



SNOW AND A WET MAIN TRACK AT CHURCHILL DOWNS GREETED HORSEMEN AND FANS FOR THE CLAIMING CROWN'S RETURN TO KENTUCKY



SNOW DAY:

CLAIMING CROWN A SUCCESS AT CHURCHILL



The Claiming Crown made a successful return to Kentucky November 12, a day marked by morning snow that left Churchill Downs' main track sloppy and forced races off the grass. Thankfully, the weather didn't deter horsemen and horseplayers.

Churchill and Claiming Crown co-partners the National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association and Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association reported total handle of \$8,963,000 for the 11-race card. The program featured eight Claiming Crown events, one fewer than recent editions with no Distaff Dash carded.

"Obviously, none of us can control the weather, but at the end of the day we were all very pleased with the way things shook out," said National HBPA CEO Eric Hamelback. "We have to thank the Kentucky HBPA. For them to step in, in a year that we didn't have a secure home base after leaving Gulfstream, they came in and helped us put on a great day of racing, now with more

than \$1 million in purses. We can't thank Rick Hiles and the Kentucky HBPA board enough."

Churchill hosted the Claiming Crown—the first in Kentucky since Ellis Park staged the event in 2007—after a 10-year run at Gulfstream Park. Fair Grounds, which hosted the Claiming Crown in 2011, is the likely site for the 2023 edition.

"Looking to the future, it's been an amazing opportunity to work with the management of Churchill Downs because, again, on that day, being late to the table so to speak, Mike Ziegler, Ben Huffman, Dan Bork and Vicki Tomlinson couldn't have been a better team to work with," Hamelback said. "Moving, we hope, next year to the Fair Grounds and to be able to work with some of the same team members under Churchill Downs just makes it a great seamless transition. From behind the scenes, this quite possibly was one of the smoothest Claiming Crowns that we've ever been able to put on. It was a great show despite the weather. —Tom Law



MIKE MAKER, THE CLAIMING CROWN'S ALL-TIME LEADING TRAINER, MAKES IT NO. 21 WITH KEYSTONE FIELD IN THE FEATURED JEWEL.

JEWEL— KEYSTONE FIELD

Mike Maker made his way to the winner's circle—finally, after watching the Claiming Crown Jewel from high above the racetrack with owner Kirk Wycoff—and summed up his situation in a word.

“Blackjack,” Maker said, acknowledging his 21st Claiming Crown victory after Keystone Field won the featured \$199,875 Claiming Crown Jewel at Churchill Downs November 12.

Maker, who came into the day as the leading trainer in Claiming Crown history, collected his 20th win early on the card when Invaluable won the Glass Slipper for owner Paradise Farms Corp. He picked up the 21st for another longtime and loyal client, the Wycoff family's Three Diamonds Farm.

Maker and Wycoff watched from the Stakes Room on the fourth floor. Wycoff, who made the short drive to Louisville after shopping the Keeneland November breeding stock sale that morning and early afternoon, said he picked that spot for a few reasons.

“I like to go up there; I don't like to stay down here like we think we're going to win,” Wycoff said. “I watched it in the same place I watched Stolen Base win the American Turf this year on the [Kentucky] Derby Day card. They wait for you if you win a big enough race.”

Keystone Field and jockey Gerardo Corrales waited in the early stages of the 1 1/8-mile Jewel, racing in fourth as Monmouth Park shipper and 3-1 second choice Benevengo led longshots Frosted Grace and Calibrator through the opening half-mile on the sloppy and sealed track in :47.91. Corrales inched Keystone Field into third through 6 furlongs in 1:13.16 while Benevengo came under pressure from Frosted Grace.

Keystone Field continued to advance while wide on the far turn, took over in the stretch and led by 3 lengths at the eighth pole and through a mile in

1:39.45. Intrepid Heart, the 2-1 favorite in the field of nine coming off five straight runner-up finishes for trainer Joe Sharp, cut into the lead through the lane but came up a half-length short after 1:53.29. Intrepid Heart finished 7 1/4 lengths clear of Benevengo with Tiz Rye Time fourth.

Keystone Field won for the third time in six starts after being purchased privately by Three Diamonds from breeder Lee and Susan Searing's CRK Stables. The now 8-year-old Candy Ride gelding raced for CRK Stables and Hall of Fame trainer Richard Mandella, running primarily on the grass.



