

# Exclusive Topics for Horse Racing in Japan

## — Spring Edition —

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The Japan Racing Association

JRA's 2026 racing season will start in earnest in March with Classic trials for three-year-olds while established horses prepare for their spring G1 events. **Forever Young** was named the 2025 Horse of the Year after claiming both the Saudi Cup (G1, dirt, 1,800m) and the Breeders' Cup Classic (G1, dirt, 2,000m), the latter a historic victory for Japan. He was also ranked second in the 2025 LONGINES World's Best Racehorse Rankings and tied for the most points among dirt runners. Separately, the 54 Japanese-trained horses who earned a ranking tied with Great Britain for the highest number of horses listed, giving Japan top ranking for the second straight year. Meanwhile, top-rated Calandagan became the first foreign-based runner in 20 years to win the Japan Cup last year, which led to JRA's flagship event tying the UK's Champion Stakes as the world's highest-rated race, both earning 126.25 points. The Japan Cup was also top rated in 2023.



As part of our ongoing efforts to support coverage of JRA events, we are pleased to update readers on last year's stars and this season's key runners in this special Spring edition of our international newsletter.

### ***Forever Young Accomplish Repeat Victory in 2026 Saudi Cup***

Since the inception of the Saudi Cup meeting in 2020, where several Japanese runners have already enjoyed success, an increasing number have made the Middle East an important early-season destination. This year, many have already run in meetings in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia during their overseas trips.

**Deep Monster (JPN, H8, by Deep Impact)** marked Japan's first overseas victory of the season in the Amir Trophy (G2, 2,400m) at Al Rayyan Racecourse in Qatar on February 14. Forwardly positioned along the rails in third, the son of Deep Impact outran the tenacious pacesetter in the last 200 meters for his second graded title following last year's Kyoto Daishoten (G2, 2,400m). **Satono Glanz (JPN, H6, by Satono Diamond)**, third in last year's Amir Trophy, was fourth while three-time

grade-race winner **Byzantine Dream** (JPN, H5, by **Epiphaneia**) finished last. **Deep Monster** will likely seek further overseas success in the Champions & Chater Cup (G1, 2,400m), held in Hong Kong, on May 24.



Forever Young, winner of 2026 Saudi Cup

Meanwhile, 20 Japanese entrants ran in Saudi Arabia, including in undercard races on the same day as the Saudi Cup at King Abdulaziz Racetrack. In the main event, the Saudi Cup (G1, dirt, 1,800m), **Forever Young** (JPN, H5, by **Real Steel**) emerged as the leader at the final corner after running near the pace and held off the field to cross the wire a length in front as the first horse to win twice in a row. **Luxor Cafe** (USA, C4, by **American Pharoah**) and **Sunrise Zipangu** (JPN, H5, by **Kizuna**) followed in fifth and sixth, respectively. **Forever Young** renewed his own record of Japanese racing career earnings to 4,560,834,500 yen (US\$ 29.1 million).

Five contenders attempted to become Japan's fourth winner in the Saudi Derby (G3, dirt, 1,600m), but the best was a third by **Satono Voyage** (JPN, C3, by **Into Mischief**). He was followed by **Wonder Dean** (JPN, C3, by **Dee Majesty**) in fourth, **Keiai Agito** (JPN, C3, by **Espoir City**) in fifth, NAR's Hokkaido-based **Best Green** (JPN, C3, by **Smart Falcon**) in ninth and **Tokai Ma Cherie** (JPN, F3, by **Drefong**) in 12th. In the Riyadh Dirt Sprint (G2, dirt, 1,200m), won by three Japanese horses in the past, **American Stage** (USA, C4, by **Into Mischief**) was the top Japanese runner in fourth, followed by **Gabby's Sister** (JPN, M5, by **Apollo Kingdom**) in sixth, **Don Amitie** (JPN, H6, by **Asia Express**) in seventh and **Yamanin Cerchi** (JPN, C4, by **Four Wheel Drive**) in 12th.

**Panja Tower** (JPN, C4, by **Tower of London**), **Fortune Time** (JPN, H5, by **Greater London**) and **Shin Forever** (USA, C4, by **Complexity**) each hoped to give Japan a repeat victory in the 1351 Turf Sprint (G2, 1,351m), but they finished fifth, sixth and 13th respectively. In the Neom Turf Cup (2,100m), which was promoted to G1 this year, **Shin Emperor** (FR, H5, by **Siyouni**) failed to defend his title, finishing fourth, while **Yamanin Bouclier** (JPN, C4, by **Kitsan Black**) and **Alohi Alii** (JPN, C4, by **Duramente**) were fifth and seventh, respectively. In the Red Sea Turf Handicap (G2, 3,000m), won by **Byzantine Dream** last year, **Struve** (JPN, G7, by **King Kamehameha**) and **Vermicelles** (JPN, M6, by **Gold Ship**) disappointed to eighth and 11th, respectively.

