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## **ENCINO POWERS PAST EPIC RIDE IN FINAL STRIDES TO WIN \$150,000 JOHN BATTAGLIA MEMORIAL**

**FLORENCE, Ky. (Saturday, March 2, 2024)** – Godolphin’s **Encino** stamped himself a contender on the Road to the Kentucky Derby when he kicked past heavy favorite **Epic Ride** in the finals strides to win Saturday’s \$150,000 John Battaglia Memorial at Turfway Park Racing & Gaming.

Trained by **Brad Cox** and ridden by **Axel Concepcion**, Encino garnered 20 qualifying points towards a spot in the starting gate in the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (Grade I).

In the early stages of the John Battaglia Memorial, Encino sat fifth, tracking the early pacesetter **Bolt at Midnight**, who clipped an opening quarter-mile in :23.84. Heavy favorite Epic Ride, under jockey **Adam Beschizza**, was placed just ahead of Encino while tracking the pacesetters in the three-path. As the field entered the far turn, Bolt at Midnight’s lead began to diminish with **Blue Eyed George** and jockey **Luan Machado** ranging up to his outside while Epic Ride made a bold-move in the three-path. Concepcion continued to ask Encino for his best run while tracking just behind Epic Ride. At the quarter-pole, Epic Ride collared Bolt at Midnight but had to fend off Encino who drew even at the top of the lane. Entering deep stretch, Encino finally stuck his head in front of Epic Ride and drew clear for a one-length score while completing 1 1/16 miles in 1:44.22.

“After I broke pretty well from the gate I was able to get over and begin to follow Epic Ride,” Concepcion said. “He relaxed very well down the backside and around the far turn I was able to ask him for his best run. I had a lot of horse still left down the lane and he continued to run hard all the way to the wire. I’m very thankful for Brad (Cox) and his team here at Turfway along with the owners and everyone behind this horse. It’s exciting riding a horse like this in a race like the Battaglia. It’s on the Road to the Kentucky Derby so it means a lot.”

“We just sort of take situations like this race by race with horses like (Encino) who just broke his maiden,” said **Tessa Walden**, the local assistant to Cox. “It was a big step up going to a race like this and we didn’t know how he’d handle it versus an allowance race. He handled everything very well and we’re very happy with how professional he was in just his third start.”

Epic Ride earned 10 qualifying points on the Road to the Kentucky Derby with his runner-up finish. He finished 1 ¾ lengths clear of third-place Blue Eyed George who earned 6 points. Fourth-place **Mugatu** tallied 4 points while fifth-place **Ode to Ballus** earned 2 points.

Mugatu and Ode to Ballus are both not currently nominated to the Triple Crown series but can become eligible by paying a \$6,000 late nomination fee due April 1.

Pacesetter Bolt at Midnight finished sixth and was followed by **Mission Ready**, **Karlwithanarl**, **Good Bali**, **Fidget** and **Mr. Faversham**.

Encino paid \$2 mutuel returns of \$13.38, \$5.66 and \$4.12. Epic Ride’s place and show backers received payouts of \$3.12 and \$2.56 while Blue Eyed George returned \$2.82.

The John Battaglia Memorial was Encino’s second win from three starts. The victory was worth \$87,536 to improve his lifetime mark to \$141,971.

Encino is a 3-year-old son of Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist out of the Bernardini mare Glittering Jewel. He was bred in Kentucky by his owner.

Named in honor of the late General Manager of Latonia Race Track, the John Battaglia Memorial is the local steppingstone to the \$700,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII), held March 23. Nominations to the Jeff Ruby Steaks close Tuesday and will be released later in the week.

For more information and to purchase tickets to Jeff Ruby Steaks Day, visit [www.Turfway.com](http://www.Turfway.com).

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