"One of the agents we deal with called me and said, 'I think this horse would suit your program,'" Wycoff said. "We do like to stretch horses out, and we obviously keep older horses in training longer."

Keystone Field finished fourth, beaten 4 lengths, in his first start for Three Diamonds and Maker in the race immediately after the Kentucky Derby going 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles on the dirt. Stretched to 9 furlongs, Keystone Field handled Roderick by 2 lengths June 17 before an off-the-board effort in a similar race in early July.

"He was a very aggressive horse to train, but we had a favorable impression of him," Maker said. "We bought him with this in mind. He was running on the grass, and we switched him to the dirt on Derby Day, and he ran a decent race with the competition."

Keystone Field didn't run again until September 10, when 12th and 33 lengths back after leading early in his return to the grass in the Grade 2 Kentucky Turf Cup Stakes at Kentucky Downs.

"That's a million-dollar race, we're going to Kentucky Downs, and he had the turf form," Wycoff said of the decision to go back to the grass. "Unfortunately, he went way too fast that day. That's not really emblematic of his ability on the turf. Now we know he likes the slop, so we might be hunting the rainstorms."

Keystone Field picked up \$113,000 to boost his bankroll to \$391,529, with \$257,249 since changing barns. He also improved to 6-for-21 in his career and 3-for-8 on the dirt. —*Tom Law*

TAKE A NUMBER

1.5: Inches of snow measured at the National Weather Service of Louisville office near Highview, about 12 miles south of Churchill Downs, the morning of the Claiming Crown

2: Times the Claiming Crown has been run in Kentucky. Ellis Park hosted in 2007

16: Claiming Crown wins for jockey Paco Lopez after he rode Palace Coup to victory in the Emerald and Out of Sorts in the Tiara

21: Claiming Crown wins for trainer Mike Maker after his double with Keystone Field in the Jewel and Invaluable in the Glass Slipper

96: Starters on the 11-race Claiming Crown card

125: Horses entered on the Claiming Crown card

8,963,000: Dollars wagered on Claiming Crown Day at Churchill Downs

SHOP TALK

"If you want a long interview, get Maker."

Owner Kirk Wycoff to TVG/FanDuel TV's Paul Lo Duca after winning the Jewel with Keystone Field

"You always want to move forward. This horse has done all we've asked, taken steps forward. Being on your home turf makes it easy to make decisions like this."

Trainer Joe Sharp on the decision to run Palace Coup in the Emerald

"It's the Breeders' Cup for the claiming horse. That's what we do. It's nice to have a race that puts a crown on your claimers, because that's exactly what it is."

FAS Racing's Adis Smajlovic, owner of Emerald winner Palace Coup

"Hopefully this is just the start and I'm back with a Derby runner one day."

Trainer John Kirby after winning the Ready's Rocket Express with Hero Tiger

"It's a dream for me. I've told [Tom Van Berg] for years I'd want nothing more than a Claiming Crown race."

Owner Jeff Evans, part of the Grit to Glory Racing syndicate celebrating Petit Verdot's victory in the Canterbury Tom Metzen Memorial before the group's The Queens Jules won the Rapid Transit

"He sure looks the part, doesn't he?"

National HBPA President Dr. Doug Daniels before presenting the trophy to Keystone Field's connections for the Jewel

"I'll take windy and cold and win than 80 [degrees] and lose."

Trainer Bobby Mosco after winning the off-the-turf Tiara with Out of Sorts

"I don't know enough to make a decent bet, but I know enough to follow my friends and listen to their advice."

Gary Nelson, a member of the Grit to Glory Racing syndicate that won the Rapid Transit with The Queens Jules and Canterbury Tom Metzen Memorial with Petit Verdot

"Dad always said if you put a canary on a horse they're going to run big. [Willie] Shoemaker was that way; he was just quiet on them. Pat Day was that way. If you stay out of the horse's way, and they're ready and happy and healthy, they're going to run for you."

Trainer Tom Van Berg, the son of the late Hall of Famer Jack Van Berg



PARX RACING SHIPPER OUT OF SORTS, CLAIMED LAST TIME OUT FOR \$25,000 BY OWNER JOHN FANELLI AND TRAINER BOBBY MOSCO, WINS THE CLAIMING CROWN TIARA.