Six Japanese runners were transferred from Saudi Arabia to Meydan Racecourse in Dubai, including **Shin Forever**, who was entered in the Godolphin Mile (G2, dirt, 1,600m); **Keiai Agito** and **Wonder Dean** in the UAE Derby (G2, dirt, 1,900m); **American Stage** in the Dubai Golden Shaheen (G1, dirt, 1,200m); and **Forever Young** and **Luxor Cafe** in the Dubai World Cup (G1, dirt, 2,000m), all races held on March 28. However, **Shin Forever**, **Luxor Cafe** and **Keiai Agito** were returned to Japan on March 17 after cancelling their entries, with the latter heading to the Unicorn Stakes (G3, dirt, 1,900m) on May 2.

Another three runners from Japan will join others already flown into Dubai from Saudi Arabia for the Dubai World Cup meeting. The Al Quoz Sprint (G1, 1,200m) field will include 2024 Sprinters Stakes (G1, 1,200m) champion **Lugal (JPN, H6, by Duramente)**, who commenced this season with a third in the Ocean Stakes (G3, 1,200m) on February 28. He will be making his third overseas outing after finishing 11th in the 2024 Hong Kong Sprint (G1, 1,200m) and fifth in the 2025 Chairman's Sprint Prize (G1, 1,200m).



Lugal, winner of 2024 Sprinters Stakes

Joining **Wonder Dean** in the UAE Derby will be **Pyromancer (JPN, C3, by Pyro)**, winner of the Zen-Nippon Nisai Yushun (Listed, dirt, 1,600m).

The Japanese nominee for the Dubai Turf is **Gaia Force (JPN, H7, by Kitanan Black)**, who raced mainly over middle distances during his first three seasons and marked three wins, including the 2022 St. Lite Kinen (G2, 2,200m). But since finishing second in the 2024 February Stakes, six out of his seven starts have been at a mile. Recognized as one of Japan's top milers, the gray horse won his second grade-race title in the 2025 Fuji Stakes (G2, 1,600m) and then made two runner-up efforts at the G1 level, both times behind **Jantar Mantar**.

Those who were slated to fly from Japan to Dubai but had their trips canceled are as follow:

- **Dubai World Cup**

**Diktaean (JPN, G8, by King Kamehameha)**, who was transferred from JRA to NAR's Oi in January 2025, claimed the Korea Cup (G3, dirt, 1,800m) and the year-end Tokyo Daishoten (G1, dirt, 2,000m) to become NAR's Horse of the Year. **Wilson Tesoro (JPN, H7, by Kitanan Black)**, who registered three consecutive seconds in the 2023-2025 Champions Cup (G1, dirt, 1,800m), added another runner-up effort in this year's February Stakes.

**Mikki Fight (JPN, H5, by Drefong)** registered his first graded title in the Leopard Stakes (G3, dirt, 1,800m) as a three-year-old, which was followed by a runner-up effort in the 2024 Japan Dirt Classic (Listed, dirt, 2,000m), where he was 1-1/4 lengths behind **Forever Young**. He kicked off the 2025 season with a third in the February Stakes (G1, dirt, 1,600m) and then scored three consecutive victories, including two major NAR titles in the Teio Sho (Listed, dirt, 2,000m) and the JBC Classic (Listed, dirt, 1,800m). **Outrange (JPN, H6, by Regalo)** won his second grade-race title in the Heian Stakes (G3, dirt, 1,900m) in May 2025 and then was a neck second to **Mikki Fight** in the Teio Sho. **Mikki Fight** and **Outrange** were second and third respectively in December's Tokyo Daishoten, won by **Diktaean**.

**Diktaean** and **Outrange** will race in the Kawasaki Kinen (Listed, dirt, 2,100m) on April 8 while **Wilson Tesoro** and **Mikki Fight** will head to the Kashiwa Kinen (Listed, dirt, 1,600m) on May 5.

