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BELMONT



ADAM COGLIANESE/NYRA

Japanese import Casino Drive will be pointed to the Belmont Stakes after dominating Saturday's Peter Pan.

Casino Drive the real deal

By DAVID GRENING

ELMONT, N.Y. — Oh brother — and sister — did the Belmont Stakes just get a whole lot more interesting.

Casino Drive, a half-brother to recent Belmont Stakes winners Jazil and the filly Rags to Riches, announced his presence as a major contender for the June 7 Belmont Stakes — and a potential Triple Crown roadblock to Big Brown — with an impressive 5 3/4-length victory in Saturday's Grade 2, \$200,000 Peter Pan Stakes at Belmont Park.

Mint Lane, who set a fast pace under Eibar Coa, held second by one-half length over Ready's Echo, who raced last for the first five furlongs. Ready's Echo was followed in the order of finish by Golden Spikes, Cosmic, Spark Candle, Tomcito, Deputyville, and Fast Talking.

Casino Drive is a son of Mineshaft out of the mare Better Than Honour,

who is the mother of Jazil and Rags to Riches. Casino Drive raced just once prior to the Peter Pan, scoring an 11 1/2-length maiden win in Japan in February. His connections were using the Peter Pan as a prep for the Belmont, but had indicated that they weren't sure he was going to be able to win the race.

Despite acting up in the paddock, Casino Drive was more than prepared for a strong effort Saturday. Under Kent Desormeaux — the regular rider of Kentucky Derby winner Big Brown — Casino Drive saved all the ground after breaking from the rail and raced in fourth position while Mint Lane set fractions of 23.08 seconds, 46.31, and 1:10.47 for the opening six furlongs.

Approaching the quarter pole, Desormeaux took Casino Drive off the rail and he adroitly split the duo of Mint Lane and Golden Spikes turning for home. With one crack of

Desormeaux's left-handed whip and three of his right, Casino Drive drew clear and was taken in hand late. He covered 1 1/8 miles in 1:47.87 over a drying out track labeled fast and returned \$4.50 as the favorite.

"He is a phenomenal talent, we got our hands full," said Desormeaux, who hopes to win next Saturday's Preakness with Big Brown and come to the Belmont with a chance at the Triple Crown. "He's got that stride; that's what I call it, that stride."

Desormeaux then spotted his agent, Mike Sellitto, and said, "There's your competition buddy, woo!"

Nobutaka Tada, the managing director for owner Hidetoshi Yamamoto, said he expects Casino Drive to take a step forward in the Belmont.

"He was good, but he was not top form," Tada said. "There's so much [room] for him to improve."

'Glory' out due to fever

By MARTY MCGEE

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — There is no way to pinpoint a time that the Triple Crown scene shifts unambiguously from Churchill Downs to Pimlico. But with all that was happening on the Saturday morning between the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes, it was clear

Preakness Doings

that the newsmakers were still hanging back in Louisville.

Most notably, Recapture the glory spiked a fever Friday night at Churchill, and by the next afternoon, owner Ronnie Lamarque had declared him out of the Preakness, which will be run Saturday for the 133rd time at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore. Big Brown galloped for the first time since his crushing Derby victory on a picture-postcard morning. Macho Again, declared out of the Preakness only the day before, was back in again after breezing a half-mile in 50.80 seconds. And Racecar Rhapsody put in serious work as one of maybe a dozen would-be challengers to Big Brown by breezing five furlongs in 1:01.

Recapture the glory, the fifth-place finisher in the Derby for Lamarque and trainer Louie Roussel, was treated with an anti-inflammatory analgesic shortly after Lara Van Deren, Roussel's assistant, came to work early Saturday and found the colt had a 102 temperature. The setback precluded the colt from training and forced cancellation of plans to van to Baltimore later that day.

"He just wasn't acting quite right," Friday night,

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