



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Kevin Kerstein
Kentucky Racing Communications
Churchill Downs, Ellis Park, Turfway Park
(610) 420-6971 (mobile)
(502) 635-4712 (office)
Kevin.Kerstein@KyDerby.com

'MORE THAN 30 YEARS, UNDER 30 STALLS': SALUTING VETERAN TRAINER NICK ZITO

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, June 6, 2024) – Hall of Fame trainer **Nick Zito** may be down on horses but he's far from out of the game. At age 76 the veteran conditioner, who has won 35 Grade I races, including two Kentucky Derbys, two Belmont Stakes, and the Preakness Stakes, currently trains 12 horses at Churchill Downs' Trackside Louisville. Despite recent challenges, he remains hopeful for a return to the spotlight before his career ends.

"I may be down but I'm sure not out of it yet," Zito said. "Horse racing is a hard business, especially when you're down on your luck. It's tough coming from where I once was in the 90s and early 2000s to now having to ask clients for horses."

Zito won his first race of 2024 two weeks ago with **Mossarosa's Philharmonic** and continues to reinvent himself in an effort to rebuild his stable.

"I've had great support from **Nena Moss**, the principal owner of Mossarosa, even when we've been down on horses," Zito said. "Recently, I received three horses from **Mike Repole**, two of which are racing Wednesday at Churchill. I'm hopeful this is the kickstart we need to get another shot at the Derby. Mike is the 'Who's Who' of horse racing owners. It's an honor to train for him."

Zito began his training career in 1972 after working as an assistant to **Leroy Jolley** and **John Campo**. The native New Yorker grew up near Queens, close to Aqueduct Racetrack. He started as a hotwalker as a teenager and then worked as a groom for **Buddy Jacobson**.

"Every day I kept telling myself that I wanted to win the Kentucky Derby," Zito said. "Once I finally did with **Strike the Gold**, I never stopped wanting to win it."

Zito has made 26 starts in the Derby, winning twice with **Strike the Gold** (1991) and **Go for Gin** (1994). His last starter in the race was Mossarosa's **Frammento** in 2015.

Saturday's Belmont Stakes, run this year at Saratoga, marks the 20th anniversary of Zito's trainee **Birdstone** upsetting **Smarty Jones'** Triple Crown bid. Zito's **Da' Tara** also played Triple Crown spoiler, leading every step of the 1 ½-mile race in 2008, defeating **Big Brown** at odds of 39-1.

"I know things are different this year with the Belmont run at Saratoga," Zito said. "There are some very nice horses in this field but the complexion is different running at a mile-and-a-quarter compared to the true test of a mile-and-a-half. I remember to this day when Birdstone ran down Smarty Jones. When Smarty Jones turned for home in front by about four lengths, more often than not, you'd see that horse go on to win. It was an unbelievable upset by an unbelievable horse."

Zito's horses are back in the Churchill Downs entries Thursday with Repole Stable's **Blind Speed** (Race 5) and **Always Be Smart** (Race 9).

"Winning the other week with Philharmonic was the shot in the arm I needed," Zito said. "Now, I'm looking ahead to build off that and get rolling again."

WHO DEY MORNING LINE FAVORITE FOR SUNDAY'S \$400,000 MATT WINN STAKES, NASH AT SARATOGA FOR WOODY STEPHENS – **Maccabee Farm's** talented Ohio-bred **Who Dey** now overtakes early favoritism for Sunday's \$400,000 Matt Winn Stakes (Grade III) after original 8-5 morning line favorite **Nash** shipped to Saratoga for Saturday's Woody Stephens (GI).

Carded as Race 8, the 1 1/16-mile Matt Winn field will go to post at 4:22 p.m. (all times Eastern). The solid nine-race program will also include the third running of the \$175,000 Leslie's Lady Overnight Stakes in Race 4 at 2:13 p.m. First post is 12:45 p.m.

Here is the complete field for the Matt Winn from the rail out (with jockey, trainer and morning line odds):

- **Northern Flame** (Julien Leparoux, Kenny McPeck, 12-1)
- Who Dey (Brian Hernandez Jr., Drury, 5-2)
- **Scatify** (Jose Ortiz, John Sadler, 12-1)
- West Saratoga (Jesus Castanon, Larry Demeritte, 10-1)
- **Rocketeer** (Tyler Gaffalione, Cox, 6-1)
- Nash (Florent Geroux, Brad Cox, 8-5)
- Society Man (Corey Lanerie, Danny Gargan, 12-1)
- **Mighty Message** (Cristian Torres, Tom Amoss, 15-1)
- **Next Level** (Jareth Loveberry, Keith Desormeaux, 12-1)
- **Luna Tap** (Luan Machado, Doug O'Neill, 20-1)

Fans can watch and wager on all the action from Churchill Downs in www.twinspires.com, the official wagering provider of Churchill Downs Incorporated and the Kentucky Derby. For more information about the 2024 Spring Meet, visit www.churchilldowns.com.

DOWN THE STRETCH – Live racing resumed Thursday at Churchill Downs with a first post of 5 p.m. for Day 25 of the 43-day meeting. The Twilight Thursday program featured \$2 domestic beers, live music from **Piper Madison** and local food trucks **All Thai'd Up**, **DonutNV**, **Flavaville**, **Lil Cheezers** and **Red Top Dogs**. The eight-race program featured a \$143,590 carryover in the 20-cent Derby City 6 Jackpot that spanned Races 3-8. ... “**Inside Churchill Downs**” will air Friday at 6 p.m. on **ESPN 680/105.7**. The one-hour program, hosted by Churchill Downs’ **Darren Rogers** and **Kevin Kerstein**, will preview the weekend action from Churchill Downs as well as the Belmont Stakes (GI) with racing analyst **Kevin Kilroy**. ... For more information about the Spring Meet from Churchill Downs visit www.churchilldowns.com.

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 and Race and Sports Book. www.ChurchillDowns.com.

-END-