• **Dubai Sheema Classic**



Danon Decile,  
winner of 2025 Dubai Sheema Classic

**Danon Decile (JPN, H5, by Epiphaneia)** gave up his bid to become the first horse to score consecutive wins in Dubai Sheema Classic (G1, 2,410m). Winless in three starts after a victory last year, he was a head plus 2-1/2 lengths in third behind Calandagan in the Japan Cup, and then third again by 1/2 length and a neck behind winner **Museum Mile** in the Arima Kinen (G1, 2,500m). The son of Epiphaneia will instead aim for his third G1 title in the Osaka Hai (G1, 2,000m) on April 5.

**Masquerade Ball (JPN, C4, by Duramente)**, who was tied for second with **Forever Young** with a rating of 128 in the World’s Best Racehorse Rankings, landed his first G1 victory in the Tenno Sho (Autumn) (2,000m), and then in the Japan Cup he finished second by a head in a fierce duel with Calandagan. Connections canceled his first overseas appearance in the Dubai Sheema Classic to race him in the Osaka Hai, but due to lameness in his left hind leg he will train towards Hong Kong’s Queen Elizabeth II Cup (G1, 2,000m) on April 26 instead. Actually, the colt still might race overseas, but in the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes (G1, 2,390m) in July.



Masquerade Ball,  
winner of 2025 Tenno Sho (Autumn)

• **Dubai Turf**



Museum Mile, winner of 2025 Arima Kinen

**Museum Mile (JPN, C4, by Leontes)**, the Satsuki Sho (Japanese 2000 Guineas, G1, 2,000m) champion, was named Best Three-Year-Old Colt of 2025 after thoroughly outpolling **Masquerade Ball** and Tokyo Yushun (Japanese Derby, G1, 2,400m) winner **Croix du Nord**. The Leontes colt also won the 2,500-meter Arima Kinen, but his connections think he is best suited to around 2,000 meters and therefore intend to run him in the Queen Elizabeth II Cup.

Last year, **Jantar Mantar (JPN, H5, by Palace Malice)** became the ninth horse in JRA history to capture both G1 mile titles—the Yasuda Kinen and the Mile Championship—in the same year, making him a unanimous choice for the season’s Best Miler title. In addition to victories in the 2023 Asahi Hai Futurity Stakes and 2024 NHK Mile Cup, the son of Palace Malice became the first horse to win all JRA-G1 mile events open to male runners. The five-year-old dark bay’s second overseas campaign, in the Dubai Turf, was called off, but he is registered to run in the Champions Mile (G1, 1,600m) in Hong Kong on April 26.



Jantar Mantar,  
winner of 2025 Mile Championship

- **Dubai Golden Shaheen**

**Fern Hill (JPN, H7, by Kinshasa no Kiseki)**, the stablemate of **Diktaean**, extended his winning streak to three in the JBC Sprint (Listed, dirt, 1,000m). His next race could be the Tokyo Sprint (Listed, dirt, 1,200m) on April 15. **Lord Fons (JPN, H6, by Lord Kanaloa)**, who registered seven wins at dirt between 1,400 and 1,500 meters, including the Negishi Stakes (G3, dirt, 1,400m) in January, ran in the Kurofune Sho (Listed, dirt, 1,400m) on March 24, where he raced mostly in second but failed to sustain his bid and finished fourth. **T O Elvis (USA, C4, by Volatile)**, who scored his fourth consecutive win in the Capella Stakes (G3, dirt, 1,200m) on December 14, will race in the Tokyo Sprint.

- **UAE Derby**

**Itterasshai (JPN, C3, by Mischevious Alex)**, the third-place finisher in the Hyacinth Stakes (Listed, dirt, 1,600m), will head to the Fukuryu Stakes (Open Class, dirt, 1,800m) on March 28, the final leg of the so-called “Japan Road to the Kentucky Derby.” **Nettaiya Rai (JPN, C3, by Contrail)**, the fourth-place finisher in the Kyoto Nisai Stakes, ran in the Floralwalk Sho (1 Win Class, 1,600m) on March 22, where he fought for the early lead and maintained his position to the furlong pole, but eventually was overtaken to finish in fourth. **Rock Ptarmigan (JPN, C3, by Siskin)**, who won his dirt debut in the Poinsettia Stakes (Open Class, dirt, 1,800m) last December, went on to win the Keihin Hai (Listed, dirt, 1,700m) on March 25 by three lengths.

