

Japanese Derby

(Promotional content)

Strong field ready to go in Tokyo Yushun’s 91st edition

Unbeaten Justin Milano looks to secure second leg of Triple Crown quest

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It's that time of year once again for one of the great horse races in Japan, the Group 1 Japanese Derby — or Tokyo Yushun to give its Japanese name — which will be held on May 26 at Fuchu Racecourse, just a short distance from the center of Tokyo.

This will be the 91st edition of the Derby, which was first run in 1932. Except for its first two years, when it was held at the former Meguro Racecourse, its home has always been the Tokyo track, which has become one of the most iconic racecourses in the world. Other famous races held at the Tokyo track include the Japanese Oaks, the Yasuda Kinen and, arguably the best on

the Japan Racing Association's yearly calendar, the Japan Cup.

To spend a day at Fuchu Racecourse on a big day is certainly something everyone should experience once, even if they're not a fan of the sport. The grandstands are packed to the rafters and the atmosphere is electric.

For those who aren't ardent racegoers, the area behind the stands, with its rose garden and racing museum, could be the spot. Or even just to stroll around the whole area, taking everything in, would provide an interesting picture of the many different aspects of Japanese life on display at the racecourse. A word of warning for this year's Derby Day is that reservations are required and must be made on the JRA website, be it general admission or reserved seating, as it won't be possible to show up on the day without them. This year's attendance will be capped at 80,000.

The Japanese Derby is the second leg of the Triple Crown series of races for colts,

with the Satsuki Sho in April being the first and the Kikuka Sho in the autumn being the last. Since 1932, there have been just eight Triple Crown winners in Japan, with the immortal St. Lite being the first in 1941 and Contrail the most recent in 2020, putting an end to an eight-year dry spell.

It's at this time when the drumroll begins, as the latest 3-year-old colt with a chance of becoming a Triple Crown winner steps into the limelight. Last year it was Sol Oriens, who arrived at the Derby with great expectations only to finish second. This year, the star act is expected to be Justin Milano, a colt by Kizuna, who won the Derby back in 2013.

Bloodlines often mean a lot when it comes to producing big-race winners, but as always with racing, nothing is guaranteed.

Justin Milano won the Satsuki Sho at Nakayama Racecourse in April, and another feather in his cap that day was the fact that he did it in record time. His trainer, Yasuo Tomomichi, is already a three-time Derby winner, having last won with Do Deuce, another record breaker, in 2022 when he reset the best time for the race at 2:21.9. Justin Milano will become just the eighth horse in JRA history to win the first two legs of the Triple Crown unbeaten if he manages to win on Sunday.

Just before the Satsuki Sho, Tomomichi expressed confidence in the latest star to grace his stable.

"He's a big striding horse, and with the talent he has, we can look forward to the Derby with him," he said.

With Justin Milano reportedly finishing the race with no problems, his jockey for the Derby is expected to be Keita Tosaki, who guided him to victory in the Satsuki Sho and has made giant leaps toward the top of the JRA jockeys' table since starting his career on the National Association of Racing, or local government circuit. After securing the first leg of the Triple Crown, Tosaki had nothing but praise for the impressive colt.

"He's a smart horse with a lot of potential," he said. "He's easy to ride, and I think



Justin Milano (left) edges out Cosmo Kuranda to win the 84th Satsuki Sho Grade 1 horse race at Nakayama Racecourse in Funabashi, Chiba Prefecture, on April 14. JJJJ

he can handle a longer distance."

It's very easy to get carried away when the focus is on just one horse in a big race, but Sunday will most likely see another 17 horses in the line-up for the Derby.

Another interesting contender will be a filly named Regaleira, whose connections seem to want her to take on the colts, as opposed to other fillies. It's a rather unorthodox move as only three fillies have won the Derby, with the last one to do so being Vodka back in 2007. The last filly to run in the race was Satono Reinas, who managed

a fifth-place finish in 2021.

Other runners to look out for are Meisho Tabaru and Cosmo Kuranda. The first is a frontrunner, and they're always exciting to watch for sustaining runs at the front of the field, should Meisho Tabaru's jockey decide that is the tactic to use on the day.

Cosmo Kuranda finished second to Justin Milano in the Satsuki Sho and this time will be ridden by Italian jockey Mirco Demuro, who's been riding in Japan since 1999 and was the first foreign jockey ever

to win the Japanese Derby back in 2003, on Neo Universe.

Which horse has what it takes to pull off the big win in the famous race? All will be revealed on Sunday, when the horses will jump from the starting gates at 3:40 p.m. in front of the grandstand and gallop for 2,400 meters, or just over a circuit, on the turf track at Fuchu Racecourse.

This year's purse is a staggering ¥300 million (around \$200 million), a far cry from the winner's purse of just ¥10,000 back in the early days of the race.

Solid Kentucky Derby showing offers hope

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"The Most Exciting Two Minutes in Sports" refers to the Kentucky Derby, a 2,000-meter dirt track race for 3-year-old thoroughbreds run at Churchill Downs Racetrack in Louisville, Kentucky. The Kentucky Derby is the first race of the Triple Crown, the second and third being the Preakness and the Belmont Stakes, and celebrated its 150th running this year.

Fans come to the racetrack dressed in their finest and sing "My Old Kentucky Home" with mint juleps in hand as the horses and riders enter the racetrack. The winning horse is draped with a garland of red roses that is glorious to behold, and winning the famous race is the dream of every jockey in the U.S.

