



ONE FOR THE RECORD BOOKS

THE 20TH RENEWAL OF THE CLAIMING CROWN SHATTERS THE EVENT'S HANDLE MARK AT GULFSTREAM PARK

Compiled from Gulfstream Park press releases | Photos by Coglianese Photos/Lauren King, Leslie Martin, Kenny Martin

T

he Claiming Crown has developed into one of the biggest days in racing since its inception in 1999 at Canterbury Park. So, it was fitting that the event hit all-time highs in handle and participation for its 20th running on December 1 at Gulfstream Park.

Total handle on the 11-race program was \$13.612 million, smashing the previous Claiming Crown record, set last year, of \$11.925 million in an increase of 14 percent. Handle on the Claiming Crown has grown every year since Gulfstream started hosting the event in 2012, traditionally on opening day of the Florida track's Championship Meet.

"We're extremely pleased with opening day," said Gulfstream General Manager Bill Badgett. "We received a lot of compliments about the improvements at our facility, and we witnessed some memorable performances on track from our equine and human athletes. We want to thank our fans and horsemen for supporting Gulfstream and the Claiming Crown program."

Owners and trainers also continued to respond in a big way, as a record 346 nominations rolled in for the nine Claiming Crown events worth \$1.11 million in purses. Those nominations translated to strong action at the entry box with 117 horses entered for the races run under starter allowance conditions. For the majority of the races, the conditions called for horses to have started for a specified claiming price or less at least once since January 1, 2017. The exceptions were the Claiming Crown Express and Claiming Crown Iron Horse, both for \$8,000 level horses, which did not have the date restriction; instead, a horse must have started for the specified price at any point in its career.

Prior to this year's running, the partners in the event—the National HBPA, Florida HBPA, Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association and Gulfstream Park—announced an extension through 2021 to keep the Claiming Crown in the Sunshine State.

"President [Leroy] Gessmann and the regional vice presidents of the National HBPA are extremely pleased to once again secure a partnership

with the Florida HBPA, Gulfstream Park and The Stronach Group to continue hosting the Claiming Crown for an additional three years beginning in 2019," said Eric Hamelback, CEO of the National HBPA. "This event has grown in popularity with owners, trainers and handicappers who are without question the backbone of our industry. I am pleased to work together with TOBA in creating an event that has become a highlight of each year's racing calendar. Our goals, along with Gulfstream Park's, will include raising the profile of the Claiming Crown with promotions throughout the country and qualifying races such as those found at Laurel Park and Kentucky Downs. We could not be more pleased to extend our partnership for an additional three years."

In addition to the action on the track, TOBA held a seminar earlier in the day, sponsored by the National HBPA and titled "The Claiming Game: How to Claim Thoroughbreds."

"Thanks to Meredith Downey of TOBA and strong support from Xpressbet, Gulfstream and the Florida HBPA, we were able to entertain the group all day and provide excellent education with great speakers discussing the claiming business," Hamelback said. "Speakers included trainers Tom Amoss, Mike Maker and Joe Orseno (also a FHBPA board member), owner and manager of Pinnacle Racing and FHBPA board member Adam Lazarus, and Gulfstream Park's general manager Billy Badgett and racing secretary Chris Camac. I am very proud of this initiative, and I hope we can keep the positive momentum to help bring in more owners to our industry."

Following are recaps of all of the Claiming Crown races.





RAPID TRANSIT

UNO MAS MODELO

Loooch Racing Stables' Uno Mas Modelo overcame a troubled start to capture the \$110,000

Rapid Transit, closing from last to register his fifth victory in his past six starts. The Rapid Transit, a seven-furlong sprint for horses that have raced for a claiming price of \$16,000 or lower, kicked off the series of nine races celebrating horse racing's "blue-collar" runners.

Uno Mas Modelo, whose only loss in his last six starts came in an off-the-board finish in the Jockey Club Gold Cup (G1) at Belmont Park on September 29, left the gate several lengths behind the field before steadily making up ground on the backstretch. Swung to the outside by jockey Albin Jimenez on the far turn, the 5-year-old gelding made a sweeping move leaving the turn into the homestretch before launching a protracted stretch drive to prevail by a neck.