- **Al Quoz Sprint**

**Mama Cocha (JPN, M7, by Kurofune)**, the 2023 Sprinters Stakes (G1, 1,200m) winner, was slated to run in the Dubai Golden Shaheen, or the Al Quoz Sprint, and prepped with a fourth in the Ocean Stakes, but will stay in Japan for the Takamatsunomiya Kinen (G1, 1,200m) on March 29. **Win Carnelian (JPN, H9, by Screen Hero)**, winner of the 2025 Sprinters Stakes, was withdrawn from the Al Quoz Sprint, where he finished second last year, to aim for another G1 success in the Takamatsunomiya Kinen.

- **Godolphin Mile**

**Bidaaya (JPN, H5, by Real Steel)**, the Musashino Stakes (G3, dirt, 1,600m) third-place finisher, switched to the Coral Stakes (Listed, dirt, 1,400m) on March 14 and finished in second by a neck. **Costa Nova (JPN, H6, by Lord Kanaloa)**, who defended his February Stakes title this year to become the race’s third back-to-back victor, will head to the Kashiwa Kinen instead of the Godolphin Mile. **Omega Guinness (JPN, H6, by Logotype)**, who is coming off a fifth in the February Stakes, will head to the March Stakes (G3, dirt, 1,800m) on March 29.



Mama Cocha,  
winner of 2023 Sprinters Stakes



Win Carnelian,  
winner of 2025 Sprinters Stakes



Costa Nova,  
winner of 2026 February Stakes

Meanwhile, horses nominated to run in the U.S. Triple Crown were announced in February. While the final selections among 37 registered JRA-based horses (32 less than last year) have yet to be determined, the list includes **Best Green**, **Keiai Agito**, **Pyromancer**, **Rock Ptarmigan**, **Tokai Ma Cherie** and **Wonder Dean**, all mentioned above, and **Lucky Kid (JPN, C3, by Discreet Cat)**, the Hyacinth Stakes victor.

### ***Spring G1 Campaign for Four-Year-Olds and Up in Japan***

The JRA has announced that starting this year, it will raise the prize money of four G1 events, specifically, two on dirt and two for older fillies or mares—the February Stakes (dirt, 1,600m), the Champions Cup (dirt, 1,800m), the Victoria Mile (1,600m) and the Queen Elizabeth II Cup (2,200m). The total purse for each race will be 326.5 million yen (US\$ 2.1 million) and winners each will receive 150 million yen (US\$ 1 million).

While some of Japan’s top horses will aim for major titles overseas, many G1 winners will pursue success at home in their spring G1 campaigns. The Takamatsunomiya Kinen (G1, 1,200m) on March 29, the first of the annual flat turf G1 events, will feature last year’s champion **Satono Reve (JPN, H7, by Lord Kanaloa)** and runner-up **Namura Clair (JPN, M7, by Mikki Isle)**, the latter hoping to turn the tables in her fourth attempt in this race.



Satono Reve,  
winner of 2025 Takamatsunomiya Kinen

After his victory last year, **Satono Reve** registered two respectable runner-up efforts overseas but in the Sprinters Stakes he finished fourth despite being race favorite, and then he was ninth in the Hong Kong Sprint. **Namura Clair**, who marked her third consecutive runner-up effort in the Takamatsunomiya Kinen and was third in her third Sprinters Stakes, is coming off a second in the Hanshin Cup (G2, 1,400m) in late December. She will retire after the upcoming G1 event to begin her career as a broodmare.

This year’s Takamatsunomiya Kinen will also welcome the aforementioned **Panja Tower**, **Win Carnelian** and **Mama Cocha**, Sprinters Stakes runner-up **June Blair (USA, M5, by American Pharoah)**, who was 11th in the Hanshin Cup. Other runners will include **A T Makfi (JPN, H7, by Makfi)**, **Fioraia (JPN, M5, by Fine Needle)** and **Pair Pollux (JPN, H5, by Kinshasa no Kiseki)**, the respective winners of November’s Keihan Hai (G3, 1,200m) and February’s Silk Road Stakes (G3, 1,200m) and Ocean Stakes.



Panja Tower, winner of 2025 NHK Mile Cup

With defending champion Bellagio Opera retired, this year’s Osaka Hai (G1, 2,000m) on April 5 will feature the abovementioned **Danon Decile** along with two other G1 winners—**Croix du Nord** and



Croix du Nord,  
winner of 2025 Tokyo Yushun

**Meisho Tabaru.** After winning the 2024 Hopeful Stakes (G1, 2,000m) and the 2025 Tokyo Yushun, **Croix du Nord (JPN, C4, by Kitasan Black)** was heavily beaten to 14th in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. However, the brown colt recovered the following month in the Japan Cup, where he finished fourth after rallying for the lead until being overtaken by Calandagan, **Masquerade Ball** and finally **Danon Decile**. Despite receiving an invitation to run in the Dubai Sheema Classic, **Croix du Nord** will focus on Japan, where he will make his four-year-old season debut in the Osaka Hai.

