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## **TOP CONTENDERS FINALIZE PREPARATIONS FOR SATURDAY'S 'DOWNS AFTER DARK' STAKES DOUBLEHEADER**

**LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, Sept. 26, 2024)** – Several top contenders for Saturday's \$500,000 Lukas Classic (Grade II) and \$400,000 Ack Ack Stakes (GIII), part of the "Downs After Dark" program at Churchill Downs, continue to finalize their preparations ahead of the highly anticipated night of racing.

Saturday's 11-race program will begin at 6 p.m. (all times Eastern) and feature the Lukas Classic, named for Hall of Fame trainer **D. Wayne Lukas**, as Race 10 at 10:40 p.m. and the \$400,000 Ack Ack (GIII) as Race 8 at 9:37 p.m., a Breeders' Cup "Win and You're In Dirt Mile" event.

**Hit Show**, the 2-1 morning-line favorite for the Lukas Classic, schooled in the paddock Thursday morning after training, alongside his stablemate **Saudi Crown**, the 4-5 favorite for the Ack Ack. Trained by **Brad Cox**, Hit Show will be making his fourth start of the year but his first for new owner **Wathnan Racing** after being privately purchased from his breeders, **Gary and Mary West**. The son of Candy Ride (ARG) has enjoyed a solid campaign this season, with his most recent outing resulting in a half-length victory in the West Virginia Governor's Cup (GIII) at Mountaineer. He'll break from post No. 6 in the Lukas Classic under jockey **Florent Geroux**.

One of Hit Show's main contenders in the Lukas Classic is **Winchell Thoroughbreds' Disarm**, who will race without blinkers for the first time since his 3-year-old season. The **Steve Asmussen**-trained colt has run seven of his 13 career races without blinkers, including a victory in the Matt Winn Stakes (GIII) at Ellis Park and a fourth-place finish in the Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI). Disarm returned to Churchill Downs in early September where he completed two published works: a five-furlong breeze in 1:02 on Sept. 15 and a half-mile in :50 on Sept. 23. He schooled in the paddock Wednesday afternoon along with several Asmussen stablemates.

In the Ack Ack, Saudi Crown is set to lead five rivals in the one-mile contest. Owned by **FMQ Stables**, Saudi Crown has been regularly galloping at 9 a.m. in a star-powered set, including champion mare **Idiomatic**. The son of Kentucky Derby winner Always Dreaming will break from the outside post in the Ack Ack with Geroux in the saddle.

"I think he likes the one-turn mile," Geroux said. "He ran that at Ellis last time and handled it well. He's done fine going longer but a one or two-turn mile really suits him."

Saudi Crown enters the race after an impressive gate-to-wire victory in the R.A. Cowboy Jones Stakes at Ellis Park in August.

One of Saudi Crown's top challengers in the Ack Ack is **Cagliostro**, who is owned by Wathnan Racing. The Hanshin Stakes winner shipped into Churchill Downs on Tuesday from his Keeneland base. Trained by **Cherie DeVaux**, the son of Upstart is looking to rebound from a disappointing performance in the Forego Stakes (GI) at Saratoga.

Trainer **Ignacio Correas IV** confirmed that **Mufasa (CHI)** will scratch from the Ack Ack in favor of Saturday's Vosburgh Stakes (GIII) at Aqueduct.

The Downs After Dark program is the final night racing event of the year at Churchill Downs and will be celebrated with an Oktoberfest-themed evening. In addition to world-class racing, fans can enjoy local brews from West Sixth Brewing and Gravely Brewing Co., bratwurst, pretzels, polka dancing, a yodeling contest and live music.

Admission gates open at 5 p.m. with the 11-race program running from 6-11:10 p.m. General admission is \$20 and includes an official program. Guests under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Outdoor box seats range from \$28 to \$38 per person, and premium dining packages start at \$91, including the exclusive Oktoberfest VIP Package.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit [www.churchilldowns.com](http://www.churchilldowns.com).

**DOWN THE STRETCH** – Thursday's eight-race program got underway at 5 p.m. and featured the final Twilight Thursday of the year from 5-8 p.m. in the Paddock Plaza. There was \$2 select domestic can beer, live music by Shane Dawson and food truck appearances from Black Rock Grille, DonutNV and Hurrikanes. ... The Derby City 6 Jackpot was hit Thursday for \$325,602. The jackpot will start over for racing on Thursday and will have a mandatory payout for Sunday's closing day card.

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

Churchill Downs Racetrack ("CDRT"), the world's most legendary racetrack, has been the home of The Kentucky Derby, the longest continually held annual sporting event in the United States, since 1875. Located in Louisville, CDRT features a series of themed race days during Derby Week, including the Kentucky Oaks, and conducts Thoroughbred horse racing during three race meets in the Spring, September, and the Fall. CDRT is located on 175 acres and has a one-mile dirt track, a 7/8-mile turf track, a stabling area, and provides seating for approximately 60,000 guests. The stable area has barns sufficient to accommodate 1,400 horses and a 114-room dormitory for backstretch personnel. CDRT also has a year-round simulcast wagering facility and Race and Sports Book. [www.ChurchillDowns.com](http://www.ChurchillDowns.com).

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