one-mile allowance victory at Churchill Downs on Nov. 24. in a blistering 1:34.06, less than one second off the track record of 1:33.26.

Bird Song began his 2017 campaign with a victory in the Fred Hooper Stakes (GIII) at Gulfstream Park prior to his Alysheba triumph.

“As Marylou and I said, the horse gave us everything and owes us nothing,” said John Hendrickson, husband of Marylou Whitney. “We were delighted to have a multiple graded stakes winner out of a champion. What more could you hope for? He’s a beautiful animal and he gave us a lot of highs and probably the top of it was his win in the Alysheba. We were sad, but we knew there was something up because his last performance wasn’t his normal self. But several farms are interested so hopefully he’ll land in a nice career. As we’ve always said, these horses don’t ask to be born so we owe it to all of our horses to take care of them.”

Bird Song is a Kentucky bred 4-year-old gray or roan son of Unbridled’s Song by the Kentucky Oaks-winning mare Bird Song began his 2017 campaign with a victory in the Fred Hooper Stakes (GIII) at Gulfstream Park prior to his Alysheba triumph.

HONORABLE DUTY ‘READY LIKE A COWBOY’S RIFLE’ FOR SATURDAY’S LUKAS CLASSIC – Following a 105-day layoff, Honorable Duty could be sitting on go as the 6-5 morning line favorite in Saturday’s fifth running of the $200,000 Lukas Classic (GIII) at Churchill Downs.

“He’s ready like a cowboy’s rifle is ready to fire,” trainer Brendan Walsh said. “He’s really been doing well so we’re all excited for Saturday.”

Owned by David Ross’ DARRS Inc., Honorable Duty was last seen in a runner-up effort behind current Breeders’ Cup Classic favorite Gun Runner in the $500,000 Stephen Foster Handicap Presented by GE Appliances (GI).

“I really think he’s doing better than the spring,” Walsh said. “He had a really solid campaign to start the year at Fair Grounds and ran two solid efforts in the Alysheba and Stephen Foster.

“This is a horse who I really can’t work in company so he’s been training solo throughout the summer. 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 (GI) 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 jockey, assigned weights, and morning line odds): Seeking the Soul (Florent Geroux, 121 pounds, 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 (Brian Hernandez Jr., 121, 3-1); and Honorable Duty (Lanerie, 123, 6-5).

‘ROAD TO KENTUCKY DERBY’ HEADS TO SANTA ANITA FOR GRADE I, $300,000 FRONTRUNNER – Ruis Racing LLC’s Bolt d’Oro is the 2-1 morning line favorite in a field of nine for Saturday’s $300,000 FrontRunner Stakes (Grade I) at Santa Anita Park, the second race on the “Road to the Kentucky Derby.”

The 1 1/16-mile contest for 2-year-olds has a scheduled post time of 7:03 p.m. (all times Eastern) and will award the Top 4 finishers points on a 10-4-2-1 scale. The Road to the Kentucky Derby, a series of 35 races, will ultimately determine the field for the 144th running of the Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (GI) on Saturday, May 5, 2018. The FrontRunner is part of the 19-race “Prep Season” that showcases foundation-building races in advance of the “Kentucky Derby Championship Series,” which begins in late February.

Bolt d’Oro is unblemished in two career starts with a 2 ¼-length maiden special weight victory on Aug. 5 at Del Mar and a three-quarter-length triumph in the Sept. 4 Del Mar Futurity (GI).

Chief among Bolt d’Oro’s challengers is Del Mar Futurity runner-up Zatter. The Zayat Stables owned, Bob Baffert trained colt by Midnight Lute is listed as the 5-2 second choice on the morning line with jockey Rafael Bejarano aboard.

The FrontRunner field from the rail out (with jockey, trainer, and morning line odds): Zatter (Bejarano, Baffert, 5-2); Take the One O One (Joe Talamo, Brian Koriner, 15-1); Ayacara (Gb) (Kent Desormeaux, Keith Desormeaux, 10-1); Bolt d’Oro (Corey Nakatani, Mick Ruis, 2-1); City Plan (Drayden Van Dyke, Eoin Harty, 20-1); Texas Wedge (Evin Roman, Peter Miller, 6-1); Encumbered (Mario Gutierrez, Simon Callaghan, 8-1); Solomini (Flavien Prat, Bob Baffert, 4-1); Continental Divide (Victor Espinoza, James Cassidy, 1-5).
The Road to the Kentucky Derby kicked off Sept. 16 at Churchill Downs with a victory by The Tabulator in the $150,000 Iroquois Stakes (GIII). For more information on the Iroquois Stakes and to relive the effort through jockey Jose Valdivia’s eyes, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qb6TCi65sdE.

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

Romans Entries: 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 – With three days of racing remaining, Corey Lanerie, a 13-time leading rider at Churchill Downs, holds a 15-8 win lead over Florent Geroux. … With two victories on Thursday’s card, Brad Cox jumped ahead (6-5 wins) of Kenny McPeek in the trainer standings. … Paul Fireman’s Fern City Stables and Ahmed Zayat’s Zayat Stables are tied in the owner standings with three victories each.

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 – Friday’s card at Churchill Downs features a 20-cent Single 6 Jackpot carryover of $42,853. The sequence begins in Race 5 at 2:45 p.m. (all times Eastern). … This week’s “Inside Churchill Downs” will not air Friday at 6 p.m. on ESPN 680 / 105.7 as the station continues its extended coverage of the events surrounding the University of Louisville’s college basketball program. Several media outlets have reported that an interim head coach is expected to be announced later in the day. … 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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