



Albarado on Indiana Derby favorite King Zachary at Indiana Grand Racing & Casino

"I think he's going to become special"

Story by Jennie Rees, Eclipse Award winning turf writer



SHELBYVILLE, Ind.; July 13, 2018 — When Robby Albarado suffered a broken ankle in a gate mishap two weeks before last year's Kentucky Derby, the jockey said that horse owner Tom Conway sent a text telling him not to worry, that "your Derby horse is in Dale's barn."

Conway, a Louisville attorney, was referring to the 2018 Derby, trainer Dale Romans and a young colt that Conway co-bred and owned outright that was a son of Curlin, whom Albarado rode throughout two Horse of the Year campaigns. King Zachary, the colt in reference who was still almost seven months from making his first start at the time of the text, missed the Kentucky Derby. But he is the 6-5 favorite in Saturday night's \$500,000 Indiana Derby at Indiana Grand. Albarado believes that King Zachary's victory in Churchill Downs' Grade 3 Matt Winn Stakes last month and the Indiana Derby will prove just the start of a huge second half of the season for the youngster.

"We've always really, really been high on him," Albarado, who has won the Indiana Derby a record three times and will be riding in the race for a record 11th running, said recently. "I really like the colt. He has a lot of characteristics of Curlin, not comparing them. But he's tactically fast, he rates, he's a smart horse, a nice physical specimen. I think he's going to become special."

King Zachary missed his chance at the Kentucky Derby when he finished sixth in New York's Grade 2 Wood Memorial after winning a maiden race at Gulfstream Park by 7 3/4 lengths.

"He just wasn't ready for those horses yet in the Wood," Albarado said. "He was a race behind him. They took off at the half-mile pole and he wasn't ready for that."

King Zachary, who who breaks from post 8 in the field of nine 3-year-old rivals in the 1 1/16-mile Indiana Derby, is unbeaten in two starts since the Wood. He did run Kentucky Derby Day at Churchill Downs, winning an allowance race under trying conditions, and then driving to a 4 3/4-length romp in the June 16 Matt Winn over stablemate Tiz Mischief.

"The other day was just impressive," Albarado said. "He wasn't stressed or tired or anything. I thought it was it was a hard-fought race Derby Day. He really had to gut it out. The other day when I squeezed, he turned it on like, 'This is what we're doing it for.'"

"He's fast enough to be close. He can do whatever you want with him. I've been inside and outside with him. He's something to look at, too. I like his swagger. His last race didn't exceed my expectations, but I was like 'Wow, this is impressive.'"

Axel Rod, Dark Vader, Blame the Rider seek to maintain California dominance

California-based horses have won the Indiana Derby five of the past nine runnings, including Irap in 2017 and Cupid in 2016. Four of those SoCal winners were trained by Bob Baffert: Cupid, Power Broker in 2013, 2010 Preakness winner and 3-year-old champion Lookin At Luck and Misremembered in 2009. Baffert does not have a runner this year, but Doug O'Neill, winner last year with Irap and in 2003 with Excessive Player, has Blame the Rider.

The other California horses seeking to extend the West Coast's recent Indiana Derby dominance are Axelrod and Dark Vader.

The 5-1 second choice is Axelrod, second in the Grade 3 Affirmed Stakes at Santa Anita in his last start. He's trained by Michael "Whitey" McCarthy, a long-time assistant for trainer Todd Pletcher who went out on his own several years ago in order to be with his family in California.

Axelrod's only poor race was his first. He figures to be pushing the pace likely set by Blame the Rider from post 2.

Axelrod had two very good races, losing by a half-length and a neck, in two starts on grass before the Affirmed.

"I always thought in the back of my mind to get him back to the dirt at some point," McCarthy said. "The Affirmed looked like it was going to be kind of light on paper. He obviously ran into a very nice horse that day in Draft Pick, but we were certainly proud of our horse's effort."

"We're excited to lead him over there. He's a horse who can lay close to the pace. We don't want anyone to get too far away from us, and he has stalking speed. He's not one dimensional, and he has a very-gifted rider in Florent Geroux. We'd been looking at the race for a couple of weeks. Then when we found out we could get Florent, that sort of swayed our decision. It was tough, because the Los Alamitos Derby is the same day in our backyard here. But we thought for \$500,000, the right move was to get him on an airplane."

Axelrod flew to Kentucky but is staying at Churchill Downs' Trackside satellite training facility with trainer Conor Murphy, shipping up to Indiana Grand Saturday morning.

"There are so many of these big pots this time of the year," McCarthy said. "We thought the spacing was great out of the Affirmed to this race. He's an improving horse. He was very green first time out, and we got a little aggressive with him. We ran him in a maiden-claimer, and he was very good that day. He's exceeded our expectations, tries hard every time and I think there's still some improvement in him."

Peter Eurton said he also had debated between the \$150,000 Los Alamitos Derby and the Indiana Derby for Dark Vader for the past "four or five weeks," ultimately electing to send his Affirmed winner Draft Pick to Los Al and to put Dark Vader on the plane.

Shipping is nothing new for Dark Vader, an Ohio-born colt who in his second start flew to Cincinnati's Belterra Park for a \$150,000 stakes for Ohio-breds, as well as New Mexico's Sunland Derby in March and most recently New York's Easy Goer Stakes on the Belmont Stakes undercard, in which he finished third by a total of a neck.

"He's just starting to learn, to get in good form," Eurton said. "When we went to Ohio with him, he was still green at the time. Sunland, he had a rough trip. We've learned that he likes to be up in the race. He's just getting bigger and stronger all the time. I just think that if he stays healthy, he's going to get better and better, because he's grown considerably — probably two inches in the last seven, eight months."