**Meisho Tabaru (JPN, H5, by Gold Ship)** notched last year's Takarazuka Kinen (G1, 2,200m) at Hanshin by going wire-to-wire, after which he was sixth by 0.2-seconds in the Tenno Sho (Autumn) at Tokyo Racecourse, where the long stretch is a major challenge for pacesetters. Posted fourth choice in the Arima Kinen, the son of Gold Ship led by the second corner but failed to settle down in the 2,500-meter trip and faded in the last 200 meters, finishing 13th. **Meisho Tabaru** will aim to bounce back in the Osaka Hai held at Hanshin, where he has claimed two graded titles.



Meisho Tabaru,  
winner of 2025 Takarazuka Kinen

Last year, **Shohei (JPN, C4, by Saturnalia)** marked a convincing 2-1/2-length win in the Kyoto Shimbun Hai (G2, 2,200m) before finishing third behind **Croix du Nord** and **Masquerade Ball** in the Tokyo Yushun. Following a discouraging 14th in the 3,000-meter Kikuka Sho (Japanese St. Leger, G1, 3,000m), the Saturnalia colt bounced back to win the American Jockey Club Cup (G2, 2,200m) in January. He is now focused on his next bid, the Osaka Hai. The G1 event may also welcome **David Barows (JPN, G7, by Lord Kanaloa)**, winner of the Naruo Kinen (G3, 1,800m) in December; **Yoho Lake (JPN, H8, by Deep Impact)**, last year's third-place finisher; **Tagano Dude (JPN, H5, by Yamakatsu Ace)**, who won his first graded event in February's Kokura Daishoten (G3, 1,800m); and **Lebensstil (JPN, H6, by Real Steel)**, who claimed his fifth graded title in the Nakayama Kinen (G2, 1,800m) on March 1.



Redentor,  
winner of 2025 Tenno Sho (Spring)

In this year's Tenno Sho (Spring), **Redentor (JPN, H5, by Rulership)** is scheduled to attempt to defend the title. After concluding his three-year-old season with a second in the Kikuka Sho, the son of Rulership registered back-to-back wins in the Diamond Stakes (G3, 3,400m) and the Tenno Sho (Spring) but canceled his trip to the International Stakes in the UK due to a femur fracture in his right hind leg. He came back in the Kyoto Kinen (G2, 2,200m) this February, where he marked the second fastest speed over the last three furlongs, but was beaten to eighth.

Last year's Kikuka Sho runner-up **Eri King (JPN, C4, by Kizuna)** is set to run in the Tenno Sho (Spring), while winner Energico will be absent due to a tendon injury in his left foreleg. **Eri King** marked three wins in as many starts as a two-year-old but after his Kyoto Nisai Stakes (G3, 2,000m) victory, he was diagnosed with a chip fracture in his right foreleg. Beaten to 11th and fifth in his two spring-classic starts, the Kizuna colt regained his form to score his second graded title in the Kobe Shimbun Hai (G2, 2,400m) in September. He then produced a runner-up effort in the Kikuka Sho and kicked off the present season with a close second in February's Kyoto Kinen, his first challenge against older foes.

In the Diamond Stakes on February 21, **Stinger Glass (JPN, H5, by Kizuna)** landed his first graded title while the Stayers Stakes (G2, 3,600m) winner **Hohelied (JPN, M5, by Rulership)** finished fifth. His six wins now include five at 2,400 meters or more. **Admire Terra (JPN, H5, by Rey de Oro)**, the 2024 Kikuka Sho third-place finisher and 2025 Meguro Kinen (G2, 2,500m) victor, claimed the Hanshin Daishoten (G2, 3,000m) on March 22 in record time. **Chevalier Rose (JPN, H8, by Deep Impact)**, winner of both the 2024 Kyoto Daishoten (G2, 2,400m) and Stayers Stakes, was fourth, and 2025 Nikkei Sho (G2, 2,500m) champion **Meiner Emperor (JPN, H6, by Gold Ship)** was short by a head in fifth.

