Exclusive Topics for Horse Racing in Japan
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The Japan Racing Association

In the latter half of October, the talk within Japanese racing circles centered on two horses: Lovcen (JPN, C3, by World Premiere), who was attempting to capture the Triple Crown, and Forever Young (JPN, H5, by Real Steel), who was aiming for a repeat victory in the Breeders' Cup Classic (G1, dirt, 2,000m). Lovcen ran in the Kikuka Sho (Japanese St. Leger, G1, 3,000m) on October 25 as the overwhelming favorite. After missing his break, he attempted to move up in the latter stages of the race but faded in the homestretch. He finished 14th in a field of 18 and failed to secure the Triple Crown—a feat not achieved since Contrail in 2020. Forever Young ran in the Breeders' Cup Classic at Keeneland in Kentucky on October 31. Although forwardly positioned for much of the contest, he lacked the necessary kick at the straight and finished fifth in a field of seven, unable to realize the dream of becoming the first horse in 25 years and only the second in history to win the race in consecutive years.

Meanwhile, the primary prep races for the 46th Japan Cup (G1, 2,400m) on November 29 effectively concluded with the Tenno Sho (Autumn) (G1, 2,000m) on November 1. The main Japanese contenders are expected to be largely the same as last year's top finishers. The Tenno Sho (Autumn) featured several key contenders: **Croix du Nord (JPN, C4, by Kitasan Black)**, who secured back-to-back G1 victories in the Osaka Hai (2,000m) and the Tenno Sho (Spring) earlier this year; **Masquerade Ball (JPN, C4, by Duramente)**, last year's Tenno Sho (Autumn) winner who finished second by a head to **Calandagan** in the Japan Cup; and **Danon Decile (JPN, H5, by Epiphaneia)**, who defeated **Calandagan** to win the Dubai Sheema Classic (G1, 2,410m) in April 2025.

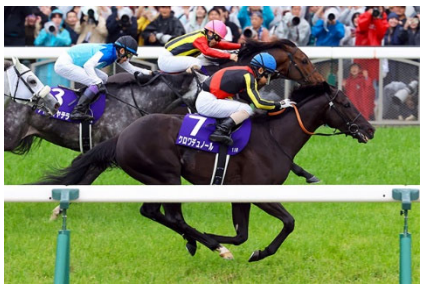
While **Croix du Nord** and **Masquerade Ball** were the Tenno Sho (Autumn)'s top two favorites, the victory went to **Danon Decile**, whose handicap fell to fourth after he drew the outermost gate in the 17-horse field. Throughout most of the race he remained toward the back of the pack, but in the homestretch he unleashed a powerful kick that went unmatched, allowing him to pull away from runner-up Nebra Disk (JPN, C4, by Duramente) by two and a half lengths. He clocked a blistering 32.9 seconds over the final 600 meters to score his first victory in over one and a half years, since

winning in Dubai. After finishing third in four consecutive domestic G1 races, he put an emphatic end to that streak.

The two four-year-olds, **Croix du Nord** and **Masquerade Ball**, both struggled in the Tenno Sho (Autumn), finishing 5th and 11th, respectively. **Croix du Nord**, ridden by Cristian Demuro for the first time and starting from the innermost stall, was boxed in and had difficulty finding a clear path for his stretch run. **Masquerade Ball** failed to find his stride early on and dropped to the very back before attempting to move up, but then found himself even more boxed in than **Croix du Nord** and was never able to showcase his ability. While both horses will look to bounce back in the Japan Cup, **Danon Decile** has once again demonstrated his high-level ability when running left-handed and should be a top contender in the race.



