



DOUBLE TAKE

RAMSEYS, MAKER AND ZITO PRODUCE REPEAT PERFORMANCES IN THE \$1 MILLION CLAIMING CROWN AT GULFSTREAM PARK

By Denis Blake
 Photos by Coglianese Photos/
 Lauren King, Leslie Martin



Trainer Mike Maker (left) and owner Ken Ramsey (far right) now have 14 career Claiming Crown wins to easily top the all-time standings.

THE 16TH EDITION OF THE CLAIMING CROWN ON DECEMBER 6 AT GULFSTREAM PARK FEATURED A MIX OF OLD AND NEW WITH STELLAR RESULTS BOTH ON THE TRACK AND AT THE BETTING WINDOWS.

The \$1 million event for “blue-collar” horses who had started for a specified claiming price since January 1, 2013, underwent some minor changes to the race format and nomination process that produced robust interest from horsemen, and after the gates opened, some familiar names took center stage as owners Ken and Sarah Ramsey teamed with trainer Mike Maker to extend their incredible success in the event, while Hall of Fame conditioner Nick Zito again captured the marquee race in South Florida.

An all-time record 341 horses were nominated to the Claiming Crown from the barns of 128 different trainers under a new system that dropped the previous method of trainer nominations and instead only required horse nominations. The conditions of two races were also altered, along with one race name change. The final results of the joint venture between the National Horsemen’s Benevolent and Protective Association and

Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association, in partnership with Gulfstream and the Florida HBPA, produced some impressive numbers in the pari-mutuel pools as handicappers responded to six fields with 14 horses entered and two with 10 entrants.

Total handle on the Claiming Crown card, which opened the Gulfstream Championship Meet, came in at \$10.06 million, an increase of 13.1 percent from last year’s \$8.8 million with a jump of 36 percent in on-track handle. Those numbers were achieved despite an impasse between the Mid-Atlantic Cooperative, which represents tracks and simulcast locations in states including Ohio, Texas, West Virginia and Pennsylvania, and Monarch Capital Management, which represents Gulfstream Park and other tracks owned by The Stronach Group, that prevented many locations from being able to wager on the Claiming Crown.



\$200,000 JEWEL

CATHOLIC COWBOY

TRAINER NICK ZITO, a two-time Kentucky Derby winner, earned his first Claiming Crown win last year when he saddled Nevada Kid to a mild upset in the \$200,000 Jewel. This year, he pulled off an even bigger upset as he sent out Catholic Cowboy to a 17-1 victory in the richest race on the card. Running for Joseph and Nina Moss' Mossarosa, Catholic Cowboy snapped a two-race losing streak that occurred over a period of just four days at Keeneland Race Course, where he ran sixth on October 8 and then seventh on October 12 against optional claiming company. But he turned things around at Gulfstream and won the 1 1/8-mile Jewel for horses that had started for \$35,000 or less. He won by a half-length in 1:49.70.

"He went a little funny on us. We didn't understand why, so we did the next best thing and gelded him," Zito said. "That always helps, because the mind goes back to where it's supposed to be. He's been fantastic now. He had some great works. [Jockey] Luis [Saez] wouldn't give up, and that was the key."

Bred in Florida by Luis de Hechavarria, the 4-year-old son of Heatseeker (Ire) ran for a \$35,000 price as a maiden last year but has spent his entire career running for Zito and the Mosses. This victory was worth



\$110,000 and boosted his bankroll to \$255,438 with a career record of 18-4-2-3.

"What I need to do is try to win another Kentucky Derby," said Zito, who won the Run for the Roses with Strike the Gold (1991) and Go for Gin (1994). "But at the end of the day, if this is what the Good Lord wants, and I can win these things every year, it's not so bad."

Adam Staple and Jalin Stable's Page McKenney, the 7-2 favorite who came in with two wins, two seconds and a third in his last five starts while facing stakes foes, closed fast to get second. Ridden by Jose Lezcano and trained by Mary Eppler, the Eavesdropper gelding has banked more than \$300,000 on the year.

PTK LLC's Cerro (Ire), a winner of three straight races at Laurel Park and ridden by Cecily Evans for trainer Dane Kobiskie, set the pace and held on for third.

Eriugena (Ire), Kings Over, Cease, Dawly, Congenial, Tenkiller Kid, Tarp's Goal, Viramundo, Bill of Rights, He's So Fine and Sinorice completed the order of finish.