Runners in the Tenno Sho (Spring) on May 3, in addition to the aforementioned **Byzantine Dream**, will include **Goltzschtal (JPN, C4, by Bricks and Mortar)**, who was fourth in the Kikuka Sho last year and then claimed the Nikkei Shinshun Hai (G2, 2,400m) this past January; and a few runners from the Nikkei Sho (G2, 2,500m) on March 28, such as the Arima Kinen runner-up **Cosmo Kuranda (JPN, H5, by Al Ain)** and the Copa Republica Argentina (G2, 2,500m) victor **Mystery Way (JPN, G8, by Just a Way)**.

The Victoria Mile, which is open to four-year-old and up females, was won last year by **Ascoli Piceno (JPN, M5, by Daiwa Major)**, marking her second G1 title. After falling short in her following two starts, the mare will attempt to return to form in her first start of the current season, the Hanshin Himba Stakes (G2, 1,600m) on April 11.



Ascoli Piceno,  
winner of 2025 Victoria Mile



Embroidery,  
winner of 2025 Shuka Sho



Kamunyak,  
winner of 2025 Yushun Himba

Two G1 winning four-year-old fillies will also kick off the current season in the Hanshin Himba Stakes. First, **Embroidery (JPN, F4, by Admire Mars)**, was a disappointing 11th in her first overseas endeavor in the Hong Kong Mile (G1, 1,600m), but she dominated two of the fillies' Triple

Crown events—the Oka Sho (Japanese 1000 Guineas, G1, 1,600m) and the Shuka Sho (G1, 2,000m), which earned her the 2025 Best Three-Year-Old Filly title. Second, **Kamunyak (JPN, F4, by Black Tide)** won the second leg of the fillies' Triple Crown, the Yushun Himba (Japanese Oaks, G1, 2,400m) and extended her winning streak to three in the Rose Stakes (G2, 1,800m), but was heavily defeated in the Shuka Sho, her last outing of the 2025 season.

In the Nakayama Himba Stakes (G3, 1,800m) on March 7, sixth-choice **Ethelfleda (JPN, M5, by Kitasan Black)** marked her first graded win. She will be given time off before preparing for the All Comers (G2, 2,200m) in September and then her main target, the Queen Elizabeth II Cup (G1, 2,200m), in November. In third was **Paradis Reine (JPN, F4, by Kizuna)**, the 2025 Queen Elizabeth II Cup runner-up. **Erika Express (JPN, F4, by Epiphaneia)**, the Fairy Stakes (G3, 1,600m) champion and the Shuka Sho runner-up, and 2024 Oka Sho champion **Stellenbosch (JPN, M5, by Epiphaneia)**, followed in fourth and seventh, respectively, and **Bond Girl (JPN, M5, by Daiwa Major)**, who came off her seventh runner-up effort at the graded level, finished 10th.



Stellenbosch, winner of 2024 Oka Sho



Cervinia, winner of 2024 Shuka Sho

Other notable candidates for the Victoria Mile are **Cervinia (JPN, M5, by Harbinger)**, winner of the 2024 Yushun Himba and Shuka Sho and a good fifth in the Nakayama Kinen; **Queen's Walk (JPN, M5, by Kizuna)**, last year's runner-up, who started this season attempting to defend her Kinko Sho title but finished a close third; and **Ai Sansan (JPN, F4, by Kizuna)**, who claimed the Aichi Hai (G3, 1,400m) on March 22 as the 12th pick.

With the retirement of the 2024 Mile Championship and 2025 Dubai Turf winner Soul Rush, the spotlight in this year's Yasuda Kinen (G1, 1,600m) on June 7 will be on the defending champion **Jantar Mantar**. The 2025 Best Miler could be challenged by the previously noted **Gaia Force**; **Buena Onda (JPN, H5, by Leontes)**, who won the Kyoto Kimpai (G3, 1,600m) in January and will next aim for his second grade-race title in the Lord Derby Challenge Trophy (G3, 1,600m) on April 4; 2024 Asahi Hai Futurity Stakes champion **Admire Zoom (JPN, C4, by Maurice)**; last year's Mile Championship third-place finisher **Water Licht (JPN, H5, by Drefong)**; and the Tokyo Shimbun Hai (G3, 1,600m) winner **Trovatore (JPN, H5, by Rey de Oro)**, of whom the last three will prep in the Milers Cup (G2, 1,600m) on April 26. Other Yasuda Kinen runners could include a few coming off the Victoria Mile, or the NHK Mile Cup for three-year-olds.