TIARA—OUT OF SORTS

John Fanelli and Bobby Mosco cut it close—almost too close—when they claimed Out of Sorts in early October at Parx Racing. “That was all the owner; he picked the horse out with 18 minutes to post,” Mosco said after winning the \$167,150 Claiming Crown Tiara with the Dramedy filly. “It was his intention for this race because it got her eligible the day we claimed, because she ran for a quarter and had never run for (that) claiming price.”

Out of Sorts, claimed October 4 for \$25,000, made that move look shrewd with a 10-length victory in the Tiara as the 6-1 fifth choice in the field of eight under Paco Lopez. The Kentucky-bred improved to 3-for-3 on wet tracks in the Tiara, one of three races moved to the main track because of wet weather.

Stakes-placed at 2, a stakes winner at 3 and a consistent stakes competitor at 4, Out of Sorts was claimed for \$30,000 out of a turf race at Laurel Park in late July by Madison Avenue Racing Stable and Jagger Inc. and trainer Jamie Ness. That price wouldn’t have made her eligible for the Tiara, open to fillies and mares who started for a \$25,000 tag or less in 2021-22.

Fanelli’s call to Mosco came eight minutes before the cutoff for claims at Parx, causing a few anxious moments for the trainer.

“I didn’t even know the horse,” Mosco said. “And I told him, ‘We only have eight minutes and nobody over here.’ But it all worked out.”

Out of Sorts trained well enough at Parx after the claim for Mosco to take a shot at his fifth Claiming Crown. He’d competed in four other editions at Gulfstream without success.

Out of Sorts changed that, attending the early pace of World of Wonder through the opening half-mile in :49.05 over the sloppy and sealed surface before taking over toward the end of the far turn. She opened up by 5 lengths in midstretch and poured it on late to win in 1:47.34. The Kentucky-based quartet of Misty Veil, the 7-5 favorite for trainer Chris Hartman; World of Wonder, who drew in as a main track-only runner for Joe Sharp; Cherokee Song; and Good Fight filled out the next four spots.

A \$1,000 yearling originally trained in Maryland by Brittany Russell, Out of Sorts improved to 5-for-20 with three seconds and a third for \$301,560 in earnings.

“She’s been great [since the claim],” Mosco said. “Trained tremendous. I couldn’t talk him out of not coming because she’s been training so well. We figured we’ve got to take a shot. I’ve been to the last three at Gulfstream with different horses and hit the board, but, whew, this one was unbelievable.

“She’s a turf horse, but she’s 3-for-3 in the slop now,” Mosco added. “Now I know I can take her back home and run in the winter. I don’t have to worry about laying her up, just hope for mud or slop.” —Tom Law



GIVEN DAVIS/DAVIS INNOVATION PHOTO

PALACE COUP TOPPED STABLEMATE BIG AGENDA TO GIVE TRAINER JOE SHARP A 1-2 FINISH IN THE CLAIMING CROWN EMERALD TO CLOSE THE CARD.

EMERALD — PALACE COUP

The day wasn't going great for Joe Sharp and his team. Sure, the Kentucky-based trainer was able to escape the damp chill by heading to the Churchill Downs Stakes Room with his wife and two children between races, but he also endured close-but-not-quite-good-enough results in the Canterbury Tom Metzen Memorial, Tiara and Jewel.

Palace Coup and Big Agenda helped remedy that situation with a 1-2 finish in the closing event on the card, the \$160,010 Claiming Crown Emerald. Palace Coup, drawing into the race as the lone main track-only runner, took the lead on the far turn and held off his stablemate to win by 2 lengths under Paco Lopez.

"I'm proud of both the boys," Sharp said. "It was fun to watch them turning for home because it looked like the result was inevitable that one of them was going to get there. It's been an exciting but frustrating day. All the horses really showed up for the most part. The weather was a little unfortunate today, but this horse, being able to draw in main track only, was the beneficiary of the rain."

The Emerald, one of three races on the card moved off the grass after rain and morning snow, still wound up with a field of 10 despite six scratches. Palace Coup started as the even-money favorite, ahead of 3-1 Onenightstandards and 6-1 Big Agenda.

