

STARRY NIGHT

Louisiana Premier Night Stakes 2023
By Chad Cooper • Photos by Coady Photography

Though Louisiana Premier Night may not be as old as the Mardi Gras season, the month of February has become synonymous with horse racing. Before Louisianans celebrated with parades, beads and king cakes, plenty of business had to be tended to at the 20th edition February 4 in the small southwestern town of Vinton at Delta Downs. The 12-race program featured 10 stakes races, all of which showcased some of the best thoroughbred horses in the Pelican State, and totaled \$980,000 of purse money.

Louisiana Premier Night Championship
\$150,000 • One mile and one sixteenth • Four Year Olds and Upward

TOUCHUPONASTAR

Star Guitar – Touch of Magic, by Lion Heart
Breeder: Coteau Grove Farms, LLC • Owner: Set-Hut LLC
Trainer: Jeff Delhomme • Jockey: Timothy Thornton



Touchuponastar has begun to live up to high expectations. Not only does he have champion in his DNA, thanks in to his sire, Star Guitar, but his connections are raising the bar each and every time the 4-year-old steps onto the racetrack.

“I thought this horse was unbeat-

able,” said Jake Delhomme. “Then, he lost his debut and I got emotional. Pressure is a privilege. I like winning, no doubt about it. Sometimes my ego gets in the way, but who doesn’t want to win every race?”

Touchuponastar was expected to

set the pace in the Louisiana Premier Night Championship 1 1/16-mile test for 4-year-olds and up, but the 6-5 betting favorite appeared to stumble out of the gates, which allowed Brian’s Iron Mike to take command and set fractions of 23.65, 47.47 and 1:12.89.

“He’s a class act and does everything you ask of him,” said jockey Tim Thornton. “He stumbled out of the gate, but I was never worried.”

When the half-mile was reached, Touchuponastar (\$4.40), who was placed second after a sluggish start, began to pressure Brian’s Iron Mike, then felt no mercy and put away the field and cruised to a 2 1/2-length win in an expeditious time of 1:45.53, which was just 2 seconds off the track record of 1:43.20 set in 1975 by Norms Promise.

Touchuponastar has now won four consecutive races and 5-of-7 starts overall for earnings of \$253,100 for Set-Hut LLC.

Bred in Louisiana by Coteau

Grove Farms, Touchuponastar was purchased for \$15,000 as yearling.

Delhomme said that Andrew Cary, a bloodstock agent for Coteau Grove, and a personal friend, raved about the horse, which led him to making the buy.

“This is an iron horse who doesn’t come around very often,” said Delhomme.

The final order of finish was Touchuponastar, Behemah Star, Ballinonabudjet, Highland Creek, Langs Day, Brian’s Iron Mike, Jimi’s a Star and Runninginthemoney. Who Took the Money was scratched.

Trainer Jeff DelHomme leads Touchuponastar and a jubilant Tim Thornton to the winners circle.



Louisiana Premier Night Distaff

\$125,000 • One mile • Four Year Olds and Up Fillies and Mares

FREE LIKE A GIRL

El Deal-Flashy Prize, by Flashy Bull

Breeders: Kim Renee Stover & Lisa Osborne • Owners: Gerald Bruno, Jr., Carl J. Deville, Chasey Pomier and Jerry Caroom • Trainer: Chasey Pomier • Jockey: Pedro L. Cotto, Jr.



Cyndi Lauper said it best in her 1983 hit song, “Girls Just Want to Have Fun,” and that’s exactly what 4-year-old filly Free Like a Girl and her trainer and co-owner Chasey Pomier are both doing. And now the daughter of El Deal is becoming iconic just like Lauper’s timeless tune.

After another stellar performance in the \$125,000 Louisiana Premier Night Distaff, Free Like a Girl has 11 wins in 23 starts, which includes a 5-for-6 record at Delta Downs, and is closing in on \$1 million in career earnings, \$829,878, as well as being Louisiana thoroughbred royalty.