\$125,000
EMERALD

SAFFRON HALL

OWNERS KEN AND SARAH RAMSEY

and trainer Mike Maker extended their record total to 14 Claiming Crown career victories with a win by Saffron Hall in the \$125,000 Emerald for horses who had started for \$25,000 or less. The 1 1/16-mile turf race featured three horses for team Ramsey-Maker, and at the wire it was the 7-year-old Giant's Causeway gelding with Irad Ortiz Jr. in the irons in a time of 1:42.19.

"It's kind of like eating popcorn; the more you eat, the more you want," Ramsey said. "It's the same way with winning. We're kind of raising the bar pretty high; I don't even know who's in second place [in number of Claiming Crown wins]. Fourteen is a pretty good number."

Sent off at odds of 5-1 in a 14-horse field that proved to be a handicapper's dream with seven horses at odds between 9-2 and 7-1, Saffron Hall came with a five-wide move to capture his 10th win in 19 starts. The Ramseys claimed Saffron Hall, who was bred in Ontario by Eugene Melnyk, for \$25,000 last year at Tampa Bay Downs. The gelding has earned \$207,222 for the Ramseys this year alone, and his lifetime earnings stand at \$268,611.



Panic Stable LLC's Rose Brier, a stakes winner at Laurel Park earlier in the year, took second for trainer Jane Cibelli and jockey Jose Lezcano.

Another of the Ramsey-Maker runners, Grade 1-placed Longhunter (GB), finished third under jockey Edgard Zayas.

"I thought [Saffron Hall] would win; he was my choice," Ramsey said. "I thought it was between him and Longhunter. If they left Longhunter alone, he could wire the field; otherwise, [Saffron Hall] was going to come from behind and nail them. When I saw Longhunter was faltering a little bit, I said, 'Where's Saffron Hall?' and here he came."

Screenplay closed for fourth and was followed by Saylor's Creek, North Star Boy (Ire), El Jefe Grande, Hard Enough, Cement Clement, Dreams Cut Short, Lasso, Key to Power, Ducduc and Delta Bluesman.



\$125,000 TIARA

ST. BOREALIS

THE ATTITUDE THAT YOU CANNOT WIN IF YOU DO NOT ENTER

has been a key principle of Ken and Sarah Ramsey's racing stable, and that was proven again in the \$125,000 Tiara for fillies and mares who had started for \$25,000 or less as their St. Borealis unleashed a big late kick to score a 13-1 upset. Claimed by the Ramseys and trainer Mike Maker for just \$16,000 in August at Ellis Park, the 4-year-old daughter of War Chant earned \$68,750 for her 1 1/16-mile turf trip under jockey Rafael Hernandez. St. Borealis, who drew away to win by 1 3/4 lengths, came into the race off a win against \$40,000 claimers at Churchill Downs.

"Rafael rode a great race," Maker said. "As soon as they broke, he took her back and saved all the ground and she finished strong. It might be the best way to ride her."

This win nearly doubled the earnings of St. Borealis to \$141,583 with her fifth win from 14 starts to go with one second and one third. She struggled in her lone start on dirt and has one win from six outings on synthetic surfaces, but the filly seems to have found a home on the turf,



where she now has four wins in seven starts. St. Borealis was bred in Kentucky by R-Cher Family Farm LLC.

Miller Racing LLC's Rock On Baby, who had not raced since finishing second in last year's Tiara to the Ramsey's Deenaallen'skitten, closed from far back to take second again. Edgard Zayas rode for trainer Marty Wolfson.

Favored Wild Swava, a winner of six turf races during the year at Gulfstream, Churchill Downs, Parx Racing and Indiana Grand, finished third under Irad Ortiz Jr. The Offlee Wild filly runs for William Butler and is also trained by Maker.

Completing the order of finish was Very Few Details, Flamingo Lane, Scenario Analysis, Tippie Tap, Miss Tapit, Dun Won, Morning Star, Lets Go Donna, Dreamlicious, Quiet Hour and Issheit.



\$110,000
CANTERBURY

BUSTER ROSE

THE \$110,000 **CANTERBURY**, named to honor the Minnesota track that hosted the first Claiming Crown in 1999, proved to be a popular addition to the event. The race replaced last year's Iron Lady, which was for fillies and mares going 1 1/16 miles on the main track. This new race, at five furlongs on the turf for horses who had started for \$25,000 or less, attracted 41 nominations and a well-matched field of 14 starters. At the finish line, it was Michael Ball's homebred Buster Rose in front, as the Indiana-bred son of Pioneering came with an eight-wide move to prevail by a half-length at odds of 7-1.

