



THE DERBY DISPATCH

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PALADIN STAMPS HIMSELF AS EARLY DERBY FAVORITE; PREP SEASON CLOSSES SATURDAY WITH \$175,000 JOHN BATTAGLIA MEMORIAL

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026) – The contenders for the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (Grade I) continue to come into sharper focus following the kickoff of the Road to the Kentucky Derby Championship Series in the Fasig-Tipton Risen Star where **Paladin** dug in late to get past pacesetter **Chip Honcho**.

Paladin, who's now stamped himself as an early favorite for the Run for the Roses, will take a similar path to the Kentucky Derby as his former stablemate **Sierra Leone** did in 2024 with a start in the Grade I Blue Grass at Keeneland on April 4.

While the Championship Series had its kickoff a week ago, the Prep Season will conclude Saturday night at Turfway Park Racing & Gaming with the \$175,000 John Battaglia Memorial (Listed). The weekend action also includes Friday's Dubai Road to the Kentucky Derby Stakes and Sunday's Hyacinth Stakes on the Euro/Mideast Road to the Kentucky Derby and Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby, respectively.

Just 10 weeks remain until the first Saturday in May.

For a preview, the "Inside the Kentucky Derby" podcast is available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and <https://www.kentuckyderby.com/horses/news/inside-the-kentucky-derby-john-battaglia-memorial-preview/>.

STREET BEAST HEADLINES OVERSUBSCRIBED FIELD IN \$175,000 JOHN BATTAGLIA MEMORIAL – Midway Racing's two-time stakes winner **Street Beast** will step onto the Road to the Kentucky Derby when he leads an oversubscribed field of 13 3-year-olds entered in Saturday's 44th running of the \$175,000 John Battaglia Memorial (Listed) at Turfway Park Racing & Gaming.

The John Battaglia Memorial, part of the Prep Season on the Road to the Kentucky Derby, will be contested as Race 9 on the 10-race program with a post time of 9:55 p.m. (all times Eastern). First post is 5:55 p.m. The 1 1/16-mile race will award qualifying points to the top five finishers on a 20-10-6-4-2 scale toward a spot in the starting gate for the 152nd running of the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (Grade I) on May 2.

Street Beast will make his second start as a 3-year-old after winning the Jan. 17 Leonatus by a length under jockey **Luan Machado**. Trained by **Ben Colebrook**, Street Beast was a two-time winner at Kentucky Downs over an 11-day span, breaking his maiden Aug. 28 before capturing the \$1 million Juvenile Mile (Listed) by seven lengths. A son of Street Sense, he finished a valiant fourth in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (GI). Machado will be back aboard and break from the rail.

Another stakes winner in the field is **West Paces Racing**, **Rainbow's End Racing Stable** and **Anthony Pisco's Attfield**. A winner of the \$150,000 Central Park Stakes (Listed) in November at Aqueduct, Attfield is set to make his seasonal debut in the John Battaglia Memorial. Trained by **Tom Morley**, he broke his maiden on debut at Saratoga and then finished third in the Futurity Stakes (GIII) during the Belmont at Aqueduct meeting. **Ricardo Santana Jr.**, who rode him to victory in the Central Park, will reunite with the son of Vekoma from post 7.

Grade I-placed **Two Out Hero** drew post 12 for **Gold Square** and trainer **Kevin Attard**. A son of War Front, Two Out Hero broke his maiden on debut at Woodbine by 12 lengths, then followed that performance with a 1 1/2-length victory in the \$150,000 Soar Free (Listed). In this third start, Two Out Hero finished third behind **Argos** and **Wild Desert** in the \$500,000 Summer Stakes (GI). **Rafael Hernandez**, who has ridden him in all three starts, will retain the mount.

Texas Turf Mile winner **Aces Honor** will compete over the Tapeta for the first time in Saturday's race. Owned by **Pocket Aces Racing**, Aces Honor broke his maiden at third asking on turf at Fair Grounds before going gate-to-wire over a yielding surface at Sam Houston. **Victor Carrasco** will ride for trainer **Ethan West** from post 10.