Danon Decile,
winner of 2026 Tenno Sho (Autumn)



Croix du Nord,
winner of 2026 Tenno Sho (Spring)



Masquerade Ball,
winner of 2025 Tenno Sho (Autumn)



Meisho Tabaru,
winner of 2026 Takarazuka Kinen

Another contender for domestic middle-to-long-distance races is **Meisho Tabaru (JPN, H5, by Gold Ship)**, who finished a distant 14th in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe (G1, 2,400m) on October 4 but is looking to redeem himself in the Japan Cup. His two career G1 victories were both in the Takarazuka Kinen (2,200m on turf at Hanshin), which he won in consecutive years. However, he has failed to place within the top ten in three starts at 2,400 meters or beyond, suggesting that the Japan Cup may be challenging. Meanwhile, Museum Mile (JPN, C4, by Leontes) was another favorite, but he was diagnosed with periostitis in his right foreleg and will be sidelined for the rest of the year.

Redentor (JPN, H5, by Rulership), winner of the 2025 Tenno Sho (Spring), is also scheduled to run in the Japan Cup. He is coming off consecutive fifth-place finishes in the 2026 Tenno Sho (Spring) and then the Kyoto Daishoten (G2, 2,400m) on October 4. In four starts at Tokyo Racecourse, he has two wins, including last year's Diamond Stakes (G3, 3,400m), and one runner-up finish. **Urban Chic (JPN, H5, by Suave Richard)**, winner of the 2024 Kikuka Sho, finished fifth in the Niigata Kinen (G3, 2,000m) on August 30, crossing the wire just 0.3 seconds behind the winner. The son of Suave Richard suffered exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhaging (EIPH) in his previous two starts and was rested from March before making his comeback in the Niigata Kinen.

Tagano Dude (JPN, H5, by Yamakatsu Ace) claimed his first graded title in the Kokura Daishoten (G3, 1,800m) in February. Although winless since, he has proven to be competitive at the highest level, finishing fourth, sixth and fifth, respectively, in the Osaka Hai, the Tenno Sho (Spring) and the Takarazuka Kinen. The son of Yamakatsu Ace launched the second fastest drive in his previous start, the Tenno Sho (Autumn), finishing fourth ahead of **Croix du Nord** by a nose.



Redentor,
winner of 2025 Tenno Sho (Spring)



Urban Chic,
winner of 2024 Kikuka Sho



Tagano Dude,
winner of 2026 Kokura Daishoten

It appears that none of the top-tier three-year-olds will compete in this year's Japan Cup. Lovcen was given a spell after the Kikuka Sho and will likely come back in the year-end Arima Kinen (G1, 2,500m) on December 27. Kikuka Sho victor Going to Sky (JPN, C3, by Contrail) excels at Tokyo Racecourse, making him an ideal Japan Cup candidate, but his connections have decided to pass on the opportunity, considering that the timing since his last start is too short and also that his regular rider, Yutaka Take, is set to partner with **Meisho Tabaru**.

Other Japan Cup-nominated or substitute horses include:

- **Cosmo Kuranda (JPN, H5, by Al Ain)**, runner-up in both the 2024 Satsuki Sho (Japanese 2000 Guineas, G1, 2,000m) and 2025 Arima Kinen and a respectable fourth in the Takarazuka Kinen this June, but ninth in the Tenno Sho (Autumn).
- **Excite Bio (JPN, C4, by Rey de Oro)**, 2025 Radio Nikkei Sho (G3, 1,800m) winner and Kikuka Sho third-place finisher, but sidelined due to a leg problem after finishing eighth in last year's Arima Kinen.



Cosmo Kuranda, winner of
2024 Yayoi Sho Deep Impact Kinen

- **Feiern Kranz (JPN, C4, by Duramente)**, ninth in last year's Tokyo Yushun (Japanese Derby, G1, 2,400m) but then scored his first graded win in this year's Meguro Kinen (G2, 2,500m) before an eighth in the Copa Republica Argentina (G2, 2,500m) on November 8.
- **Shake Your Heart (JPN, H6, by Heart's Cry)**, who has claimed three graded titles this year, including the Kinko Sho (G2, 2,000m) and the Sapporo Kinen (G2, 2,000m), but was sixth in the Tenno Sho (Autumn), behind Croix du Nord by a head.
- **Wurttemberg (JPN, H6, by Kitasan Black)**, the runner-up in this year's Tenno Sho (Spring), missing out on the title by a nose to **Croix du Nord**.