Trained by Stephen Dunn and ridden by Jeremy Rose, the 6-year-old veteran had won all four of his turf sprints at Indiana Grand and proved he could take his show on the road in his first-ever start in Florida. He earned \$60,500 for the dash timed in :55.96, which put his lifetime earnings at \$364,168 with a record of 29-10-8-5. Buster Rose became eligible for the Canterbury with several starts at the \$10,000 claiming level last year.

"For whatever reason, God made him to be a five-eighths of a mile on the grass horse," Dunn said. "He shows up every



time, and he's a special horse in that he's 23 out of 29 in the money now, so that just tells you how good a horse he is. He has a great owner; he bred him, and he's had him since he was a baby. I'm just lucky enough to be a part of the team."

Favored Mr. Online, who had run in four consecutive graded stakes at Woodbine and Gulfstream Park with two second-place finishes, came with a wide move to get second for owner Tim E. O'Donohue Racing LLC, trainer Michael Pino and jockey Mario Pino.

Epona Racing Stable and CJC Racing's Thomas Hill, a shipper from Belmont Park, took third with Joe Bravo riding for conditioner Bruce Brown.

Mongolian Saturday, Determinato, Didn't Take It, Moonwalker, Amelia's Wild Ride, Mongol Bull, Elusive Blueboy, This Ain't No Bull, Take Time to Pray, Pirates Vow and Quality Lass completed the order of finish.



\$110,000
RAPID TRANSIT

GRANDE SHORES

JACKS OR BETTER FARM INC.'S HOMEBRED GRANDE SHORES CAME INTO THE \$110,000 RAPID TRANSIT

for horses who had started for \$16,000 or less with a sterling record, but even with 10 career wins he was lacking a signature victory. He had placed five times in stakes races without a victory and finished third in last year's Rapid Transit. This time, he put it all together and scored by three-quarters of a length in the seven-furlong contest with a clocking of 1:23.19. Jockey Edgard Zayas picked up his second Claiming Crown winner of the day, and Stanley Gold was the winning trainer.

"This is one of my favorite horses," Zayas said about the 9-2 shot. "He's so consistent. No matter where you put him, he tries hard. I've been having problems with him lately. He hasn't been breaking like he used to. I decided to warm him up really good to get him a little closer. He broke good. I was happy where I had him, because I know he'll fight to the end."

Grande Shores, who raced for an \$8,000 tag multiple times last year at Tampa Bay Downs, is now an earner of \$332,061 with a lifetime record of 39-11-13-3. The 6-year-old son of Black Mambo was bred in Florida.



High Point Thoroughbred Partners' Goodtimehadbyall, the winner of last year's Rapid Transit who came in from Belmont Park, finished second as the 3-1 favorite. Paco Lopez was up for trainer Jorge Navarro.

Stallwalkin' Dude crossed the wire third but was disqualified and placed fourth for interference in the stretch. That elevated Dawghouse Stable's Monty Haul to third. A winner of three of his last four races at Parx Racing, Monty Haul was ridden by John Bisono for trainer Philip Aristone.

Fundit finished fifth and was followed by Behemoth, Palatine Hill, Holy Highway, Megalith, Box Office, Capital City, Punster, Bear Behind (Ire) and Put It Forward.



\$110,000
GLASS SLIPPER

BEST BEHAVIOR

AFTER TAKING THE RUNNER-UP SPOT WITH ROCK ON BABY

in the \$125,000 Tiara, trainer Marty Wolfson, jockey Edgard Zayas and owner Miller Racing LLC got into the winner's circle 30 minutes later with Best Behavior in the \$110,000 Glass Slipper for fillies and mares who had started for \$12,500 or less. The Ontario-bred daughter of Into Mischief duelled for the early lead and then took command on the second turn and went on to win by 2 ¼ lengths in a time of 1:37.80 for one mile on the main track. The Glass Slipper conditions were tweaked from last year when the claiming level was \$16,000 and the distance was seven furlongs.

The 4-year-old, who was bred by James and Janeane Everatt and J. Arika Everatt-Meeuse, was claimed for \$62,500 in August at Gulfstream and in her lone start for her new connections finished second in the \$75,000 Sky Beauty Stakes at Gulfstream Park West (formerly Calder Race Course). This win earned her \$60,500 and pushed her lifetime earnings to \$193,778 with a record of 19-7-5-5. The filly has changed hands several times in her career and last year raced for a \$10,000 price at Woodbine.



Best Behavior had been running exclusively in sprints, but her trainer had a feeling she could succeed around two turns.

"I wanted to try a route with her," Wolfson said of the 5-2 second choice in the wagering. "She's by Into Mischief, and I thought she'd stretch out. I just told [Zayas] to try to relax her up front. He rode her perfect."