The field for the John Battaglia Memorial from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and morning line odds):

- Street Beast (Luan Machado, Colebrook, 5-2)
- **Steel Imperium** (Dylan Machado, Caio Caramori, 15-1)
- **Maximus Prime** (Walter Rodriguez, Anthony Mitchell, 30-1)
- **+Kilo Tango** (Fernando De La Cruz, Brad Cox, 12-1)
- **Baytown Dreamer** (Orlando Bocachica, Paul McEntee, 30-1)
- **+Time for Money** (Danny Sheehy, John Ennis, 30-1)
- Attfield (Santana, Morley, 8-1)
- **Great White** (Alex Achard, John Ennis, 15-1)
- **Stop the Car** (Edgar Morales, Brendan Walsh, 8-1)
- Aces Honor (Carrasco, West, 15-1)
- **Fulleffort** (Vincent Cheminaud, Brad Cox, 3-1)
- Two Out Hero (Hernandez, Attard, 7-2)
- AE: **+Small Town** (Walter Rodriguez, Michael McCarthy, 12-1)

+ = Kilo Tango, Time for Money and Small Town are not currently nominated to the Triple Crown series but can become eligible with a \$6,000 payment due Monday, April 6.

The John Battaglia Memorial was added to the Road to the Kentucky Derby in 2021. The following year, **Rich Strike** finished fourth in the race prior to winning Kentucky Derby 148.

Fans can watch and wager on the John Battaglia Memorial on www.twinspires.com, the official wagering provider of Churchill Downs Incorporated and the Kentucky Derby.

TRIPLE CROWN NOMINEE SALLOOM LEADS 14 IN DUBAI ROAD TO THE KENTUCKY DERBY STAKES – Prince Abdullah Bin Al Aziz and Sons’ debut winner **Salloom** leads 14 3-year-olds that have been entered in Friday’s \$218,210 Dubai Road to the Kentucky Derby Stakes at Meydan Racecourse, which is part of the Euro/Mideast Road to the Kentucky Derby.

Formerly known as the Al Bastakiya, the Dubai Road to the Kentucky Derby Stakes serves as the local prep for the March 28 UAE Derby (GII). Run at about 1 3/16 miles, the Dubai Road to the Kentucky Derby Stakes goes as Race 7 on the card with a post time of 1:10 p.m. (all times Eastern). The card at Meydan also includes the UAE Oaks (GIII) in Race 3 at 10:50 a.m.

Salloom is one of five **Bhupat Seemar** trainees declared for the race. A son of Authentic, Salloom won his one-mile debut by 6 ¾ lengths under **Tadhg O’Shea**. Salloom will exit gate 7 in Friday’s race with O’Shea in the irons.

Other Seemar trainees in the race are Triple Crown nominees **Lino Padrino** and **Omaha Front** along with **Senator of the State** and **Watch Collector**, who are currently not nominated.

The field for the Dubai Road to the Kentucky Derby Condition Stakes in numerical order (with jockey, trainer and gate draw):

- Salloom (O’Shea, Seemar, 7)
- Lino Padrino (Richard Mullin, Seemar, 3)
- **+Brotherly Love (GB)** (Saffie Osborne, Jamie Osborne, 6)
- **+Raajehh** (Ray Dawson, Michael Costa, 12)
- **+Al Khawaneej** (Adrie De Vries, Marwan Al Baidhaei)
- Omaha Front (Andrew Slattery, Seemar, 2)
- +Watch Collector (William Buick, Seemar, 9)
- **+Duke of Immatin** (Silvestre De Sousa, Musabbeh Al Mheiri (1)
- **+Knight of Glory** (Rossa Ryan, David Menuisier, 5)
- ~~**+Rammas** (TBA, Seemar, 13)~~
- +Senator of State (Sandro Paiva, Seemar, 10)
- **+Awesome Fleet** (Bernardo Pinheiro, Salem bin Ghadayer, 11)
- **+Sary Shayan** (Patrick Dobbs, Doug Watson, 8)
- **+Fire D’Oro** (Connor Beasley, Ahmad bin Harmash, 13)

+ = Brotherly Love, Raajehh, Al Khawaneej, Watch Collector, Duke of Immatin, Knight of Glory, Senator of State, Awesome Fleet, Sary Shayan and Fire D’Oro have not been nominated to the Triple Crown. They can still become eligible for the series by their connections paying a \$6,000 late nomination fee by Monday, April 6.

