

Japan Cup (G1) - Comments from runners' connections

[Almond Eye](#) (mare, 5)

Sakae Kunieda, trainer

“Today (Nov. 25) was her last fast work and my main thought is that we’ve done our best and come this far and I’m hoping she’ll get all her work done without a hitch. I think she’s pretty ready. Jockey Christophe Lemaire rode her last week, and today was just to check her responses. I’m happy with her time. If he’d had her come up on the outside, she’d have gone faster but I think he wanted to keep the tank full. Her footwork was excellent. She was very fresh this morning from the time she left the stable and coming off the track she was feeling it too. Lemaire found nothing amiss and he looked very content. Going in to the Tenno Sho (Autumn), there was room for a bit more improvement. I thought she was a bit heavy but when she got to the track, she was looking sharp and kept that sharpness afterward. She has gotten a lot stronger now. Whereas she was always exhausted after a race, now she’s not and I saw no signs of fatigue after the Tenno Sho. We considered Hong Kong, but it just didn’t seem realistic with the pandemic. The Japan Cup, on the other hand, didn’t pose any problem so we aimed her here. As for the time between races, she went from the Victoria Mile to the Yasuda Kinen and though she lost, it was still a good race. This time, she’s still in good shape so it should be OK. I think she can still give us a performance like she did two years ago but the heavy rain on the first day of the Tokyo meet this year did a lot of damage. Looking at the track last week, I’d say it’s not ideal. The main thing is that she has a safe run.”



Almond Eye

[Contrail](#) (colt, 3)

Yuichi Fukunaga, jockey

“He was in extremely good condition for the Kikuka Sho (Japanese St. Leger) and very calm. The distance was longer than what he is best at but because he was calm, I thought he’d be able to handle it. The race was really tough but in the end, his competitive spirit shone through. I was reminded of the amazing ability he has, both physically and mentally. His training last week was the usual. He worked with another horse on the woodchip flat course. His partner could move and this one was to chase and catch him, which he did. Though it took longer than usual, that did bother me a bit. His time was excellent though. He had gate practice after that, then this week I rode him up the hill course twice. I’d never ridden the final fast work before. He moved really well and I was surprised at the improvement from last week. He won the Derby so I’m not worried about the distance. I’ve never ridden Almond Eye or Daring Tact so I can’t well judge where they’re strong or weak, but Contrail’s best point is his acceleration, and his mental power. He has yet to go full out. He has a kick we haven’t even seen yet.”



Contrail

[Crescendo Love](#) (horse, 6)

Toru Hayashi, trainer

“The Sankei Sho All Comers didn’t pan out well for him, but the jockey did a very good job and go the best from the horse. The horse is temperamental and until now I’ve always been very careful not to push him too much mentally when getting him ready physically. After his last start, however, I realized that if he’s going to take on a higher-class race he needs more work, so he’s gotten a lot of training this time. And he has responded well. I think he may be in the best condition yet. We won’t know until we try it how he’ll take to the Tokyo 2,400 meters. The bar is very high and just to race alongside the others in this race is an honor. If he can make full use of his present condition, we’ll see how much he can manage.”



Crescendo Love

Curren Bouquetd'or (filly, 4)

Sakae Kunieda, trainer

“Unfortunately, she hasn’t been able to win in a while. She’s been second in Grade 1 races several times and her second in the Japan Cup last year was very frustrating. She wasn’t at her best after returning from Dubai, and then was coming off a long spell for the Sankei Sho All Comers. She was in very good shape though. The race was a bit slow and she was kept under way but she did run solidly until the end. She’d always been a bit unreliable but last start she did an excellent job. She went to the farm and returned to the training center with the Japan Cup as the target. All has gone well. She was fit and lean. Almond Eye is 5 years old and maintains her condition at a high level more easily, but Curren Bouquetd’or changes more easily. Her time was good last week, this week’s not quite as good but she did move well up the hill course. She still had a lot more in the tank.”



Curren Bouquetd'or

Daring Tact (filly, 3)

Kohei Matsuyama, jockey

“In the Shuka Sho, she was very excitable in the pre-parade ring. But, in the preliminaries and behind the gate she was able to calm down again. The race went smoothly, she settled well, and really ran well in the final stage. It was a very strong race. Last week, we pushed her hard in fast work and she moved well. This week, since we have to haul her to the track, my priority was keeping her balanced. She did very well, moved well, and felt better than she had before her last race. She did well in the Yushun Himba (Japanese Oaks) so there shouldn’t be a problem with the Tokyo 2,400 meters. There are many very strong horses in the lineup and taking on the challenge will be exciting and, naturally, I want to get good results. As for strategy, the main thing, with the long straight, is for her to stay balanced. I won’t know when to make our move until the moment I make it.”



Daring Tact

Glory Vase (horse, 5)

Tomohito Ozeki, trainer

“After winning the Kyoto Daishoten he went to the farm and returned to the training center on Nov. 4. On the 18th, he worked in tandem over the woodchip flat course. His movement was good and he ran solidly from six furlongs so his time was good too. The rider who rode fast work before Kyoto Daishoten and also last week

said, 'Compared to before his last race, he's mentally more on his game this time and he's using his body differently as well.' He looked better going around and I think he'll improve more right before the race. Having never raced at Tokyo may be a disadvantage, especially since the three top picks have all gotten good results at Tokyo. But, it was his first time at Niigata when he ran in the Sado Stakes and he won that. I don't think this horse is particularly unsuited to Tokyo. Actually, I think the course will suit him."