This year, two horses representing Japan

competed — Forever Young and T O Password — posing a fresh challenge to two valiant horses with impeccable credentials.

Forever Young was undefeated in five starts. He became Japan's 2-year-old dirt champion and conquered two races in the Middle East in 2024 — the Saudi Derby and UAE Derby. Forever Young is managed by trainer Yoshito Yahagi, who has two derby victories in Japan, including with Triple Crown winner Contrail, and eight overseas G1 victories including the Breeders' Cup Distaff in 2021 via Marche Lorraine and the BC Filly & Mare Turf with Loves Only You. His trademark is a colorful broad-brimmed hat that's marked him as "the man in the hat" among turfmen around the world.

T O Password made his debut in January and within three months has won two races in Japan, quickly giving people hope that he could be a Kentucky Derby contender. Rid-

den by Kazushi Kimura, who's been a leading jockey in Canada for three consecutive years and received three consecutive Sovereign Awards for Outstanding Jockey, the colt appeared ready to make history.

Prior to this year's Kentucky Derby, just six Japanese horses had run the race, starting in 1995 with Ski Captain, who barely managed to keep up with the field and finished 14th. His rider, Yutaka Take, who later went on to become a legend in Japanese horse racing, told Nikkan Sports afterward: "The pace was too fast. I wanted to push forward at the third turn, but he just couldn't."

Horse racing in Japan has mainly scheduled turf races in line with the European norm. Japanese horses have finished second four times in France's Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe and seem just a step away from winning it all. But a victory in the United States, the home of dirt tracks, had been considered impossible, particularly at the Kentucky Derby, which gathers the top 3-year-olds for the "Run for the Roses."

In recent years, however, Japanese horses have captured crowns in leading international dirt races. Marche Lorraine won the Breeders' Cup Distaff in 2021, Panthalassa the Saudi Cup in 2023 and Ushba Tesoro the Dubai World Cup also in 2023. Japanese horse racing is now in an era in which domestic thoroughbreds can compete on a par with the best in the world.

At the Kentucky Derby this year, Forever Young showed in third and T O Password finished strong in fifth. The memorial race was eventually won by homebred Mystik Dan. Forever Young, the first Japanese horse to finish in the money at the Derby, split the pack and down the stretch bumped several times with runner-up Sierra Leone before a three-horse photo finish. Betting also took place in Japan, sending Derby-related terms in Japanese trending on social media platform X. Although Forever Young didn't win, his strong showing left fans hopeful for future victories.

After the race Yahagi and jockey Ryusei



Forever Young (center), ridden by Ryusei Sakai, finished third in this year's Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky, on May 4. AFP / JJJJ

Sakai expressed their frustration at having come so close. The race and the team's reaction have made observers feel that the Kentucky Derby is no longer a distant object of admiration or a challenge just to enter, but

a realistic goal.

The day is approaching when a Japanese horse will finally win the Kentucky Derby. Even in defeat, the 150th memorial race affirmed their undeniable promise.

Chart guide			
Horse	Trainer Sire (father) Dam (mother)	Jockey	Weight (adjusted)
JRA PHOTOS			

For our Japanese Derby coverage, please visit : <https://sports.japantimes.co.jp/horse-racing/2024-special/japanese-derby.html>

Bracket number	Horse number	Horse	Jockey	Bracket number	Horse number	Horse	Jockey	Bracket number	Horse number	Horse	Jockey
1	1	Sunrise Earth Koichi Ishizaka Rey de Oro Chant de l'Ange	Kenichi Ikezoe 57 kg	4	7	Mr GT Yoshito Yahagi Duramente Listen	Yusuke Fujioka 57 kg	7	13	Shin Emperor Yoshito Yahagi Siyouni Starlet's Sister	Ryusei Sakai 57 kg
	2	Regaleira Tetsuya Kimura Suave Richard Roca	Christophe Lemaire 55 kg		8	Urban Chic Ryo Takei Suave Richard Edgy Style	Takeshi Yokoyama 57 kg		14	Gonbade Qabus Noriyuki Hori Bricks and Mortar Affilato	Kohei Matsuyama 57 kg
2	3	June Take Hidenori Take Kizuna Admire Sabrina	Mirai Iwata 57 kg	5	9	Danon Ayers Rock Noriyuki Hori Maurice Mosheen	Joao Moreira 57 kg		15	Justin Milano Yasuo Tomomichi Kizuna Margot Did	Keita Tosaki 57 kg
	4	Byzantine Dream Tomoyasu Sakaguchi Epiphaneia Japoni Chara	Atsuya Nishimura 57 kg		10	Sunrise Zipangu Hidetaka Otonashi Kizuna Saimaa	Akira Sugawara 57 kg	8	16	Meisho Tabaru Mamoru Ishibashi Gold Ship Meisho Tsubakuro	Suguru Hamanaka 57 kg
3	5	Danon Decile Shogo Yasuda Epiphaneia Top Decile	Norihiro Yokoyama 57 kg	6	11	Sugar Kun Hisashi Shimizu Duramente Sugar Heart	Yutaka Take 57 kg		17	Shonan la Punta Tomokazu Takano Kizuna Furia Azteca	Katsuma Sameshima 57 kg
	6	Cosmo Kuranda Shizuya Kato Al Ain Southern Speed	Mirco Demuro 57 kg		12	Sixpence Sakae Kunieda Kizuna Finley'sluckycharm	Yuga Kawada 57 kg		18	Ecoro Walz Mitsunori Makiura Black Tide Petit Princesse	Yasunari Iwata 57 kg