"We planned to be up close, but the horse was moving a little bit in the gate before the break and we got a bad break," Jimenez said. "He broke in the air, and we missed a lot right there. So, I just got him relaxed down the backside and tried to make one move, and that's what we did. I could see the other horses were pretty tired, and my horse just kept going."

Flying P Stable's Magnifier, a Jorge Navarro trainee who set fractions of :22.75, :45.61 and 1:11.09 while showing the way into the stretch under Paco Lopez, held second, a length ahead of late-closing Nominal Dollars, another Navarro runner owned by Monster Racing Stables. Magnifier had a two-race win streak from Delaware Park snapped, while Nominal Dollars provided a nice return for his



connections in his first start since being haltered for \$10,000 at Keeneland.

Uno Mas Modelo, the 4-5 favorite who was coming off a victory in the Bet On Sunshine Stakes at Churchill Downs, stopped the clock at 1:25.23 to win his fifth race of the year.

"He kept coming; he's something," trainer Anthony Quartarolo said. "At the beginning of the race, I said, 'He has a lot to overcome. Let's see if he can do it.' He did."

Uno Mas Modelo, a son of Macho Uno bred in Kentucky by Russell L. Reineman Stables Inc., improved his lifetime record to 30-8-4-2 with earnings of \$318,110.

Cautious Giant, winner of last year's Rapid Transit, finished fourth and was followed by Sal the Turtle, Chunnel, Morning Buzz, Imperatore and Diamond Majesty.



EXPRESS

APPEALING FUTURE

Jon Marshall's Appealing Future received a picture-perfect trip in the \$110,000 Express, parlaying a ground-saving journey into a narrow victory in the six-furlong sprint for horses that have started for a claiming price of \$8,000 or lower.

The 4-year-old homebred gelding, who once ran for a \$5,000 claiming price, captured his third straight victory after scoring back-to-back allowance wins at Parx.

"We didn't have too much to do with him here in South Florida; they had him prepared with our team up at Parx, which is a huge effort to them," said Tyler Servis, trainer John Servis' son and assistant. "He shipped here about three weeks ago, and they took care of the job. He came ready to run. I told [jockey] Nik [Juarez], being in the two hole, just to use him enough to hold his position, let him take a little breather and make one good run."

Sent to post at 5-2 in a field of 14, Appealing Future was involved with the early pace before Juarez eased him back to save ground behind the pacesetters, Harryhee and Small Fortune. Juarez continued to save ground on the turn into the homestretch before easing the son of Successful Appeal out to the two-path at the top of the stretch. Appealing Future responded with a strong stretch drive and held off the late run of Brother Chub by a neck. Fast Pass rallied late to finish third, two lengths farther back.

Brother Chub, owned by Michael Day and Kasey K Racing Stable LLC and conditioned by Michael Moore, also came in from Parx and earned a stakes



win earlier in the year at Monmouth Park, while Fast Pass, owned by Paradise Farms Corp. and Walder Racing and trained by Peter Walder, made his last start at Santa Anita before traveling nearly 3,000 miles to south Florida.

Pennsylvania-bred Appealing Future ran six furlongs in 1:12.16 to win his ninth race in 23 career starts and push his earnings to \$311,434. It's been quite a turnaround for the gelding, who in August of last year raced for a \$5,000 tag at Delaware Park with no takers.

Leadem in Ken crossed the wire fourth and was followed by Small Fortune, Harryhee, Nick the Cardshark, First Growth, Creative Art, Gorgeous George, Union Blues, Dan the Go to Man, Richest Gifts and Social Roy.



DISTAFF DASH

OXFORD COMMA

S

andra New's Oxford Comma kept her perfect record on turf intact, extending her win streak to three races and giving trainer Tom

Amoss his first career victory at Gulfstream in the \$110,000 Distaff Dash for fillies and mares who have started for \$25,000 or less.

Outhustled for the lead by defending champion and 4-5 favorite Blue Bahia, Oxford Comma, the 7-5 second choice, completed five furlongs on the turf in :55.69 under jockey Miguel Vasquez to win by 1 ½ lengths over 79-1 longshot Unaquoi. Blue Bahia was third, another half-length back.

Blue Bahia and Oxford Comma blazed up front through an opening quarter-mile in :20.68 before Blue Bahia established a clear lead after a half in :43.37. Vasquez kept Oxford Comma to the leader's outside and came with a steady run down the stretch to slingshot past and earn her eighth career win from 11 starts, the last three since being moved from dirt to turf.