The Dubai Road to the Kentucky Derby Stakes will award the top five finishers qualifying points on a 20-10-6-4-2 scale for a possible invitation to compete in the 152nd running of the \$5 million Kentucky Derby (GI) on Saturday, May 2 at Churchill Downs.

Following Friday’s race, the Euro/Mideast Road to the Kentucky Derby will head to Kempton (GB) on Wednesday for the Road to the Kentucky Derby Condition Stakes.

HYACINTH STAKES LED BY TRIPLE CROWN NOMINEES ARCADIA CAFÉ, ITTERASSHAI, SEIZE THE THRONE AND LUCKY KID – The Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby continues Sunday at Tokyo Racecourse where four Triple Crown nominees have entered the \$244,767 Hyacinth Stakes (Listed).

Run at one mile, the Hyacinth Stakes is the fourth race on Sunday's card with a post time of 12:25 a.m. ET. The Hyacinth is the penultimate race in the series and will offer qualifying points on a 30-15-9-6-3 scale.

Post positions for the Hyacinth were not finalized Thursday morning but a total of 10 3-year-olds are scheduled compete in Sunday's race led by **Arcadia Café**, who finished third in the Nov. 29 Cattleya Stakes.

Entries for the Hyacinth in alphabetical order:

- Arcadia Café (IRE)
- **+Boku Mada Nemuiyo (JPN)**
- **+Don Erectus (JPN)**
- **+Ho O Luxor (JPN)**
- **Itterasshai (JPN)**
- **Lucky Kid (JPN)**
- **Seize the Throne (JPN)**
- **+Talki Blitzzen (JPN)**
- **+Your Felicity (JPN)**
- **+Yu Pharoah (JPN)**

+ = Boku Mada Nemuiyo, Don Erectus, Ho O Luxor, Talki Blitzzen, Your Felicity and Yu Pharoah have not nominated to the Triple Crown series. They can still become eligible for the series by their connections paying a \$6,000 late nomination fee by Monday, April 6.

HOW TO WATCH THE JOHN BATTAGLIA MEMORIAL

- FanDuel TV featuring live, on-site coverage from **Matt Bernier** and **Joe Talamo**
- Churchill Downs LIVE app/TwinSpires.com will feature the simulcast show at Turfway Park with analyst **Kaitlin Benson**.

JOHN BATTAGLIA MEMORIAL QUOTES

- **Trainer Ethan West (Aces Honor):** "He's the type of horse who keeps improving. Once we got him down to Fair Grounds, he really stepped his game up winning a maiden special weight on the grass. We took him over to Sam Houston and it was an interesting scenario for him being a four-horse field in the Texas Turf Mile. He opened up on the field around the turn. Luckily, he was able to hang on and get the job done. He doesn't need the lead but should be close to the action early."
- **Trainer Tom Morley (Attfield):** "He's ready to have a run. If there was a turf race right now, I'd probably be running him in it. There isn't a turf race with Derby points. Do I think this is a Derby horse? No, I don't think he'll get 10 furlongs, but that's something to worry about down the line. He's ready to get his year started."
- **Trainer Brendan Walsh (Stop the Car):** "We ran him in the Lecomte and we were a little disappointed in him that day. We decided to do something different with him after that. He always worked good on the track at Turfway when he was up there last year. We're hoping this might just change things up."

KEY RACES TO WATCH TO WATCH – This weekend there are several races around the world that could have implications on the Kentucky Derby and Kentucky Oaks. Here are some of the key races:

Friday

- MEY, R3 (10:50 a.m.), \$217,835 UAE Oaks (GIII), 3yo f, 1 3/16 M (seven entries)
- MEY R7 (1:10 p.m.), \$217,840 Dubai Road to the Kentucky Derby Stakes, 3yo, 1 3/16 M (13 entries)
- SA, R3 (4:32 p.m.), Mdn 70k, 3yo, 1 M (five entries)
- TP, R9 (9:55 p.m.), \$175,000 Cincinnati Trophy, 3yo f, 1 M (11 entries)