“She is just so unbelievable and we are so blessed to have a race-

horse like her,” said Pomier. “She’s is a gamer. She really has the temperament of getting mad when she gets beat. She lost the last two races (both second place finishes) and she literally knew that coming into tonight and wanted to win. She doesn’t like horses to pass her and when one does, she finds a way to dig in.”

Under jockey Pedro Cotto Jr., he and the filly were never a length behind front runner Winning Romance, who tried stealing the race at 24.60 and 50.31. With one



Chasey Deville Pomier

turn left in the one-mile Distaff, Cotto and Free Like a Girl (\$3.40) took command at the sixteenth pole and kept to task to beat her rival by one length in 1:41.16.

“The filly was really good again tonight,” said Cotto. “I am so thankful to have the opportunity to ride her.”

Final order of finish was Free Like a Girl, Winning Romance, A G’s Charlotte, Fort Polk, Eileen Alexandra, Lutie Mo and Final Quest. Basalt Street was scratched.

“She [Free Like A Girl] doesn’t like horses to pass her and when one does, she finds a way to dig in.”

Chasey Deville Pomier

Louisiana Premier Starlet

\$100,000 • 1 mile • Three Year Old Fillies

ALPINE MIST

Blofeld – Ski Tune, by Brahms

Breeder: Melissa Cantacuzene • Owner: Melissa Cantacuzene • Trainer: J. Luis Garcia

Jockey: Vicente Del-Cid



While many eyes may have been on other horses, Alpine Mist is quietly developing into a star. All three of her career starts came this season at Delta Downs and all three were wins. The daughter of Blofeld can now add “stakes winner” to her name as well as a bankroll of \$108,600.

“I’ve always known she had the ability,” said trainer J. Luis Garcia. “What’s really impressive is the fact she is improving each race and she is undefeated.”

With Vicente Del-Cid in the irons, Alpine Mist raced in the middle of the pack, but stayed less than 2 lengths behind frontrunner and heavy favorite Free Drop Maddy, who led the eight-horse field with



Owner/breeder, Melissa Cantacuzene.

“Nothing beats watching Louisiana horse racing.”

Melissa Cantacuzene

fractional times of 23.25 and 48.16. Del-Cid asked his runner near the 5/16ths pole and led the rest of the way to cover one mile in 1:42.86 at 11-1 odds.

“This horse has been a real surprise,” said owner and breeder, Melissa Cantacuzene, “I bred her mother, Ski Tune, and her second

dam, Ski Race, who is still alive. Nothing beats watching Louisiana horse racing.”

Final order of finish saw Alpine Mist, Olivia G, Tensas Candy, Louisiana Liberty, Free Drop Maddy, Taken It, Where’s Aunt J and Everlyn’s Angel.

Louisiana Premier Prince

\$100,000 • 1 mile • Three Year Olds

JACK HAMMER

Jimmy Creed – Lipstick Junky, by Flatter

Breeder: Allied Racing Stable, LLC • Owner: Allied Racing Stable, LLC • Trainer: W. Bret Calhoun

Jockey: Reylu Gutierrez

What would be a night of stakes races be without a little controversy?

This year’s Louisiana Premier Night Sprint was nothing short of a two-horse race between Marks

Promise and Jack Hammer and it was the latter of the two who waited out a jockey’s objection to win the coveted one-mile test for 3-year-olds.



Marks Promise set most of the pace under fractions of 24.33 and 1:14.38. It was near the far turn when he floated out and was bumped by Jack Hammer while dueling in the upper stretch. The two battled, but Jack Hammer (\$5.20) got the best of him to win by 1 1/4 lengths in a final time of 1:40.70. The stewards disallowed rider C.J. McMahon’s objection to uphold the win.

Owned by Allied Racing Stable, LLC, Jack Hammer improved to an undefeated 3-0 with earnings of \$157,755.