Amoss, a multiple graded-stakes winning trainer with more than 3,500 victories and \$97 million in purse earnings, had last started a horse at Gulfstream in the 1999 Breeders' Cup, when Heritage of Gold ran third behind Beautiful Pleasure and Banshee Breeze in the Distaff (G1).

"Ironically, we were entered to run on the grass at Churchill Downs [last] month and that race was taken off the grass, so we moved to Plan B, which was to race here," Amoss said. "Her time here has been good, and I give a lot of credit for today's win to Natalie Fawkes, who took the horse for us this past week. She's a small trainer, but she's very good at her job and very efficient. The conversation I had with her over the phone let me know she's a big-time trainer when she's ready to be one."



A 3-year-old daughter of Majesticperfection bred in Kentucky by John O'Meara, Oxford Comma raced at Indiana Grand, Delta Downs and Mahoning Valley Race Course before making her Gulfstream debut. She boosted her career earnings to \$215,390.

West Virginia-bred Unaquoi, running for owner-breeder Ray M. Pennington III and trainer Ollie Figgins III, had finished off the board in her last three starts at Charles Town Races and Laurel Park but was a proven performer in turf sprints with five prior wins, and she rebounded with a solid effort to get second.

Dennis A. Drazin's homebred Blue Bahia, who was coming in off a five-month layoff, held third to improve her record to 19-9-3-2.

Lady's Island took fourth followed by My Sister Caro, Taylor's in Orbit, Lover's Key, Keep Your Distance and Pretty Greeley.



IRON HORSE

SALSA'S RETURN

Salsa's Return made an immediate return on owner Joseph Besecker's investment while stepping to victory in the \$110,000 Kent Stirling Memorial Iron Horse in his first start since being claimed. The Iron Horse was for horses who have started for \$8,000 or less and was contested at 1 1/16 miles.

Salsa's Return finished third in a \$16,000 claiming race at Keeneland on October 11 before joining the barn of trainer Jorge Navarro, who saddled three horses for the Iron Horse, including 22-1 runner-up Donji and pacesetter Guns of Steel, the 2-1 favorite.

Salsa's Return, sent off at 16-1, was rated well off the early pace by jockey Albin Jimenez as Guns of Steel showed the way around the first turn and along the backstretch past fractions of :24.24 and :47.61. Salsa's Return made steady progress while saving ground down the backstretch and around the far turn as Guns of Steel maintained a clear advantage. After straightening into the stretch, Guns of Steel shortened stride and was quickly overtaken by Donji, who withstood a challenge to his outside by Moon Gate Warrior but was unable to hold off the inside bid of Salsa's Return, who found a hole between horses at the top of the stretch and responded to Jimenez's urging to prevail by three-quarters of a length.

The 8-year-old gelding even surprised his trainer somewhat.

"The 1 horse [Guns of Steel], he was the horse, the way he was training," Navarro said. "We claimed him for this, and I guess he ran short. The track was not to our advantage today. The winner, we claimed him a month ago out of Keeneland, and this is what we did it for. We do our homework, and we pay



attention to races like this. This is fun."

Salsa's Return, bred in Florida by Harold J. Plumley, ran 1 1/16 miles in 1:47.27 to register his 13th career victory. The gelded son of Olmodor has earned \$343,570 in 51 starts.

Imaginary Stables and Glenn K. Ellis' Donji, a recent winner at Delaware Park and Monmouth Park, completed the Navarro exacta that returned \$261.80 for a \$1 bet.

Moon Gate Warrior, who came in with eight wins this year, took third for owner and trainer Louis C. Linder Jr.

Cheech Thunder, Guns of Steel, Twocubanbrothersu, Steelman Run, Quenane, Double Whammy, Yes I See, Lewis Vale, Spirit Love, Pat's Shoes and To Dare rounded out the order of finish.

The race honored Kent Stirling, the longtime executive director of the Florida HBPA who also worked tirelessly on medication issues for the National HBPA.