Saturday

- AQU, R5 (3:12 p.m.), Mdn 80k, 3yo, 1 M (seven entries)
- LRL, R8 (3:22 p.m.), \$100,000 Miracle Wood, 3yo, 1 M (seven entries)
- GP, R8 (3:50 p.m.), Mdn 84k, 3yo, 1 1/8 M (seven entries)
- TP, R9 (9:55 p.m.), \$175,000 John Battaglia Memorial, 3yo, 1 1/16 M (13 entries, 12 eligible to run)

Sunday

- TOK, R4 (12:25 a.m.), \$244,767 Hyacinth, 3yo, 1 M, (10 entries)

ROAD TO KENTUCKY DERBY LEADERBOARD –

Here are the Top 20 horses on the Road to the Kentucky Derby Leaderboard including a possible three invitational spots, two from the Euro/Mideast Road to the Kentucky Derby and one from Japan:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Horse</u>	<u>Trainer</u>	<u>Resume</u>	<u>Possible Next Start</u>	<u>Points</u>
1	Paladin	Chad Brown	1 st – Risen Star 1 st – Remsen	April 4 Blue Grass	60
2	Chip Honcho	Steve Asmussen	1 st – Gun Runner 2 nd – Risen Star 4 th – Lecomte	March 21 Louisiana Derby	39
3	Golden Tempo	Cherie DeVaux	1 st – Lecomte 3 rd – Risen Star	March 21 Louisiana Derby	35
4	Silent Tactic	Mark Casse	1 st – Southwest 2 nd – Smarty Jones	March 1 Rebel	25
5	Renegade	Todd Pletcher	1 st – Tampa Bay Derby 2 nd – Remsen	March 28 Arkansas Derby	25
6	Intrepido	Jeff Mullins	1 st – American Pharoah 2 nd – Robert B. Lewis 5 th – Breeders’ Cup Juvenile	March 7 San Felipe	23
7	Universe	Kenny McPeck	2 nd – Kentucky Jockey Club 3 rd – Champagne 5 th – Risen Star	TBA	23
8	Plutarch	Bob Baffert	1 st – Robert B. Lewis 3 rd – American Pharoah	March 7 San Felipe	23
9	Pavlovian	Doug O’Neill	1 st – Sunland Derby	March 28 Arkansas Derby or April 4 Santa Anita Derby	20
10	Express Kid	Justin Evans	1 st – Springboard Mile 2 nd – Sunland Derby	March 28 Arkansas Derby	20
11	Nearly	Todd Pletcher	1 st – Holy Bull	March 28 Florida Derby	20
12	Talk to Me Jimmy	Rudy Rodriguez	1 st – Withers	April 4 Wood Memorial	20
13	Litmus Test	Bob Baffert	1 st – Los Al Futurity 3 rd – Breeders’ Futurity 4 th – Breeders’ Cup Juvenile	March 7 San Felipe	19
14	Soldier N Diplomat	Steve Asmussen	2 nd – Southwest 3 rd – Kentucky Jockey Club	March 1 Rebel	13
15	Grittiness	Todd Pletcher	2 nd – Withers 5 th – Remsen	TBA	11
16	Carson Street	Brendan Walsh	3 rd – Lecomte 4 th – Risen Star	TBA	11
17	Napoleon Solo	Chad Summers	1 st – Champagne	Feb. 28 Gotham or Fountain of Youth	10
18 (Euro/Mideast)	Six Speed	Bhupat Seemar	1 st – UAE 2000 Guineas	March 28 UAE Derby	20
19 (Euro/Mideast)	Puerto Rico (IRE)	Aidan O’Brien	1 st – Prix Jean-Luc Lagardere	March 28 UAE Derby or May 2 2000 Guineas or May 10 French 2000 Guineas	10
20 (Japan)	Pyromancer (JPN)	Keiji Yoshimura	1 st – Hyacinth	March 28 UAE Derby	20

DOWN THE STRETCH – The Road to the Kentucky Oaks continues Friday at Meydan for the UAE Oaks (GIII) and Saturday for the \$175,000 John Battaglia Memorial at Turfway Park. Each race awards the top five finishers qualifying points on a 20-10-6-4-2 scale toward the \$1.5 million Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI). Nominations for the Kentucky Oaks closed Wednesday and will be released in the coming days.