“This horse took a big step forward tonight,” said winning jockey Reylu Gutierrez. “I thought we had

“This horse took a big step forward tonight,”

Reylu Gutierrez



W. Bret Calhoun

a great trip. He went a little wide, but he was under wraps so I knew I had to let him go.”

Trainer Bret Calhoun said this gelded son of Jimmy Greed is green, but already has two stakes wins.

“It’s a good learning experience for him,” said Calhoun. “He’s never raced under the lights, so I was glad he was able to overcome it.”

Final order of finish Jack Hammer, Marks Promise, King’s Lute, The Boss Soss, Gobot, Late September and A Million Stars.

Since the Louisiana Premier Night Sprint, Jack Hammer returned to the racetrack Feb. 25 and suffered his first loss of his four-race career in the \$75,000 Louisiana Stallion Of The Year Half Ours Stakes at the Fair Grounds.

Louisiana Premier Sprint

\$100,000 • 5 furlongs • Four Year Olds and Up

BRON AND BROW

Gormley – Changing Vista, by Changeintheweather

Breeder: J. Adcock & Hume Wornall • Owner: Gary Barber • Trainer: Mark E. Casse • Jockey: Reylu Gutierrez



The 4-year-old Bron and Brow was not involved early in the Louisiana Premier Night 5-furlong Sprint, but the gelded son of Gormley and rider Reylu Gutierrez, who took three winning photos on the night, made a gutsy rail bid to slip through an opening to draw

away in the \$100,000 affair in a rapid time of 58.69.

“I tried to get the horse into a few spaces,” said Gutierrez. “The rail wasn’t really open, but I went ahead and took it.”

David Carroll, assistant to trainer Mark Casse, stated the horse was

having issues, so he was gelded and came back a totally different horse.

“We didn’t get the best break, so I thought we may be in some trouble,” said Carroll, a former lead trainer himself. “Once Rey took the rail, I knew we would win the race.”

Takes Two to Tango dueled with multiple runners for the lead at 22.25, 46.00 and looked to have been clear down the stretch with a one-length lead until Bron and Brow (\$6) got the opening he needed to win going away by 1 1/2 lengths.

The Gary Barber owned runner is 5-11, a perfect 2-2 in 2023, with earnings of 284,670.

The final order of finish was Bron and Brown, Takes Two to Tango, Fiesty Fist, Big Chopper, Big Chopper, Black Sword, Pickens, Prizeless, Adios Carlos and Prado’s Priority.

Louisiana Premier Matron

\$100,000 • 5 furlongs • Four Year Olds and Up Fillies and Mares

OVA CHARGED

Star Guitar – Charged Cotton, by Dehere

Breeder: Brittlyn, Inc. • Owner: Brittlyn Stable, Inc. • Trainer: Jose Camejo • Jockey: Jose Rodriguez

SNOWBALL

Apriority – Inner Peace, by Value Plus

Breeder: 4M Ranch • Owner: Tin Roof Farms LLC • Trainer: Sam Breaux • Jockey: Vicente Del-Cid



Louisiana Premier Night saw a dead heat for the first time in the racing night's 20-year history. The highly-touted Ova Charged (\$2.10), who only has one loss in her nine-race career, and veteran Snowball (\$5), both hit the finish line at the exact same time in the \$100,000 Louisiana Premier Night Matron.

Several horses fought for the early lead, Wild Mallory, Lady Hopper and Scarlett O'Hara, while Snowball sat back in the second tier



Sam Breaux

and Ova Charged near the back.

With swift fractions of 22.04 and 45.90, Snowball and pilot Vicente Del-Cid hit a second gear and took over the lead, but just lasted enough as Ova Charged came barreling down the stretch for the tie.

"I thought we won," said Sam Breaux, Snowball's trainer. "I really did, but it was an exciting race to watch."