Sharp and owner Adis Smajlovic of FAS Racing claimed Palace Coup for \$25,000 out of a third going 1 ¹/₁₆ miles June 18 at Churchill. The Ontario-bred

son of Bernardini ran three times for his new connections before the Emerald, including a second in the slop July 21 at Saratoga Race Course and a win for a \$50,000 tag September 29 at Churchill.

"A lot of things played in our favor, obviously the weather," Smajlovic said. "The track—a lot of horses didn't favor it, but our horse actually does. He runs great in the slop. We were very confident going into the race. When he made the lead, I was confident he was going to finish the way he did."

A half brother to 2009 Queen's Plate Stakes winner Eye of the Leopard, 2010 Queen's Plate runner-up and multiple stakes winner Hotep, Grade 2 winner Deceptive Vision and stakes winner Desert Isle, Palace Coup started his career for Neil Howard, Stuart Simon, Gail Cox and Phil D'Amato before being claimed for \$40,000 by Vann Belvoir and A and J Racing in August 2021 at Del Mar. He ran once for Belvoir before being transferred to Robertino Diodoro, who won two races from five starts with the gelding before Sharp and Smajlovic dropped a claim slip.

Palace Coup picked up \$84,000 for the Emerald, his seventh victory in 24 starts. He's also earned \$135,200 since the claim.

"We have five horses right now; this is a huge win for us," Smajlovic said. "Anything you win when you win is great. It's more the experience than the money. The money is just a bonus. The experience, you can't pay for that."

—Tom Law



PETIT VERDOT KICKED OFF THE CLAIMING CROWN CARD WITH A VICTORY IN THE CANTERBURY TOM METZEN MEMORIAL FOR THE FIRST OF TWO WINNERS FOR TRAINER TOM VAN BERG AND OWNER GRIT TO GLORY RACING LLC.

CANTERBURY TOM METZEN MEMORIAL—PETIT VERDOT

Jeff Evans needed to change things up. Interested in claiming a handful of horses as part of the Grit to Glory Racing syndicate on the last day of the 2021 Churchill Downs fall meeting, Evans and trainer Tom Van Berg watched as they were outshook on the first four.

"We actually went to claim five horses that day, and he was the last one," Evans said of Petit Verdot, at the time a 3-year-old gelding by Vancouver making his 16th start. "So we had my son Camden drop the slip on the fifth one."

"To change our luck," Van Berg said.

"And it worked," said Evans, telling the story with sons Camden and Max in the winner's circle along with Van Berg and the Grit to Glory team after Petit Verdot splashed home to win the \$160,600 Canterbury Tom Metzen Memorial to open the Claiming Crown portion of the card.

Petit Verdot and jockey Florent Geroux won the 5 ½-furlong Canterbury Tom Metzen Memorial—moved from the turf to the sloppy and sealed main track because of wet weather in Louisville—by a head over Towing to start a big day for Kentucky-based connections. Petit Verdot was also one of two Claiming Crown wins for Grit to Glory and Van Berg, along with The Queens Jules in the Rapid Transit, and three overall on the day for Van Berg.

"The horses are happy," Van Berg said. "All I can do is get them over here happy and healthy and let the jockey do the rest. And Flo knows this horse really well. I didn't even have to give him any instructions. He was like, 'I know, I know,' before I even walked in the paddock. Hearing that I said, 'We're good.'"

Geroux kept Petit Verdot in his preferred spot toward the outside and behind the speed of Spycraft, Towing and C C's Kitten through a quick quarter in :22.36. They advanced toward the end of the far turn and continued to gain in the stretch before taking control just outside the eighth pole. Petit Verdot maintained the advantage inside the final furlong to win by a head in 1:05.52. Towing held second, 4 ½ lengths clear of New York shipper Seven Scents.

The Canterbury Tom Metzen Memorial took the biggest hit of the Claiming Crown turf races, losing six of its original 11 entrants.

Van Berg kept a close eye on the weather that moved into Louisville the day before the Claiming Crown, hoping for a surface change. Petit Verdot raced on synthetic at Presque Isle Downs this summer but hadn't raced on the grass since September 2021 at Kentucky Downs, almost three months before he was claimed at Churchill for \$10,000.