After his fifth-place finish in the Sunland Derby, Dark Vader won a Santa Anita allowance race at the Indiana Derby's 1 1/16-mile distance. He was ridden that day for the first time by Corey Nakatani, who rides him for the second time at Indiana Grand.

Nakatani's agent is his son, Matt, who was a place-kicker for the University of Louisville football team from 2010-2013.

Blame the Rider is the 6-1 third choice and will be ridden for the first time by Julien Leparoux, who won the 2011 Indiana Derby aboard Wilburn.

Was Ohio Derby a warning shot by Trigger Warning?

An interesting horse in the field at 8-1 is Trigger Warning, who had the lead with an eighth-mile to go at 86-1 in the Grade 3 Ohio Derby before weakening to third, losing by a total of a length. The son of Candy Ride cost \$6,000 as a Keeneland yearling and now has earned \$157,778 off a 4-0-2 record in 11 starts.

Trigger Warning started his career out west, winning on his second attempt at Turf Paradise and finishing third in a sprint stakes. He spent most of the winter and spring in New Mexico before owner Brinley Enterprises sent him to Ohio-based Mike Rone. Trigger Warning's two races around two turns before the Ohio Derby were dreadful — he was eased in the Fair Grounds' Grade 3 Lecomte Stakes and lost Sunland Park's Mine That Bird Derby by 20.

Trigger Warning rebounded to win a sprint allowance race at Sunland before going to Rone, who doesn't sugarcoat the Candy Ride colt's prior form in longer races.

"They were terrible," he said. "Make a man want to jump off a basement window. Then they wanted me to try this horse going two turns. I wasn't about to obligate myself until I got my hands on him."

In two starts in his new home and with veteran jockey Irwin Rosendo, Trigger Warning won Presque Isle's \$100,000 Tom Ridge Stakes at six furlongs and then nearly pulled off the shocker in the Ohio Derby.

"I've have him, what?, 2 1/2, three months," Rone said by phone. "After we came home from the stakes going short, we started to prepare him to go a route of ground. By the grace of God he showed up a little bit in the Ohio Derby. I lost my composure for about an eighth of a mile, you could say."

"There were some things in that journey that cost him the race. He made two steps to the right when he left there, and he fanned out about seven-wide leaving the first turn. So where does that put me at down there at the finish line? Pretty close, the way I figure it. The Indiana Derby is a little quick back. But this horse came out of the Ohio Derby well, and it's a sixteenth of a mile shorter."

Lauer hoping to cash in with Indiana-bred The Money Dance in Indiana Derby

The purse for the Indiana Derby is \$500,000, but Indiana-bred The Money Dance will receive a 40-percent purse enhancement if he finishes in the top three. The Money Dance is trained by Indiana Grand stalwart Mike Lauer and co-owned by his wife, Penny, and Mike Johnson. The Lauers bred The Money Dance, who is a son of the Distorted Humor stallion Jimmy Creed (also the sire of California shipper Blame the Rider).

"I've loved the horse from the winter on," Mike Lauer said by phone. "I think he's a nice horse. How nice, I don't know."

Nice enough that The Money Dance won an Oaklawn Park maiden race in Arkansas by seven lengths and followed that up by shipping to New York's Belmont Park to win a mile allowance race on May 3.

"That was another incentive," Lauer said. "Belmont offered horses that made their last start at Oaklawn \$1,500 for vaning and 30-percent purse boost. So that purse was \$99,000. The races at Oaklawn and Belmont were great races, and that's what I'm hoping to see."

That's because The Money Dance comes into the Indiana Derby off two disappointing efforts, finishing seventh over yielding turf in his grass debut in Chicago's Grade 3 Arlington Classic on May 26. More unexpected was The Money Dance's subsequent fourth-place finish in the five-horse \$100,000 Hoosier Breeders Sophomore Stakes for Indiana-breds. Lauer attributes the debacle to the horse getting into repeated jackpots in a short field. He's throwing out as being too bad to be true.

Lauer said it wasn't hard to make the decision to run The Money Dance in Indiana's biggest horse race.

"He didn't run good on the grass, and the next Indiana-bred stakes is on the grass," he said. "So I thought the dirt, and I didn't see a Grade 1 horse in the race. Now, there might turn out to be, but they're kind of like us - they're trying to find their own level of water. And we run for 40-percent more."

Finish lines

Steve Asmussen is looking for his third Indiana Derby victory with Title Ready, having previously won with Wilburn in 2011 and Zanjero in 2007.

Among other past winners, Brian Hernandez Jr., who rides Funny Duck, also is seeking a third Indiana Derby victory, prevailing in 2012 with Neck 'n Neck and with Cielo Gold in 2006 in a dead heat.

Dale Romans, trainer of favored King Zachary, finished second in the 2011 Indiana Derby with Preakness winner Shackelford but has never won Indiana's signature race.

The 16th season of Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing continues through Wednesday, Nov. 7. Racing is conducted Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 2:05 p.m. EST with Saturday racing beginning at 6:05 p.m. EST. Two special Thursday racing dates will be held July 19 and Sept. 6 with a 2:05 p.m. EST post time.

About Indiana Grand Racing & Casino: Indiana Grand Racing & Casino holds multiple awards for customer service, entertainment, gaming, dining, and diversity. Located in Shelbyville, Ind., Indiana Grand features 2,200 of the latest slots and electronic table games in addition to a one-mile dirt race course and a seven-eighths mile turf course offering live Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing each year. Simulcast wagering is also offered year-round at Winner's Circle Brewpub & OTB located on the casino floor as well as a Winner's Circle OTB located in Clarksville, Ind.

Photo by Linscott Photography - 2007 Indiana Derby winner Zanjero and Robby Albarado - Albarado's last Indiana Derby winner.