

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



By John Scheinman

Duke of Mischief Set for Title Defense Against Classic Cast April 11, 2012

(Charles Town, WV) – One year after surging five wide before the final turn to seize control of the \$1 million Charles Town Classic, the now 6-year-old **Duke of Mischief** returns to the scene of his greatest triumph Saturday night to try to knock off another star-studded cast in West Virginia's richest horse race.

After being elevated to Grade 3 status last year in just its third running, the Classic at Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races was awarded a Grade 2 ranking this year by the American Graded Stakes Committee, continuing its climb in prominence among the most important races for older horses in the country.

For the second year in a row, each of the runners in the full field of 10 – which includes stars **Pants on Fire** and **Tackleberry** – is a graded stakes winner, with a total of 20 graded wins amassed among them. Duke of Mischief, who has earned more than \$1.7 million in his career for trainer David Fawkes, tops the list with last year's Classic becoming the fourth of his graded scores.

The chestnut son of Graeme Hall has finished off the board in both of his starts this year, the most recent a turf stakes at Tampa Bay Downs, but Fawkes insists Duke of Mischief is in form to defend his title.

"He kind of got off his game a little bit and lost interest over the year, but I worked him with [top sprinter] Apriority, and he has had some dynamite works," Fawkes said. "[Jockey Joey] Bravo said he wasn't himself, but the last two works he was really happy with him.

"I'm very confident. I think the horse is doing really well right now," Fawkes said. "He would have been a great bull ring horse."

On the 3/4-mile Charles Town oval, the 1 1/8-mile Classic is contested around three turns. If trainers of the entered closers, like Duke of Mischief, believe they need a solid pace up front to be effective, there is no shortage of talented horses with speed signed up to compete.

Chief among them is the Florida ace Tackleberry, a game fourth last year after running on the lead over a sloppy track. The 5-year-old gelded son of Montbrook, owned and trained by Luis Olivares, has proven to be one of the toughest, most versatile horses in training.

Tackleberry has won stakes in short sprints, one-turn miles and around two turns. In his most recent start, after a nearly 10-month layoff, he finished a strong second in the one-mile Grade 2

Gulfstream Park Handicap. The third-place finisher that day, Jackson Bend, emerged to capture the Grade 1 Carter Handicap last week at Aqueduct Racetrack.

“I’m expecting him to run a good race,” said Olivares, who has tabbed jockey Rajiv Maragh for the mount. “He’s a much fresher horse this year than when he went [to Charles Town] last year.

Tackleberry has a world of speed, but Olivares insists, “The horse doesn’t have to be on the lead. I ran him one time at Calder off the pace, and he came back and won the race easy. If he goes too fast up front, it won’t be good for him. He can lay second or third. If nobody wants to take the lead, he’ll take the lead.”

Whether leading or stalking, Tackleberry will have company. **Redding Colliery**, from the barn of Kiaran McLaughlin, has done his best running on the pace, including a devastating wire-to-wire score two years ago in the Grade 2 Hawthorne Gold Cup. Earlier in 2010, the gray son of Mineshaft stalked the pace in the Charles Town Classic and took the lead heading for home before finishing a close-up third.

Meantime, Pants on Fire, a multiple graded stakes winner last year at 3 years old, and West Coast shippers **Tres Borrachos** and **Skipshot**, have done their best work on or pressing the pace.

The Louisiana Derby-winning Pants on Fire will have the services of regular rider Anna Rose Napravnik for the race and has been galloping sharply in the mornings at Charles Town in preparation.

Asked if he expected to be on the lead or stalking, trainer Kelly Breen said, “Just in front at the wire.”

Tres Borrachos, like Pants on Fire a former veteran of the Triple Crown trail, heads a strong contingent shipping from the West for the Classic: **Uh Oh Bango**, winner earlier this year of the Grade 2 San Pasqual, comes in off a hard-rallying third in the Grade 1 Santa Anita Handicap; Skipshot, trained by Hall of Famer Jerry Hollendorfer, enters off a third-place finish in the 1 ½-mile Grade 3 Tokyo City Handicap, also at Santa Anita; **Norvsky**, also based at Santa Anita, finished fifth in the Big Cap. Earlier this year, he won the Grade 2 San Gabriel on the turf.

Norvsky’s trainer Donald Warren had a frustrating first experience last year in the Classic, when his horse, Acclamation, finished 10th on the sealed and sloppy track. Acclamation subsequently went on to a terrific campaign and earned the Eclipse Award as champion older male.