Admire Zoom,  
winner of 2024 Asahi Hai Futurity Stakes



Ecoro Duel,  
winner of 2025 Nakayama Daishogai

The highlight of this spring's steeplechase calendar will undoubtedly be the Nakayama Grand Jump (J-G1, 4,260m) on April 18. Last year's winner, **Ecoro Duel (JPN, H7, by Kitanas Black)**, became the third horse to win both J-G1 events in the same year by taking the year-end Nakayama Daishogai (4,100m), following the footsteps of Up to Date (2015) and legendary Oju Chosan (2016 & 2017). The 2025 Best Steeplechase Horse kicked off his 2026 season in the Hanshin Spring Jump (J-G2, 3,900m) on

March 14, where he finished in second by a nose. **Dinasta (JPN, H7, by Duramente)** landed his first jump-graded title in the Hanshin Spring Jump and is now 4-4-0 out of eight starts in jump races. Two-time J-G1 runner-up **Neviim (JPN, H8, by Kizuna)** finished sixth.

Other candidates for this year's Nakayama Grand Jump could include **Sun Davis (JPN, H8, by Jo Cappuccino)** and **Forged Brick (JPN, H5, by Bricks and Mortar)**, respective winners of the Kokura Jump Stakes (J-G3, 3,390m) on February 14 and the Pegasus Jump Stakes (Open Class, 3,350m) on March 21. **Vehrenberg (JPN, H6, by Eishin Flash)**, the Nakayama Daishogai third-place finisher, was withdrawn from the Pegasus Jump Stakes due to an injured right foreleg.

### ***Three-Year-Old Classic Hopefuls***

The three-year-old classics will begin this year with the Oka Sho for fillies on April 12 and then the Yushun Himba on May 24, while the Satsuki Sho for colts and fillies on April 19 will be followed by the Tokyo Yushun on May 31.

Last year's Hanshin Juvenile Fillies (G1, 1,600m) winner and Best Two-Year-Old Filly **Star Anise (JPN, F3, by Drefong)** is set to head straight to the Oka Sho and then is likely to target the NHK Mile Cup (G1, 1,600m) on May 10. Meanwhile, Hanshin Juvenile Fillies runner-up **Garavogue (JPN, F3, by Lord Kanaloa)** kicked off her three-year-old campaign in the Queen Cup (G3, 1,600m) in February but finished a disappointing ninth. The race was won by **Dream Core (JPN, F3, by Kizuna)**, whose dam Normcore is a two-time G1 winner.



Star Anise,  
winner of 2025 Hanshin Juvenile Fillies



Dream Core,  
winner of 2026 Queen Cup



Taisei Vogue,  
winner of 2026 Tulip Sho

**Taisei Vogue (JPN, F3, by Indy Champ)**, who was third in last year's Hanshin Juvenile Fillies, began the current season in one of the three trial races, the Tulip Sho (G2, 1,600m) on March 1, where she prevailed in a multiple-horse rally to win by a neck, but was later diagnosed with a chip fracture

in her left foreleg and will be sidelined until autumn. Finishing a neck behind in second was **Namura Cosmos (JPN, F3, by Danon Premium)** with **Alankar (JPN, F3, by Epiphaneia)** another neck back in third.

Other Oka Sho candidates who performed well in separate trial races include **Saint Antoine (JPN, F3, by Drefong)** and **I Need You (JPN, F3, by Fine Needle)**, who finished second and third, respectively, in the Fillies' Revue (G2, 1,400m) on March 7; and **Dear Diamond (JPN, F3, by Saturnalia)** and **Rule the Wave (JPN, F3, by Lord Kanaloa)**, the top two finishers in that order in the Anemone Stakes (Listed, 1,600m) on March 14. Meanwhile, **Ghillies' Ball (JPN, F3, by Epiphaneia)**, winner of the Fillies' Revue, will skip the Oka Sho due to concerns about her physical condition.

Other notable Oka Sho contenders include **Festival Hill (JPN, F3, by Saturnalia)**, who has been sidelined with a left foreleg fracture since her victory in the Fantasy Stakes (G3, 1,400m) last November; **Black Chalice (JPN, F3, by Kitanasan Black)**, winner of the Fairy Stakes in January; **Lily Joie (JPN, F3, by Silver State)**, who extended her winning streak to three in the Kobai Stakes (Listed, 1,400m) in January; and **Sweet Happiness (JPN, F3, by Real Impact)**, who was fourth in the Hanshin Juvenile Fillies and is coming off a win in the Elfin Stakes (Listed, 1,600m) in February.