TIARA

PERU (GB)

One year after coming up a nose short in the same race, Ken and Sarah Ramsey's Peru (GB) came flying with a furious late rally down the center of the course to catch Valedictorian and surge to a 1 ¼-length victory in the \$125,000 Tiara for fillies and mares who have started for \$25,000 or less. Peru covered the 1 ¼-mile distance under jockey Julien Leparoux in 1:41.87 over a firm turf course to give the Ramseys their 16th Claiming Crown victory and trainer Mike Maker his 17th, extending their respective event records.

Valedictorian finished second, 1 ¾ lengths ahead of 16-1 longshot You Cheated. Pacesetting 3-5 favorite Starship Jubilee, a multiple graded-stakes winner of more than \$560,000, ran fourth.

"With the No. 1 [post], we were inside for the first part of the race," Leparoux said. "We saved ground. On the second turn, I had to find room. I could see the two favorites start to get loose on the lead. I needed to get out and start my run. She had a nice kick at the end. She ran a nice race. Last year she ran great, too, but today she got the win. She deserved it."

Starship Jubilee, breaking from outside post 12, got out quickly and went to the lead, taking the field through a quarter-mile in :24.52 and a half in :48.36, tracked intently by Valedictorian to her outside. Peru found herself trapped behind a wall of horses in the early going, ahead of just two rivals after six furlongs in 1:11.53.

Valedictorian collared Starship Jubilee at the top of the stretch and edged past, but Leparoux had tipped Peru to the far outside on the final turn and they set their sights on the leader once straightened for home, steadily gaining after



finding open space.

"I was hoping Julien would have free run; it looked like he had a lot of horse," Maker said. "She was cutting back in distance, so I was hoping she wouldn't lose contention early, so we sat inside and when we tipped her out, she was full of run."

Bred in Great Britain by Langton Stud, Peru eclipsed the \$300,000 mark in earnings with the win, her seventh in 26 starts.

Epic Racing's Valedictorian, trained by Kelly Breen, had won three of her last four races, including stakes at Laurel Park and Monmouth Park.

You Cheated, owned by Hooties Racing LLC, WSS Racing LLC and Brent Gasaway, hit the board for the fourth time in five starts since her current connections claimed her for \$25,000 at Indiana Grand.

Following Starship Jubilee was Spicy Nelly, Vendita, Drinks On Me, Truth in the Lies, So Innocent, Mauras Forever, She's So Fine and Queen Jill.



GLASS SLIPPER

MISSCHIEF MAAS

Misschief Maas rallied through the stretch to win the \$110,000 Glass Slipper, providing trainer Jorge Navarro with his second victory on the card. The trainer added a third later in the day to give him eight wins in all to rank second behind Mike Maker's all-time mark of 17.

"What an amazing feeling to win twice today," said Navarro after the 14-1 upset and before adding a third win. "We've been planning all year for this day, being the second leading trainer to win this is just amazing, coming from Calder. She ran a huge race; I think it's a bit of a dead track today. Going a mile we were asking a little of her, but everything set up for her today."

Owned by Nick Surick Stable LLC, Flying P Stable and Toni Anne Fuoco, the 4-year-old Florida-bred daughter of Yes Its Legal ran the mile in 1:39.42 in the race for fillies and mares that have raced for a claiming price of \$12,500 or lower.

Misschief Maas raced well back in the 14-horse field as Starship Reina, the 7-2 favorite who also is trained by Navarro, set solid fractions of :23.20 and :45.85. Starship Reina continued to show the way into the stretch as Misschief Maas was in traffic several lengths back. Jockey Chris Landeros found room between horses at the top of the stretch, and Misschief Maas surged late to get to the wire first, a half-length ahead of a late-running Viva Forever, who was another half-length ahead of Starship Reina.



"Jorge said just to be patient," Landeros said. "His other horse was going to go, and I was just hoping they set some fast fractions. I knew they were flying up front, and I just bided my time. I found a little seam, and she was all game. She's a good horse, and she grinded to the end."

Runner-up Viva Forever, who races for Georgina E. Billers and trainer Louis Linder Jr., came into the race with wins in six of her last seven starts, and third-place finisher Starship Reina continued her consistent season by hitting the board for the ninth time in 11 outings.

Amaluna took fourth, followed by Honey Bunny, Expect Indy, Miss Contessa, Grace's Drama, Color Me Pretty, Mo Town Kat, Radiantrhythm, Southernperfection, Bella Vincenza and Ransomed.