“We had a lot of mud last year, so we were watching the weather pretty close this year,” Warren said. “In California, we don’t get a lot of mud.”

“He’s developed into a good horse in his own right,” Warren said of Norvsky. “He had a little bit of a troubled trip in the Santa Anita Handicap, and I think he might have been third in that race. I like the million-dollar purse [of the Classic]. We don’t have those big races back here.”

Mister Marti Gras ships north from New Orleans for trainer Neil Pessin. The 5-year-old gelded son of Belong to Me won two graded stakes races last year and was a hard-trying fourth when five wide in the Grade 1 Clark Handicap in November at Churchill Downs.

In two graded stakes starts this year, Mister Marti Gras has been checked and steadied, spoiling his chances to win.

“Last race [the jockey] got off and apologized for the ride,” Pessin said. “I think he’ll run a really big race, as long as there’s enough speed to set it up for him.”

Pessin took Mister Marti Gras to Keeneland and worked the horse on the 5/8ths training track, “and he handled it really well, and that was the final decision to come. I did not breeze him; I just galloped him. I wanted to see how he’d handle the turns. He switched leads when I asked him, and he knew what to do.”

At the time entries for the Classic were drawn, trainer Todd Pletcher spiced the field further by throwing **Caixa Eletronica** into the mix.

A \$62,500 claim last year by owner Mike Repole, Caixa Eletronica has proven fast, consistent and versatile. At Saratoga last summer, he won a six-furlong sprint carrying 127 pounds and followed that with a win at 1 1/8 miles under 131 pounds. He then went on to place third in the Grade 1 Vosburgh at Belmont Park.

“We’re intrigued by the race and the horse is doing really well at the moment,” Pletcher said.

Asked about a horse that has run in three sprints this year attempting to negotiate three turns in the Classic, Pletcher said simply, “I love it.”

Post time for the Classic is 10:30pm EST on Saturday and is the final leg of a \$50,000 Guaranteed Pick 4 that begins in Race 9.

\$1,000,000 CHARLES TOWN CLASSIC (G2)

April 14, 2012

Race 12 – Post time 10:30pm EST

4&up, 1 1/8 miles

PP. Horse, Jockey, Weight, Trainer

1. Tres Borrachos, Kendrick Carmouche, 116, Martin F. Jones
2. Tackleberry, Rajiv Maragh, 116, Luis Olivares
3. Mister Marti Gras, Julien R. Leparoux, 116, Neil L. Pessin
4. Pants on Fire, Rosie Napravnik, 118, Kelly J. Breen
5. Skipshot, Travis L. Dunkelberger, 118, Jerry Hollendorfer
6. Caixa Eletronica, Javier Castellano, 118, Todd A. Pletcher
7. Duke of Mischief, Joe Bravo, 116, David Fawkes
8. Norvsky, Kevin Krigger, 120, Donald Warren
9. Redding Colliery, Alan Garcia, 118, Kiaran P. McLaughlin
10. Uh Oh Bango, Aaron T. Gryder, 120, R. Kory Owens

ALSO ELIGIBLE

11. Norman Asbjornson, J.D. Acosta, 118, Christopher W. Grove
12. Cease, Miguel Mena, 118, Albert M. Stall, Jr.
13. Eighttofasttocatch, Sheldon Russell, 118, Timothy L. Keefe

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Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races, a Penn National Gaming property, is a world-class entertainment venue offering visitors over 3,500 slot machines, more than 100 table games, a 30-table poker room, live and simulcast horse racing and a wide range of food and beverage choices, including Zen Noodle, the 350-seat Epic Buffet, the Final Cut Steakhouse—proud recipient of the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence—and all-new Skybox Sports Bar and H Lounge. The historic Charles Town Races has hosted live thoroughbred racing since 1933 and began offering gaming to visitors in 1997. Conveniently located about an hour from the Baltimore and Washington DC beltways, Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races is one of the region’s fastest growing gaming and entertainment destinations with more than 4 million visitors each year.

Hotel accommodations can be found on property at the Inn at Charles Town, which features 153 comfortable guest rooms, including 18 spacious suites that overlook live thoroughbred racing action. Guests can enjoy a complimentary breakfast buffet and wireless internet access. They can further unwind by taking the complimentary shuttle service to enjoy racing, table and slot action and a diverse selection of dining options at Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races. The Inn at Charles Town offers a variety of venues to host business or social functions.

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