

Exclusive Topics for Horse Racing in Japan

– Summer Edition –

August 2020

The Japan Racing Association

JRA-organized races, which began to be held in front of empty stands from the end of February due to the COVID-19 pandemic, continued without spectators even after the Japanese government lifted its nationwide state of emergency in late May. JRA finally resumed operating selected off-track betting sites on July 11, although races continue to be held behind closed doors.



Although wagering was limited to betting by telephone or online, sales remained relatively sound during the first half of its fiscal year—earnings came to 96.8% from a year earlier. The Takamatsunomiya Kinen, the Victoria Mile and the Takarazuka Kinen even increased sales from last year. Telephone/online betting, which had accounted for 70% of total sales in 2019, attracted new members in the first six months of this year to grow by 8.4% and play a major role in supporting the sport’s continuity during the pandemic.

Although horse racing in Japan has begun to revert to more “normal” conditions, the ongoing pandemic has affected international travel, forcing JRA to cancel its World All-Star Jockeys event, which normally is held annually at Sapporo Racecourse in late August. Plans to send top horses overseas have been postponed or cancelled—Australia’s Queen Elizabeth Stakes in April was the last trip abroad—which may also affect scheduling for the fall campaign.



Deirdre in the 2020 Nassau Stakes

The exception has been **Deirdre (JPN, M6, by Harbinger)**, who has been training in Newmarket, England, since last year. Coming off a runner-up effort in her 2020 debut, the Mohamed Yousuf Naghi Motors Cup (2,100m) in Saudi Arabia, the Harbinger mare entered the Eclipse Stakes (G1, 1,990m) on July 5 and ran forwardly in third but was outrun to finish fifth by 5-1/4 lengths. She continued with another unenergetic effort in her next start, the Nassau Stakes (G1, 1,980m) on July 30, where she faded to last after racing in third early. This has raised doubts about her main target, the Prix de l’Arc de Triomphe (G1, 2,400m) on October 4, for which she was listed as the only starter from Japan as of July.

Mozu Ascot (USA, H6, by Frankel), winner of the February Stakes (G1, dirt, 1,600m), will enter the Mile Championship Nambu Hai (dirt, 1,600m) at NAR's Morioka Racecourse on October 12 as his prep race, if conditions allow, for the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile (G1, dirt, 1,600m) on November 7.



Mozu Ascot
in the 2020 February Stakes

Meanwhile, this year's spring season in Japan produced two three-year-olds, one of each gender, who are one win away from a Triple Crown in their respective categories. In the past, four pairs of colts and fillies have won the first two legs in the same year, but this is the first time in JRA history that both are also undefeated. Kyoto Racecourse, where the last legs of both the Colts and Fillies Triples are held, will close after the last race on November 1 to undergo a major renovation prior to reopening in 2023. The remaining G1 events that are usually held at Kyoto—the Queen Elizabeth II Cup (G1, 2,200m) on November 15 and the Mile Championship (G1, 1,600m) on November 22—will be transferred to Hanshin Racecourse.



Renderings of the renovated Kyoto Racecourse



Daring Tact
in the 2020 Yushun Himba

Daring Tact (JPN, F3, by Epiphaneia) hopes to emulate Almond Eye, the last winner of the Fillies Triple two years ago, and become the sixth Triple champion by winning the Shuka Sho (G1, 2,000m) this coming October 18. With a win in her fall debut, the Rose Stakes (G2, 2,000m) on September 20, she also has a chance to become the first in history to claim the Triple undefeated.

Contrail (JPN, C3, by Deep Impact) aims to become the eighth Colts Triple Crown winner with a win in the Kikuka Sho (Japanese St. Leger, G1, 3,000m) on October 25. He would become the first such colt since Orfevre (JPN, by Stay Gold) in 2011 and the third undefeated title winner after Symboli Rudolf (JPN, by Partholon) in 1984 and his sire Deep Impact (JPN, by Sunday Silence) in 2005. Scheduled to return from his summer break in the Kobe Shimbun Hai (G2, 2,200m) on September 27, his connections also could decide to run him in the Japan Cup (G1, 2,400m) on November 29 if he is up to it after the Kikuka Sho.



Contrail
in the 2020 Tokyo Yushun



Almond Eye
in the 2020 Victoria Mile

Almond Eye (JPN, M5, by Lord Kanaloa), after an overwhelming victory in the Victoria Mile (1,600m), entered the Yasuda Kinen (G1, 1,600m) with many hoping she would become the first runner in JRA history to score eight G1 career titles over turf. However, the Lord Kanaloa mare missed her break and succumbed to second, which her connections attributed to a soft track and the short spacing between her previous two starts. In her fall comeback, she will likely aim for a repeat victory in the Tenno Sho (Autumn) (G1, 2,000m) on November 1, her next shot at rewriting history.

Other G1 winners from the spring are scheduled to return this fall as follows: Takamatsunomiya Kinen (1,200m) winner **Mozu Superflare (USA, M5, by Speightstown)** will start in the Kitakyushu Kinen (G3, 1,200m, August 23) prior to the Sprinters Stakes (G1, 1,200m, October 4), where he finished second last year. **Oju Chosan (JPN, H9, by Stay Gold)**, who extended his J-G1 winning streak to seven by claiming the Nakayama Grand Jump (4,250m), will enter the Tokyo High-Jump (J-G2, 3,110m) on October 18 and then the Nakayama Daishogai (J-G1, 4,100m) on December 26. **Fierement (JPN, H5, by Deep Impact)**, who successfully defended his title in the Tenno Sho (Spring) (3,200m), will resume racing with the All Comers (G2, 2,200m) on September 27 and then head to the Japan Cup.



Mozu Superflare (right)
in the 2020 Takamatsunomiya Kinen



Oju Chosan
in the 2020 Nakayama Grand Jump



Fierement
in the 2020 Tenno Sho (Spring)

NHK Mile Cup (1,600m) champion **Lauda Sion (JPN, C3, by Real Impact)** will begin his fall campaign in the Fuji Stakes (1,600m)—newly upgraded to G2—on October 24, prior to the Mile Championship. Yasuda Kinen winner **Gran Alegria (JPN, F4, by Deep Impact)** will focus on distances between 1,200m and 1,600m and most likely be targeted at the Sprinters Stakes and the Mile Championship. Takarazuka Kinen (G1, 2,200m) champion **Chrono Genesis (JPN, F4, by Bago)** will make her fall comeback in either the Tenno Sho (Autumn) or the Queen Elizabeth II Cup.



Lauda Sion
in the 2020 NHK Mile Cup



Gran Alegria
in the 2020 Yasuda Kinen



Chrono Genesis
in the 2020 Takarazuka Kinen