UPCOMING ROAD TO KENTUCKY DERBY RACES

Feb. 28 (nine weeks out) – \$400,000 Fountain of Youth (GII), 1 1/16 miles, Gulfstream Park (Top 5: 50-25-15-10-5)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Bravaro (Saffie Joseph Jr.); *Canaletto (Chad Brown)*; *Chief Wallabee (Bill Mott)*; Commandment (Brad Cox); Jackson Hole (Todd Pletcher); *Napoleon Solo (Chad Summers)*; Solitude Dude (Saffie Joseph Jr.)

Feb. 28 (nine weeks out) – \$300,000 Gotham (GIII), one mile, Aqueduct (Top 5: 50-25-15-10-5)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Arbiter (Wesley Ward); Balboa (Brittany Russell); Creole Chrome (Joe Sharp); Iron Honor (Chad Brown); *Napoleon Solo (Chad Summers)*; Talkin (Danny Gargan)

March 1 (nine weeks out) - \$1 million Rebel (GII), 1 1/16 miles, Oaklawn (Top 5: 50-25-15-10-5)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Blackout Time (Kenny McPeck); *Brant (Bob Baffert)*; Class President (Todd Pletcher); Honey's To Blame (Kenny McPeck); Silent Tactic (Mark Casse); Soldier N Diplomat (Steve Asmussen); Strategic Risk (Mark Casse).

March 7 (eight weeks out) – \$200,000 San Felipe (GII), 1 1/16 miles, Santa Anita (Top 5: 50-25-15-10-5)

Known possible starters (with trainer): *Brant (Bob Baffert)*; *Intrepido (Jeff Mullins)*; Litmus Test (Bob Baffert); *Secured Freedom (Tim Yakteen)*; So Happy (Mark Glatt)

March 7 (eight weeks out) – \$400,000 Tampa Bay Derby (GIII), 1 1/16 miles, Tampa Bay Downs (Top 5: 50-25-15-10-5)

Known possible starters (with trainer): *Canaletto (Chad Brown)*; Further Ado (Brad Cox); Hulkamania (Whit Beckman); Talkin (Danny Gargan); The Puma (Gustavo Delgado)

March 14 (seven weeks out) - \$500,000 Virginia Derby, 1 1/8 miles, Colonial Downs (Top 5: 50-25-15-10-5)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Incredibolt (Riley Mott); Ocelli (Whit Beckman)

March 21 (six weeks out) – \$1 million Louisiana Derby (GII), 1 3/16 miles, Fair Grounds (Top 5: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Chip Honcho (Steve Asmussen); *Emerging Market (Chad Brown)*; Golden Tempo (Cherie DeVaux)

March 21 (six weeks out) – \$777,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII), 1 1/8 miles (Tapeta), Turfway Park (Top 5: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Stark Contrast (Michael McCarthy)

March 28 (five weeks out) – \$1.5 million Arkansas Derby (GI), 1 1/8 miles, Oaklawn (Top 5: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Express Kid (Justin Evans); Renegade (Todd Pletcher)

March 28 (five weeks out) – \$1 million Florida Derby (GI), 1 1/8 miles, Gulfstream Park (Top 5: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Nearly (Todd Pletcher); Wayne's Law (Amador Sanchez)

April 4 (four weeks out) – \$1.25 million Blue Grass (GI), 1 1/8 miles, Keeneland (Top 5: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): Paladin (Chad Brown)

April 4 (four weeks out) – \$500,000 Santa Anita Derby (GI), 1 1/8 miles, Santa Anita (Top 5: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): *Intrepido (Jeff Mullins)*; Pavlovian (Doug O'Neill)

April 4 (four weeks out) – \$750,000 Wood Memorial (GII), 1 1/8 miles, Aqueduct (Top 5: 100-50-25-15-10)

Known possible starters (with trainer): *Emerging Market (Chad Brown)*; Talk to Me Jimmy (Rudy Rodriguez)

April 11 (three weeks out) – \$400,000 Lexington (GIII), 1 1/16 miles, Keeneland (Top 5: 20-10-6-4-2)

Note: The possible fields for upcoming Kentucky Derby Championship Series races are fluid as owners and trainers vie for points. Known possible horses mentioned to be under consideration for each race are based on published news reports and other sources. Horses listed in *italics* are possible for multiple races.

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. www.ChurchillDowns.com.