Excite Bio,
winner of 2025 Radio Nikkei Sho



Feiern Kranz,
winner of 2026 Meguro Kinen



Shake Your Heart,
winner of 2026 Sapporo Kinen



Calandagan,
winner of 2025 Champion Stakes
(Photo: Ascot)

Six foreign runners have accepted invitations to the Japan Cup. Last year, French-based **Calandagan (IRE, G5, by Gleneagles)** became the first foreign contender in 20 years to win the Japan Cup, setting a new track record of 2:20.3. The Francis-Henri Graffard-trained gelding added two G1 titles to his belt this year—the Dubai Sheema Classic and the Grand Prix de Saint-Cloud (2,400m). He then marked runner-up efforts in the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes (G1, 2,390m) and the Champion Stakes (G1, 1,990m), the latter on October 17. **Calandagan** will attempt to become only the second horse to win the Japan Cup back-to-back, following Gentildonna in 2013.

His stablemate **Goliath (GER, G6, by Adlerflug)** will return to the Japan Cup after a sixth-place finish in 2024, when he struggled in a slow-paced race. He won the 2024 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes and then marked two other G1 titles—the 2025 Grosser Preis von Baden (2,400m) and the 2026 Preis von Europa (2,400m), his previous start, both of which he won wire-to-wire.



Goliath, winner of 2024 King George VI
and Queen Elizabeth Stakes
(Photo: @Edward Whitaker)



Minnie Hauk, winner of 2026 British
Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes
(Photo: Ascot)

Minnie Hauk (IRE, F4, by Frankel) claimed the Oaks (G1, 2,410m), the Irish Oaks (G1, 2,400m) and the Yorkshire Oaks (G1, 2,370m) before a respectable runner-up effort in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe last year, which earned her the season's Cartier Champion Three-Year-Old Filly title. Although beaten to tenth in this year's Arc, the Aidan O'Brien-trained filly bounced back to win the British Champions Fillies & Mares Stakes (G1, 2,390m) on October 17.

Another Ireland-based contender, **Ethical Diamond (IRE, G6, by Awtaad)**, who pulled off a huge upset victory in last year's Breeders' Cup Turf (G1, 2,400m), is trained by William Mullins who is known for his Nakayama Grand Jump victory with Blackstairmountain in 2013, the Awtaad gelding

added another title this August in the Ballyroan Stakes (G3, 2,400m) but failed to defend his Breeders' Cup Turf title in the end of October when he struggled to find room early in the stretch and finished ninth.



Ethical Diamond, winner of 2025 Breeders' Cup Turf
(Photo: Eclipse Sportswire / Breeders' Cup Photos©)



Ombudsman,
winner of 2026 Champion Stakes
(Photo: Ascot)

British raider **Ombudsman (IRE, H5, by Night Of Thunder)** claimed his first G1 title in the 2025 Prince Of Wales's Stakes (G1, 1,990m) and then validated the win with another title in the International Stakes (G1, 2,050m) before concluding last season with a second to **Calandagan** in the Champion Stakes. The Godolphin-owned horse kicked off this season with his third G1 victory in the Dubai Turf (1,800m) and then defended his title in the Prince Of Wales's Stakes. While unable to score a back-to-back win in the following International Stakes, the son of Night Of Thunder is coming off his fifth G1 title in the Champion Stakes, where he soundly beat **Calandagan** by more than three lengths to avenge a defeat to the same foe in the same race last year.

Teao (CHI, C4, by Ya Primo), whose damsire Seeking the Dia was known for runner-up efforts in the 2005 and 2006 Japan Cup Dirt, was named the 2026 Horse of the Year in Chile with four G1 victories—the Dos Mil Guineas (dirt, 1,600m) and the Gran Criterium (dirt, 1,900m) last year and the El Derby (2,400m) and the Gran Premio Latinoamericano (2,000m) this year. The Chile-bred colt was transferred to John Sadler's stable in the United States this year to run in the Japan Cup.



Teao, winner of
2026 Gran Premio Latinoamericano