CANTERBURY

ROCKET HEAT

Grade 3 winner Rocket Heat, claimed three starts back for Flying P Stable, sprinted to a short lead leaving the backstretch and extended his advantage through the lane, holding off late-running Oak Bluffs to win the \$110,000 Tom Metzen Memorial Canterbury by a half-length.

It was the third victory of the day and second straight in a Claiming Crown race for jockey Chris Landeros, following the \$110,000 Glass Slipper with Misschief Maas. The winning time was :55.26 over a firm turf course.

Breaking from outside all but one in the 11-horse field, Rocket Heat was between rivals in a tight pack vying for the early lead, emerging with a short advantage over Midwest Justice after going the first quarter-mile in :20.66.

Rocket Heat cut the corner sharply and was set down for the drive by Landeros, opening up on the group in mid-stretch. Oak Bluffs, second by a half-length to multiple stakes winner Pay Any Price in last year's Canterbury, found trouble early but came running late to pick up the place once again.

Rocket Heat, a 6-year-old gelding by Latent Heat bred in Kentucky by Farfellow Farms Ltd., was claimed out of a win at Saratoga in July by trainer Michael Tannuzzo. He ran sixth in two subsequent starts, including his previous effort in the 5 ½-furlong Woodford Stakes (G2) on October 6 at Keeneland.

It was the second career stakes win and first in two and a half years for Rocket Heat, following the 2016 Twin Spires Turf Sprint Stakes (G3) at Churchill Downs.

"He didn't break sharp like he did in his last race at Keeneland, so Chris did a good job to get him to the front," Tannuzzo said. "He's got to be up there. He's not a horse that's going to sit back and rate, so Chris sent him and once he cleared, I told him to drop to the fence and he'll give you that spurt to hold them off. It feels great to win a Claiming Crown race.



"Flying P gave me a shot with four or five horses, and it feels great to have won a few races already with the limited amount of horses I have. I picked this horse out and knew he was eligible for this race and thought he was a real nice horse. I knew we'd run him at Keeneland and point him here, and he showed up."

Rocket Heat has won 11 of 37 career starts, and his earnings now stand at \$578,827.

Runner-up Oak Bluffs, trained by Mary Eppler and owned by her Mary E. Eppler Racing Stable Inc., again showed his affinity for the Gulfstream course while improving his record at the track to 9-3-5-0.

Tim W. Rosin's Bushrod, who finished fifth in the Nearctic Stakes (G2) in his last start at Woodbine, took third for trainer Kathy Mongeon.

Maniacal, Diddley, Dowse's Beach, Dance Proudly, Sambucca Steve, Tenacity Zip, Midwest Justice and Earth completed the order of finish.

This race honored Tom Metzen, the former executive director of the Arizona HBPA and president of the Minnesota HBPA who helped make the first Claiming Crown at Canterbury Park a reality. Metzen also served as first vice president and central region vice president for the National HBPA.



EMERALD

UNCLE B

David Caprio's Uncle B, claimed out of his 4-year-old debut 11 months ago at Gulfstream, took the lead in mid-stretch and outran his rivals to the wire to spring a 36-1 upset in the \$125,000 Emerald. The 1 ¹/₁₆-mile Emerald is for 3-year-olds and up that have started for a claiming price of \$25,000 or less.

Ridden by Ricardo Santana Jr. for trainer Lilli Kurtinecz, Uncle B finished in 1:41.76 over a firm turf course to win by three-quarters of a length. It was his second career stakes win and first since taking the OBS Sprint at the Ocala Training Center in January 2017.

"Lilli told me she had a lot of confidence in her horse," Santana said.

"He broke really well, and we had him stalking in great position. By the three-eighths pole, everyone started moving, and we were in a great position at that time. He picked it up by himself without me asking. I waited for the turn for home, gave him a smooch and he gave it all to me."

Santana settled Uncle B in fourth as Birdsnest Party, Driven by Thunder and Souperfast battled through contested fractions of :23.67, :47.42 and 1:11.32. Santana tipped Uncle B three wide rounding the far turn, and the gelded son of Zensational got rolling to reel in Driven by Thunder at the eighth pole and edge away.

Uncle B won three straight starts after being claimed for \$16,000 out of a fifth-place finish January 13. He hadn't won in four tries since, most recently tiring to last in a one-mile optional claimer October 21 at Gulfstream Park West.