"We weren't running unless it came off the grass," Van Berg said. "So, when it did come off the grass, we thought we had a chance. He was a little overmatched with some of those turf specialists, but on the dirt he liked the off track; he liked speed. We knew he liked this track, and it played to his favor. It worked out pretty well."

Petit Verdot improved to 7-for-27 and boosted his bankroll to \$304,606. Four of the victories in 11 starts and \$189,437 in earnings have come after the claim through the end of November. —Tom Law



GRIT TO GLORY RACING AND TRAINER TOM VAN BERG SWEATED OUT THE PHOTO BEFORE CELEBRATING A VICTORY BY THE QUEENS JULES IN THE CLAIMING CROWN RAPID TRANSIT.

RAPID TRANSIT—THE QUEENS JULES

Gary Nelson tried to coerce some of the Grit to Glory Racing partners to join him along the rail while the final strides of the \$138,755 Claiming Crown Rapid Transit replayed over and over on Churchill Downs' mammoth 15,000-plus-square-foot 'Big Board' LED video screen.

He couldn't get any takers, even when it looked like The Queens Jules held off Divine Leader in the last jump of the 7-furlong Rapid Transit. Trainer Tom Van Berg wouldn't take the bait either, opting to stay under the heat lamp of the owners' boxes lining the back of the winner's circle.

"I know better than that," Van Berg said after The Queens Jules' number went up for the third win of the day for the trainer and second in a Claiming Crown race after Petit Verdot kicked it off in the Canterbury Tom Metzen Memorial.

The Queens Jules, at eight times the most frequently claimed of the day's winners and haltered by Van Berg and company for \$20,000 November 6, 2021, at Churchill, won his third race of the year from 12 starts and pocketed another \$79,000.

"I can tell you this: Nothing has been more fun this year than to be part of this group," said Nelson, also part of Van Berg's Chicken Fried Racing syndicate. "Friends of ours, they asked us to go in on this. I've got four small children, so obviously any time you have expenses outside of things that aren't necessary it's challenging, but this has been the most fun in the world. We pay for the corn and the hay, and every once in a while, the horses get a better massage than I do, but you always hope one day it's going to pay off. It's what it's all about."

The Queens Jules, coming off a win going 6 furlongs for a \$20,000 tag October 15 at Keeneland, and jockey Florent Geroux worked out a trip from the outside post in the field of 10 for the Rapid Transit. Just off Cajun Brother's opening quarter-mile in :22.96, The Queens Jules took over on the far turn and opened up a length to the half in :46.13.

Geroux let the Scat Daddy gelding draw off even more in the lane, and the 8-1 sixth choice led by 2 lengths at the eighth pole with Divine Leader gaining. Divine Leader, second and a head behind The Queens Jules in that mid-October race at Keeneland, gained a slight advantage in deep stretch but didn't get his nose down at the finish. The Queens Jules won in 1:25.10 for his 12th win from 59 starts, to go with 12 seconds and nine thirds.

"This horse doesn't like kickback, and we were able to get in front and in the clear," Geroux said. "He was game as could be on the inside and didn't want to let the other horse get by."

Third in the Dads Caps Stakes in March 2021 at Aqueduct, The Queens Jules changed barns five times before Van Berg claimed him out of a third going 6 ½ furlongs for trainer Lynn Cash. Van Berg didn't run the gelding the rest of the year, and after a slow start to 2022—when he didn't win the first six months while only placing once—The Queens Jules has since won three of six.

"It's crazy; horses don't usually blossom this time of year," Van Berg said. "You really don't see it. They start growing their hair long, start getting-ready-for-winter kind of mode. This horse after his last race, he turned the corner and didn't think he could be beat. He was like Superman. Every day coming out to the track he was blowing more steam and felt great." —Tom Law



PARADISE FARMS CORP.'S INVALUABLE, CLAIMED FOR \$32,000 TWO STARTS BACK WITH THE CLAIMING CROWN IN MIND, WINS THE GLASS SLIPPER FOR JOCKEY LUIS SAEZ AND TRAINER MIKE MAKER.

GLASS SLIPPER—INVALUABLE

Mike Maker couldn't remember his first Claiming Crown win after collecting his 20th at the 2022 renewal, but there are a few takeaways from that sweltering day back in 2007 at Ellis Park.