It was only her eighth win in 47 starts, with her most recent photo being taken last August at Evangeline Downs. With earnings of \$470,370, the daughter of Apriority returned to the Delta track Feb. 24 and finished third in an allowance race

Ova Charged, who was sent off as the heavy favorite while on a five-race winning streak, has only been beaten one time in the summer of 2021 in the Grade 3 Victory Ride Stakes at Belmont Park.

The Jose Camejo trainee is owned by Brittlyn Stables, Inc., and was ridden by Jose Rodriguez. She has earned \$364,600.

"I am very happy," said owner and breeder Evelyn Benoit. "She isn't used to running under the lights and doesn't like a deep track, but she found a way to win, so we are happy. I would like to see her head to Saratoga this summer and race in a Grade 1 race."

The mare is the daughter of four-time Louisiana champion and the state's richest-bred horse of all time at \$1.79 million, Star Guitar, who was also owned and bred by Brittlyn Stable, Inc.

"I believe Star Guitar is the greatest thing to happen to Louisiana Thoroughbred breeding," added Benoit.

The final order of finish saw Ova Charged/Snowball, Spirited Beauty, Miss Jana, Wild Mallory, Scarlett O'Hara, Drop Dead Sexy and Lady Hopper.



Evelyn Benoit

Louisiana Premier Ladies Starter

\$60,000 • One mile • Four Year Olds and Up Fillies and Mares

ZYDECO MUSIC

Maclean's Music – Pint, by Afternoon Deelites

Breeders: Barney Core & Regina Core • Owner: Richard Anthony Tompkins

Trainer: Shane Wilson • Jockey: Reyly Gutierrez

The connections of 6-year-old mare Zydeco Music made a wise decision to avoid Ova Charged in the Louisiana Premier Night Matron. Instead, the crew chose to compete in the \$60,000 Louisiana Premier Night Ladies Starter, which was the first stakes race of the card. With the choice, Zydeco Music used a front-running style approach to win her second stakes in her last three starts, but this time going from sprint to route in 1:42.57.

“Shane and Connor Wilson had her prepared,” said winning rider

Reyly Guitierrez. “I wanted to be aggressive. After the first two races of the night were won on the front end, I wanted to take my position on the rail and we had just enough to win. This was my first time at Delta Downs (bullring), so I looked up and knew I only had an eighth of a mile to ride, so I felt relatively comfortable she was going to have enough for the mile.”

The daughter of Maclean's Music and 5-2 second betting choice (\$7.20) led the entire way with fractions of 23.94, 48.91 and 1:14.41. A Wish for Madelyn was



placed off the pace before making a driving launch at Zydeco Music only to fall short by a neck.

Owned by Richard Anthony Tompkins, Zydeco Music improved to 10-28 with career earnings of \$204,440.

Final order of finish saw Zydeco Music, A Wish for Madelyn, Tincandance, Our Little Girl, Georgia Dawn, Savvy Shipman, Emmas Ruler and Carlos Loves Tee.

Louisiana Premier Bon Temps Starter

\$50,000 • 5 Furlongs • Four Year Olds and Up Fillies and Mares

D'WILD MUFFIN

D'Wildcat – Muffin, by Smart Strike

Breeders: Circle H Farms & Carrol J. Castille • Owner: Mark N. Hidbon

Trainer: Mark N. Hidbon • Jockey: Alex Birzer



Owner/trainer Mark Hidbon thought his 9-year-old mare would have too tough of competition in the Louisiana Premier Night Bon Temps Starter, but after looking at the nominations, he trusted

his instinct to pay the supplemental fee of \$500. The payoff? The horse's first stakes win in 49 starts.

“She has been banging on the door,” said Hidbon. “She finished second in her last two starts, so I knew she was in good form.”

Jockey Alex Birzer and the daughter of D'Wildcat was able to settle in the second flight of horses during the 5-furlong sprint. He noticed the horse to his outside, Building Home, made a premature move to grab the lead and wanted to take full advantage.

