

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **CALIFORNIA BURRITO TURNS BACK BABY MAX TO WIN \$173,500 JOHN BATTAGLIA MEMORIAL**

**FLORENCE, Ky. (Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025)** – Aaron and Victoria Haberman's California Burrito turned back a determined challenge from **Baby Max** to win Saturday night's 43<sup>rd</sup> running of the \$173,500 John Battaglia Memorial (Listed) at Turfway Park Racing & Gaming, the Prep Season finale on the Road to the Kentucky Derby.

Trained by **Tommy Drury Jr.** and ridden by **Irving Moncada**, California Burrito completed the 1 1/16-mile race in 1:45.98 while earning 20 qualifying points toward a spot in the starting gate for the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (Grade I).

California Burrito broke aggressively from the gate and was immediately sent to the lead by Moncada. Longshot **Maitre D**, who broke from the far-outside post, pressed California Burrito into the first turn through an opening quarter-mile in :24.50. Up the backside, California Burrito maintained a half-length margin through a half-mile clocking of :49.41. As California Burrito rated on the lead, Baby Max tracked his every move under jockey **Luis Saez** while sitting in third, about two lengths off the front.

Around the far turn, Baby Max launched his bid three wide and, turning for home, California Burrito's lead was down to a head as the two battled the entire length of the Turfway Park stretch. At the line, California Burrito battled back to Baby Max's inside to finish a half-length in front.

"He's been working lights out in the morning," Moncada said. "I was very confident in him coming into the race. The plan was to be aggressive early to get him into a good spot, and he took me right to the lead. He was doing it very easily on his own most of the race. I'm very impressed with how he battled back down the lane. I think the future is very bright for him. I see no problem with him stretching out in distance from today."

It was 5 ½ lengths back to **Maximum Promise** in third, followed by **Banks, Studlydoright, Coming in Hot, Shan, Special Caliber, King of Ashes, Maitre D** and **Spirit Rags**.

"His first race was sort of a head-scratcher," Drury said. "We knew we'd be able to be aggressive with him entering for the \$150,000 claiming tag because of that, and it actually gave him a confidence boost. Watching these 3-year-olds develop is like watching teenagers and trying to pick out which ones will make it to the NBA—it's so difficult at this stage. His last race, he got an easy lead and did everything on his own, so we really didn't know a lot about him. Tonight, he made the lead very easily again but the way he battled back against Baby Max told us a lot. He has a lot of fight in him. He doesn't need the lead, he's worked behind horses in the morning."

Sent off at odds of 7-2, California Burrito returned \$9.42, \$4.50 and \$3.18. Baby Max paid \$3.72 and \$2.62 with Maximum Promise returning \$3.92 to show.

Saturday's win marked California Burrito's third victory from six starts, increasing his career earnings to \$222,941 after earning \$102,850 for the win. The son of Army Mule, out of the Hard Spun mare Bluegrass Sunset, was bred in Kentucky by Westbrook Stables.

The John Battaglia Memorial was part of the Road to the Kentucky Derby Prep Season and awarded the top 5 finishers qualifying points on a 20-10-6-4-2 scale for the 151<sup>st</sup> running Kentucky Derby.

The John Battaglia Memorial is named in honor of the late general manager of Latonia Race Track and Turfway Park. Battaglia's influence on horse racing in Northern Kentucky is still felt today. His son, **Mike Battaglia**, a legendary former track announcer at Turfway Park, presented the trophy along with several family members.

The race serves as the local prep for the \$777,000 Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII), a Championship Series contest on the Road to the Kentucky Derby, scheduled for March 22.

Live racing resumes Sunday at Turfway Park. The 10-race card, originally scheduled for Wednesday, was postponed due to inclement weather. First post is 4:15 p.m.

**JOHN BATTAGLIA MEMORIAL QUOTES:**

**Irving Moncada (jockey, California Burrito, winner):** “He’s been working lights out in the morning,” Moncada said. “I was very confident in him coming into the race. The plan was to be aggressive early to get him into a good spot, and he took me right to the lead. He was doing it very easily on his own most of the race. I’m very impressed with how he battled back down the lane. I think the future is very bright for him. I see no problem with him stretching out in distance from today.”

**Tommy Drury Jr. (trainer, California Burrito, winner):** “His first race was sort of a head-scratcher. We knew we’d be able to be aggressive with him entering for the \$150,000 claiming tag because of that, and it actually gave him a confidence boost. Watching these 3-year-olds develop is like watching teenagers and trying to pick out which ones will make it to the NBA—it’s so difficult at this stage. His last race, he got an easy lead and did everything on his own, so we really didn’t know a lot about him. Tonight, he made the lead very easily again, but the way he battled back against Baby Max told us a lot. He has a lot of fight in him. He doesn’t need the lead—he’s worked behind horses in the morning.”

**Kelsey Danner (trainer, Baby Max, runner-up):** “We’re proud how well he ran. He just came up second best tonight.”

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