"It didn't cross my mind until you mentioned 20, then I thought, 'Damn, I'm old,'" Maker said after winning his 20th Claiming Crown race in the \$109,850 Glass Slipper with Invaluable. "Actually, I think it was at Ellis Park and I won three."

Maker, 53, did saddle a trio of winners in the 100-degree temps of Ellis Park's lone Claiming Crown, taking the Iron Horse with Bargainwiththdevil, the Emerald with One Eyed Joker and the Jewel with Miami Sunrise. He added to his haul in the near-freezing temps at Churchill Downs in 2022, starting with Invaluable and finishing with Keystone Field in the Jewel.

Invaluable, claimed for \$32,000 two starts back by Peter Proscia's Paradise Farms Corp. and Maker, won the 1-mile Glass Slipper by 1 ½ lengths over Maoilin as the 3-1 second choice under Luis Saez. The 5-year-old daughter of Include finished third for a \$10,000 tag going 6 ½ furlongs in mid-October at Keeneland, one of a few races the last few years that made her eligible for the Glass Slipper, open to fillies and mares who started for \$12,500 or less in 2021-2022.

Maker said Proscia claimed the Kentucky-bred mare with the Claiming Crown in mind, something the series' all-time leader is always thinking about as the season winds down.

"She was consistent, fit this race well," Maker said. "I thought a stretch out would be in order and that she'd appreciate the wet track."

Invaluable won the Glass Slipper in 1:39.84 over the sloppy and sealed track. Maker said the rains that blew into Louisville the day before the Claiming Crown followed by snow showers the morning of the event "didn't hurt my feelings one bit."

Invaluable, claimed out of her debut in May 2020 at Gulfstream Park, came into the Glass Slipper with a pair of wins in six starts on wet tracks. Hashtag Lucky took the early initiative, leading Invaluable by a head through quick opening splits of :22.59 and :45.86. Invaluable took command 3 furlongs from home, clicked past 6 furlongs in 1:12.16, opened up by 3 ½ lengths in midstretch and had plenty left to hold off Maoilin. Teller to Sing finished three-quarters of a length back in third.

Invaluable improved to 7-for-25 with the win, to go with six seconds and six thirds and earnings of \$334,024. Proscia, who watched the race from Las Vegas, and Maker claimed the mare out of a victory going 6 furlongs September 1 at Saratoga Race Course. She's earned back her claiming price and then some since, adding \$68,645 to her connections' account. —*Tom Law*



TIME FOR TROUBLE KEPT THINGS ROLLING FOR THE HOMETOWN CONTINGENTS WITH A VICTORY IN THE KENT STIRLING IRON HORSE FOR TRAINER AND CO-OWNER JEFF HILES AND THORNDALE STABLE.

KENT STIRLING IRON HORSE TIME FOR TROUBLE

Perhaps Time for Trouble wanted more distance. Or turf. Or a fast track. Perhaps.

Time for Trouble showed that he didn't need any of the above, or much else, in giving trainer Jeff Hiles back-to-back victories in the \$108,433 Claiming Crown Kent Stirling Iron Horse. The English Channel gelding, co-owned by Hiles and Paul Parker's Thorndale Stable, stayed in the clear through the early stages of the 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ -mile Kent Stirling Iron Horse and kicked away late to win by 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ lengths under Joe Talamo.

"He's done well for us," said Hiles, who claimed Time for Trouble in June 2021 for \$8,000 from Repole Stable and Mike Maker. "Last year we claimed him and stretched him out. This really isn't his preferred distance, but Joe got him to lay up a little closer today and he was able to pull it off."

Hiles added the 2022 Kent Stirling Iron Horse to his victory in 2021 at Gulfstream Park with Blue Steel, who was entered for his defense by new trainer George Leonard but scratched. Hiles considered running Time for Trouble in the Emerald, open for horses who have started for a claiming price of \$25,000 or less, but opted for the Kent Stirling Iron Horse, for those who have started for \$8,000 or less.

"He's an English Channel out of a Galileo mare, which screams long turf," Hiles said. "That's why we put him on the grass down at Kentucky Downs going the mile and five-sixteenths. He set the track record at Belterra for a mile and

three-eighths on the grass. He's very versatile. Very versatile. He has a small foot. We thought let's give him a shot. We thought about putting him in the [Emerald]. I've got another horse in there that's a longshot. He's won on the dirt, and we might catch a little less competition. Then it came off the grass anyway. Looks like we made the right move."