“I thought we had a phenomenal trip,” said Birzer. “I wanted to sit

off the speed and just wait my time and it worked out. Mark and his group did a great job getting this ol' mare prepared.”

Fire of Gold shot out of the gate and set fractions of 22.34 and 46.94 before fading. D'Wild Muffin (\$14.20) was wide around the far turn, but was much the best late and won by 1 1/4 lengths in 1:00.57 to improve to 12-49 with earnings of \$235,053.

She has since returned to the racetrack Feb. 25 and finished sixth in the Bold Accent Stakes at Fonner Park in New England.

The final order of finish was D'wild Muffin, Building Home, Itsnotmyjob, See Sassy Run, Fire of Gold, A.K.A. Grams, Jus My Imagination and Madame Jane. Da Due Run Run was scratched.

Louisiana Premier Gentlemen Starter
\$60,000 • One mile and one sixteenth • Four Year Olds and Up
FREEDOMFI

Guilt Trip – Charming Colleen, by Charismatic
Breeder: James McIngvale • Owner: Kevin Delahoussaye
Trainer: Glenn Delahoussaye • Jockey: Timothy Thornton

The biggest upset of the evening came in the \$60,000 Louisiana Premier Night Gentlemen Starter as the 6-year-old gelded son of Guilt Trick necked out a victory in the six-horse field at odds of 31-1 and return supporters \$64.20 on a \$2 win ticket.

Jockey Tim Thornton said he didn't think the race would have a lot of pace. He was right.

Dr. Leo took an easy stroll through most of the 1 1/16-mile contest at fractions of 24.25, 48.51 and 1:40.02. As he led by nearly two lengths down the stretch, that's when Thornton made a rail move

before the final turn and went wide to catch the front runner to win by a neck in 1:47.74.

"I knew the distance was in our favor and we could grind down Dr. Leo," added Thornton.

Trainer Glenn Delahoussaye who had this horse once already in his barn, claimed him back for \$4,000 in mid-December with this stakes race in mind.

"I've had some success with him before," said Delahoussaye. "I lost him for \$20,000 at Evangeline Downs and when they dropped him down, I knew he was eligible for all the starters and starters' stakes.



Knowing he needed more ground to run and this race was at this distance, it was a no brainer to try to get him back. Tim did a great job and I'm very, very grateful to win this race."

Despite just winning his sixth start in 47 attempts, Freedomfi now has a bankroll of \$229,847.

The final order of finish was Freedomfi, Doctor Leo, Guitar Slim, Bayou Jam, Pince Assault and Taken Back. Binding and Mageez were scratched.

Louisiana Premier Ragin Cajun Starter
\$50,000 • 5 Furlongs • Four Year Olds and Upwards
DIXIE STREET

New Year's Day – Scootles, by Macho Uno
Breeders: J. Adcock & Neal McFadden • Owner: Vanessa Motta
Trainer: Sean Alfortish • Jockey: Tracy Hebert



The final race on the card was the \$50,000 Ragin Cajun

Starter and it was won convincingly by the 4-5 favorite Dixie Street, who was previously 0-for-4 at Delta Downs.

The gelded 6-year-old son of New Year's Day was void of early speed and let Bibleman do all the early work of 22.45 and 46.95. Veteran Louisiana rider Tracy Hebert then asked the Sean Alfortish trainee, and the pair swept a five-wide move around the far

turn to breeze by the crowded field to win willingly by 2 1/2 lengths and cover the 5-furlong sprint in 59.71.

Dixie Street (\$3.80) went from last to first to earn his second stakes win, and ninth overall victory in 33 starters for owner Vanessa Motta. The horse's bankroll now sits at \$219,520.

The final order of finish was Dixie Street, Hostile Afleet, Baseball Lover, Born Again George, Morricone, Mucho Marvin, Bibleman, Aztar, G Don't Know and Farewell Time. Flashy Premo was scratched.