"We didn't want to go here, but he's just been crawling out of his skin," Kurtinecz said. "I work him every week, and he took me around. I couldn't pull him up last week. I could tell he was zoned in. We were in a \$16,000 starter, and



that's kind of where he belongs.

"We were going to the OBS Sprint race because he holds the track record there, but I don't know anything about that surface, and I've been stretching him out. The owner wanted to run. I said, 'No red flags. Let's go for it.'"

Bred in Kentucky by Andy Reynolds, Uncle B has now earned \$265,234.

Your Only Man, owned by Mitchell Goldberg, Frank Catapano and Mary Beth and Gary Reis and trained by Marcus Vitali, made a late move to get up for second in his second start for his connections since being claimed for \$25,000 at Saratoga. Drawing Away Stable's Aquaphobia, a Robert Falcone Jr.-trained runner who was exiting the Knickerbocker Stakes (G2) at Belmont Park, took third and was followed by Who's Your Drama, Montclair (Ire), Driven by Thunder, Bold Rally, Durocher, Love Conquers, Salute the Colonel, Slim Shadey (GB), Birdsnest Party, Souperfast and Lucky Ramsey.



JEWEL

AZTEC SENSE

A

ztec Sense was relentless in victory in the \$200,000 Jewel while providing trainer Jorge Navarro with his third success on the card after scoring with longshots Salsa's Return (\$35.60) in the Iron Horse and Misschief Maas (\$30.20) in the Glass Slipper.

"Amazing day," Navarro said. "I told my wife today, if we can win three races today, it's a touchdown. When we won the first one, I said, 'You know what? One is good.' Three? Hey, as long as they come, I'm going to take them."

Aztec Sense, the 3-2 favorite ridden by Emisael Jaramillo, has won eight straight races since last tasting defeat in a troubled fourth-place finish in the Rapid Transit last year.

Jaramillo rated the son of Street Sense in fifth along the backstretch as the Navarro-trained Flowers for Lisa, the defending Jewel champion, showed the way past swift fractions of :23.80 and :47.70 while pressed by Chris and Dave. Aztec Sense moved up to third leaving the backstretch before poking his nose in front leaving the turn into the homestretch. Chris and Dave held the lead into the stretch but began tiring in mid-stretch, with Aztec Sense to his outside and Rich Daddy to his inside looming boldly. Aztec Sense outfinished Rich Daddy to prevail by a neck, while Navarro's third Jewel starter, Zulu, rallied late to finish third, more than five lengths farther back.

"Our plan coming into the race was to not go to the lead as usual, because Jorge had three horses in this race and my horse was a better fit to run from behind," Jaramillo said. "He was looking around a little in the beginning, so I had to control him a bit to avoid trouble during the trip, but my horse responded very well down the stretch."

Aztec Sense was timed in 1:52.75 for the 1 1/8-mile race for horses that have started for a claiming price of \$35,000 or lower.



"Going into the race, I kept asking myself and I told my wife I was worried," Navarro said. "It's always in the back of your head. I don't know how trainers win 20 times in a row. The time's going to come when he's going to lose a race. That was the only thing worrying me. I thought he was done. At the quarter-pole, I said, 'We're done,' but Jaramillo told me at the half-mile pole he still had plenty of horse."

Bred in Kentucky by Charles Fipke, Aztec Sense, who was claimed for \$12,500 at Parx in August 2017, has won nine of 10 starts for Navarro and owner Joseph Besecker. That original investment has returned more than \$400,000 in earnings this year, and the gelding has nearly \$550,000 in career earnings.

Runner-up Rich Daddy, co-owned by HRH Racing and trainer Eddie Kenneally, also finished second in last year's Iron Horse, and this year's effort pushed his earnings over the \$465,000 mark.

Imaginary Stables and Glenn K. Ellis' Zulu, a Grade 3-placed runner last year at Gulfstream, earned \$20,000 for running third, which is the same amount he was claimed for in June at Churchill Downs.

Race Me Home (Ire) got up for fourth followed by The Scotsman, Chris and Dave, Flowers for Lisa, St. Louie Guy, Bad Student, Prince Tito, Unbridled Holiday and Capital Letters. **HJ**