Time for Trouble led a 1-2 finish for Kentucky-based runners in the Iron Horse and was one of six winners from the Bluegrass State to win a Claiming Crown event on the cold, damp and windy afternoon. Time for Trouble and Talamo stalked the early pace of Bless the Kitten before overtaking that rival in the lane. Bless the Kitten finished 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ lengths clear of Moment, with Malibu Star fourth in the field of eight.

"On this track, you've got to be close, and Joe gave him a perfect ride," Hiles said. "If you go back and watch the replay, he started riding him at about the (nine-sixteenths pole) to get him going."

Bred by Calumet Farm and a \$170,000 yearling buy at the 2018 Keeneland September sale, Time for Trouble started in New York with trainer Todd Pletcher before moving to Maker's barn in the summer of 2020. He's won five of eight for Hiles since the claim, starting with that course-record score in 2:13.05 on the Belterra Park turf course July 29, 2021, and continuing to the Claiming Crown, while earning \$233,107. —Tom Law



HERO TIGER GAVE TRAINER JOHN KIRBY, A THIRD-GENERATION HORSEMAN WHO GOT HIS START IN NEW ENGLAND, REASON TO CELEBRATE WITH A VICTORY IN THE CLAIMING CROWN READY'S ROCKET EXPRESS.

READY'S ROCKET EXPRESS —HERO TIGER

John Kirby wasn't about to leave anything to chance. "I rode down with the horse," Kirby said of Hero Tiger, shipped from Parx Racing just outside Philadelphia to Louisville for the trainer's first foray at Churchill Downs. "And he shipped unbelievable."

Hero Tiger ran to his trainer's impressions when he toppled a big field that included 2022 win machine Beverly Park in the \$106,899 Claiming Crown Ready's Rocket Express. Claimed three starts back at Saratoga Race Course, Hero Tiger came from off the pace while running wide under Luis Saez to give Parx-based runners two wins on the card with a 1 ¼-length victory over Joyful Heart. Hero Tiger joined fellow Parx runner Out of Sorts, winner of the Claiming Crown Tiara in the race prior to the Ready's Rocket Express.

A native of New England who got his start at Suffolk Downs, 25-year-old Kirby realized a dream standing under Churchill's famous twin spires.

"Everything went his way, and I'm thrilled to be here," Kirby said. "I'm a third-generation guy, and this is our first time running at Churchill. Really special. He's the first horse I've saddled here in three generations. To win here, in horse country, it's just unbelievable."

Owner Gregg O'Donnell claimed Hero Tiger for \$40,000 September 4 at Saratoga, winning a shake with David Jacobson for the 6-year-old gelding by Hero of Order. He finished fourth that day to eventual Grade 3 Fall Highweight

Handicap winner Greeley and Ben.

Hero Tiger, who ran in the Grade 3 Indiana Derby in 2019 and finished fourth in the 2021 Express at Gulfstream Park, became eligible for the Ready's Rocket Express when he won for an \$8,000 tag in August 2020 at Gulfstream.

Sent off as the 4-1 third choice in the field of 11 behind 2-1 favorite Beverly Park and 3-1 second choice The Wolfman, Hero Tiger raced fifth early before inching closer to a battle between Elle'sbigseacret and Beverly Park at the quarter-pole. Beverly Park, looking for his 13th win of 2022 (he later secured that mark November 28 at Mahoning Valley Race Course), never made the lead but hung tough with Elle'sbigseacret as Hero Tiger and Joyful Heart ran by in the lane. Joyful Heart finished 2 ¼ lengths ahead of Elle'sbigseacret with Beverly Park fourth.

"The two scratches [Powerfully Built and Silver Moon Road] really helped us in the pace setup," Kirby said. "The way he shipped and the way he was training for this race I knew he had a hell of a shot. Luis, he rides great for us. I always feel confident with him in the irons. This horse is all class, and no matter what you do with him he shows up. Everything went his way, and we got lucky."

Hero Tiger won for the eighth time, with 17 seconds and nine thirds, in his 52nd start and boosted his bankroll to \$303,275. He finished fourth and second at Parx in his first two starts for Kirby and O'Donnell and earned \$128,600 since the claim through November. —Tom Law