Ghillies' Ball,  
winner of 2026 Fillies' Revue



Festival Hill,  
winner of 2025 Fantasy Stakes



Black Chalice,  
winner of 2026 Fairy Stakes

**Cavallerizzo (JPN, C3, by Saturnalia)**, last year's Asahi Hai Futurity Stakes champion and Best Two-Year-Old Colt, will begin his three-year-old campaign in the Satsuki Sho. Last year's Hopeful Stakes (G1, 2,000m) winner **Lovcen (JPN, C3, by World Premiere)** kicked off the current season with a head-and-neck third in the Kyodo News Hai (G3, 1,800m) in February, a race won by **Realize Sirius (JPN, C3, by Poetic Flare)**, who captured his second grade-race title following the Niigata Nisai Stakes (G3, 1,600m) last August.



Cavallerizzo,  
winner of 2025 Asahi Hai Futurity Stakes



Lovcen,  
winner of 2025 Hopeful Stakes



Realize Sirius,  
winner of 2026 Kyodo News Hai

**Admire Quads (JPN, C3, by Real Steel)**, winner of last year’s Daily Hai Nisai Stakes (G2, 1,600m) and third in the Asahi Hai Futurity Stakes, commenced this season in the Yayoi Sho Deep Impact Kinen (G2, 2,000m) on March 8, one of the trial races towards the first leg of the Triple Crown, where he finished a close third behind winner **Basse Terre (JPN, C3, by Kitanan Black)** and runner-up **Reichsadler (JPN, C3, by Siskin)**. **Peintre Naif (JPN, C3, by Kizuna)**, winner of the Tokyo Sports Hai Nisai Stakes (G2, 1,800m) in November, was withdrawn from the race due to cellulitis in his left hind leg.



Admire Quads,  
winner of 2025 Daily Hai Nisai Stakes



Basse Terre, winner of  
2026 Yayoi Sho Deep Impact Kinen



Peintre Naif, winner of  
2025 Tokyo Sports Hai Nisai Stakes

Hopeful Stakes third-place finisher **Ask Edinburgh (JPN, C3, by Leontes)** made his seasonal debut in the Spring Stakes (G2, 1,800m) on March 15, in which he rallied for the lead in the final 200 meters but fell short, finishing second by a neck. Eighth-pick **Audacia (JPN, C3, by Kizuna)** won the race in record time, with **Acrophase (JPN, C3, by Lord Kanaloa)** in third. **Matenro Gale (JPN, C3, by Epiphaneia)** and **Lord Filer (JPN, C3, by Kizuna)** also secured berths in the Satsuki Sho by finishing first and second, respectively, in the trial Wakaba Stakes (Listed, 2,000m) on March 21.

The Satsuki Sho field will also feature **Forte Angelo (JPN, C3, by Fierement)**, runner-up in the Hopeful Stakes; as well as **Green Energy (JPN, C3, by Suave Richard)**, **Zoroastro (JPN, C3, by Maurice)** and **Large Ensemble (JPN, C3, by Benbatl)**, respective winners of the Keisei Hai (G3, 2,000m) in January, the Kisaragi Sho (G3, 1,800m) in February and the Sumire Stakes (Listed, 2,200m) also in February.



Audacia,  
winner of 2026 Spring Stakes



Green Energy,  
winner of 2026 Keisei Hai



Zoroastro,  
winner of 2026 Kisaragi Sho



Diamond Knot,  
winner of 2026 Falcon Stakes

**Diamond Knot (JPN, C3, by Bricks and Mortar)** was runner-up in the 2025 Asahi Hai Futurity Stakes and is being targeted at mile-distance races, such as the NHK Mile Cup, rather than the Triple Crown classics. He kicked off his three-year-old season in the Falcon Stakes (G3, 1,400m) on March 21, where he dueled down the stretch before pulling away 100 meters out to win by 1-1/4 lengths, earning his second graded victory.

The NHK Mile Cup will also include **Thunderstruck (JPN, C3, by Lord Kanaloa)**, winner of the Shinzan Kinen (G3, 1,600m) in January, and various runners from two trial races—the Churchill Downs Cup (G3, 1,600m) on April 4 and the New Zealand Trophy (G2, 1,600m) on April 11—as well as contenders from the Oka Sho and Satsuki Sho who prefer a mile rather than the 2,400-meter distance of the Yushun Himba or the Tokyo Yushun.



Thunderstruck,  
winner of 2026 Shinzan Kinen