Joker Racing LLC's Don'tcallmecharley, coming in off a third-place effort against stakes competition at Gulfstream Park West, closed well for second with Manoel Cruz in the irons for trainer Thomas Schell.

Marisa Lizza's Pebble Beach Baby, who had raced in California, New York and Pennsylvania during the year, finished third. Orlando Bocachica rode for trainer Ramon Preciado.

Rounding out the field were Silk n' Sequins, Winning for Sarah, Rebecca's Surprise, Fruttidimare, Majestic Shoes, Unseen Visitor, Horsin' Around, Courtney Ryan, Annelle and Claiming Victory.



\$110,000
IRON HORSE

J B'S UNC

ONE OF THE HALLMARKS OF A QUALITY CLAIMING HORSE IS CONSISTENCY,

and few have been as reliable as J B's Unc, who came into the \$110,000 Iron Horse with 13 consecutive top three finishes. Last year, the gelded son of Cactus Ridge finished a good third in the \$110,000 Express, a six-furlong contest for horses that had started for a claiming price of \$7,500 or less. This time around, the 6-year-old proved his versatility by going in a 1 1/16-mile event for the same class of claimers. And this time around, he got up to prevail by a neck under jockey Paco Lopez.

Trained by Jorge Navarro for owner High Point Thoroughbred Partners, J B's Unc completed the distance in 1:43.66 as the 3-1 second choice. This win improved his lifetime record to 33-14-5-3 with earnings of \$254,327. EquiVision Inc. bred J B's Unc in Kentucky.

"He's a nice horse to have around," Navarro said. "He's one of my favorite horses of all time."

J B's Unc spent much of the year at Parx Racing in Pennsylvania and Monmouth Park in New Jersey before prepping for the Claiming Crown with a second-place effort



at Gulfstream Park West in a starter optional claimer. J B's Unc raced for a \$5,000 tag last summer at Monmouth before climbing up the claiming ranks and then competing mostly in starter allowance and optional claiming races.

Kenneth Fishbein's Francois, the runner-up in last year's Iron Horse, took that spot again with Corey Lanerie in the irons for conditioner Cheryl Winebaugh. The Smarty Jones gelding came in from Chicago where he had been running in high-level optional claiming races at Hawthorne Race Course and Arlington Park.

Feisty Albert, a shipper from Laurel Park in Maryland, took third for owners Two Rivers Racing Stable LLC and MCA Racing Stable LLC. Gabriel Saez rode for trainer Claudio Gonzalez.

Chillin Dylan, Sir Leslie, C D Gold, Double Judge, Gimmeadrink, Senor Castrico and Ararat completed the order of finish.



\$110,000
EXPRESS

LOVERBIL

TRAINER JORGE NAVARRO SCORED IN THE \$110,000 EXPRESS AS HE SADDLED LOVERBIL TO COMPLETE A SWEEP OF THE FIRST TWO CLAIMING CROWN EVENTS

after taking the Iron Horse with J B's Unc. The field in the Express, which was contested at six furlongs for horses who had started for \$7,500 or less, had the unenviable task of facing defending race champion Ribo Bobo, an 18-time winner who was exiting the Grade 1 Vosburgh Stakes at Belmont Park. But when that favorite didn't fire in the stretch, it opened the door for Loverbil, who recorded a 7-1 upset under Jose Lezcano. Loverbil races for White Wabbit Wacing LLC, which took the exacta in the Express as its Quiz Whiz finished second with Jonathan Gonzales riding for trainer Aubrey Maragh.

Loverbil, who was bred in New Jersey by Golden Dome Stable, stopped the timer at 1:10.07, and the \$60,500 payday improved his bankroll to \$214,746 with a record of 31-8-5-4. The 5-year-old Not For Love gelding had been running at Gulfstream Park West and previously



battled allowances foes at Monmouth Park after racing for a \$6,250 tag earlier in the year.

"He needed that last race over a deeper track," Navarro said about a victory last time out at the former Calder Race Course against allowance/optional claiming horses. "I told the owners, 'I think he's ready.' I thought with all that speed, he'd take back and make one run. It went perfectly."

Quiz Whiz, who had won six of his 12 prior starts at Gulfstream, just missed the victory but earned \$22,000 for his seventh straight in-the-money finish.

Lungs, a 98-1 longshot who came in from Churchill Downs, took third for the connections of owner Dave Hearn, trainer George Leonard III and jockey Hector Rosario Jr.

Ribo Bobo crossed the wire fourth and was followed by Blings Express, Disarm, Frontier Warrior, A. P. Corsair, Levkos Pirgos and Motin. *lh*