Glory Vase

Kiseki (horse, 6)

Katsuhiko Sumii, trainer

"He was in good condition for the Tenno Sho (Autumn) and he raced from a good position, though the results were unfortunate. There's not much time between races but we were careful to get him over any fatigue. Last week, he was very in tune with the rider and moved solidly. This week he felt ready. I had him breeze alone but his time was better than usual. Since he's an older horse, there should be no dramatic swings. I think he'll maintain his condition at a good level. A fast track is good for him but he did win over a heavy track in the Kikuka Sho in 2017, so I think he adapts to whatever surface it is. To be able to do battle amid such a strong field is an honor in itself. As long as he's running though, I'd like to see him beat the three heavyweights. He hasn't had a win since the Kikuka Sho, but he's in good shape and I hope he'll give it his best."



Kiseki

Makahiki (horse, 7)

Yasuo Tomomichi, trainer

"I'd planned to race him in the Sapporo Kinen, but after his final workout before that race I sensed something was wrong and withdrew him. The vet couldn't find anything wrong but when he went to the farm, he was very excited so I think he needed the refreshment. Since then he has handled all his work. Unlike last year, he had time off in the cool temperatures of Hokkaido and he's full of energy. He's light on his feet and not showing his age at all. Jockey Kosei Miura, who will ride the race, rode him on Nov. 19 and said, 'Looking at his recent races, I thought he was reluctant to run but that's not the case at all.' The lineup is strong and I'm hoping, for his sake, that the track will be a bit slow."



Makahiki

Mikki Swallow (horse, 6)

Takanori Kikuzawa, trainer

"He was the favorite in a small field for the Sankei Sho All Comers and it was difficult for him in spots. After that he went to the farm for a bit, then returned to get ready as planned for the Japan Cup. Keita Tosaki, who will ride the race, rode fast work last week to get a handle on the horse. For a horse that doesn't like working to the left on the woodchip flat course, he did pretty well in chasing down his training partner. The competition is very high this time and I think it's just going to be matter of seeing how well he can hold up. That said, he finished

fifth place in 2018 and he's stronger now, so I'm looking forward to seeing how well he'll do."



Mikki Swallow

Perform a Promise (horse, 8)

Nobuyuki Tashiro, assistant trainer

"He traveled well about midfield in the Kyoto Daishoten and accelerated well in the end. I don't think he did as poorly as sixth place sounds. After that, he went to the farm to refresh. He's 8 years old, so he's pretty stable. There aren't any sudden changes and things have gone as they should. His fast work was up the hill course last week on Nov. 18. The rider pushed him until the end and he got his best time yet. He was on his toes and feeling good. I don't see him slowing down at all due to age. He's going to the gate in good shape. He did have some lengthy spells along the way, but he's had 20 races. And he's still very young. The race before the last one was his first race in a year and he won it, a graded-stakes race. He definitely has talent. The competition is strong but he's well-suited to Tokyo. He'll run well for sure."



Perform a Promise

Taurus Gemini (colt, 4)

Shun Takano, assistant trainer

"In the Fukushima Kinen, the horse in second position really kept the pressure on him the whole time. Overall, it was a tough race for him. Then, going in to the stretch he suddenly lost momentum. I guess 2,000 meters is long for him. There's not much time between races but he came out of his last start well and since he wasn't the worse for wear, we decided to race him here. His weight was up 4 kg for the last start as well and since he was a bit heavy I don't think the tight rotation will be a problem. The distance will be even further this time and likely long for him, especially with this field. But all he has to do is run his own race and we'll see how well he can hold his ground."



Taurus Gemini

World Premiere (colt, 4)

Yasuo Tomomichi, trainer

"After the Arima Kinen (The Grand Prix) last year, I sent him to the farm with an eye to the Tenno Sho (Spring). But while there, he was favoring his right foreleg a bit so I decided not to overdo it and let him sit the spring out. I did have the Takarazuka Kinen in mind but with the heat and the poor track, I decided to race him again from the fall. I had planned to give him a prep racing to the left but, considering the distance, decided to bring him here. On Nov. 18, he had a very good workout over a heavy track. He doesn't look fat at all and he has come

along well. Even if it's agitated when heading out to the track, once on the track he calms down. He has a very good on-off switch and a good fighting spirit. He always gives it his all."



World Premiere

Yoshio (horse, 7)

Daishi Hidaka, assistant trainer

"His fast workouts this week and last were up the hill course, working in tandem. We pushed him hard and he moved well. His movement was powerful. He's returning from a 4-month layoff but he is in good condition."

You Can Smile (horse, 5)

Yasuo Tomomichi, trainer

"The winner in the Copa Republica Argentina was strong. I think the fact that this horse carried the heaviest assigned weight of the field was definitely a factor in his not gaining enough ground in the finish. He came out of the race well though and has gotten all the work he needed to. On Nov. 19, just about 10 days after he'd raced, he breezed up the hill course. His time over the half mile was 53.8 seconds with a final furlong of 13 seconds, which is sufficient. He worked on the woodchip flat to the left on Nov. 22 and finished just a neck behind his partner. He does well with a prep race, so I'm expecting him to show improvement. Now he has no problem with racing to the right, but he used to be best to the left. But, with the level of competition, it's going to be tough unless he has a bit more. Still, I'm hoping he can give us a good race at Tokyo."



You Can Smile