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The Jersey-Bred is a Champ

by Bill Finley

After a magical year on the racetrack, one that included a historic run at Saratoga, the New Jersey-bred Book'em Danno received the ultimate honor Jan. 22 when he was officially crowned champion sprinter of 2025.

In what was a close vote, he prevailed by a 115-to-82 margin over the Breeders' Cup Sprint-G1 winner Bentornato. Book'em Danno became the first New Jersey-bred to win an Eclipse Award since Open Mind, the champion

3-year-old filly in 1989. Open Mind was also named champion 2-year-old filly in 1988.

"It's a dream come true," said Jay Briscione, who heads the Atlantic Six Racing partnership that campaigns the son of Bucchero. "It felt incredible. The night couldn't have gone any better. It's just incredible what this horse has done, where he has brought us and what he has accomplished. When I was looking back trying to figure whether he would win the Eclipse



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Award or whether Bentornato would win, I realized he was a neck away from being undefeated with two Grade 1 wins, and that is pretty impressive.”

The fact that Book'em Danno was born in New Jersey was not lost on Briscione.

“It was fun to have a Jersey-bred and represent the state in that kind of atmosphere,” he said.

The Book'em Danno team knew that their horse was no cinch to win an Eclipse Award. Bentornato's case for a championship revolved around his win in the Breeders' Cup Sprint, a race that did not include Book'em Danno. Danno did not run after winning the Grade 1 Forego Stakes Aug. 23 at Saratoga, but those who voted for him obviously focused on the fact that he had the more complete campaign in 2025.

“It was a good award to win and he deserved it,” trainer Derek Ryan said. “He had the best year of any sprinter. I figured that common sense would prevail and people would realize that it's supposed to be a year-round award.”

Still, Briscione admitted to being nervous as the night wore on.

“I was reasonably confident going in because of his body of work,” the owner said. “But I realize that a lot of people put a lot of weight on the Breeders' Cup, while others were saying that their vote is representative of what happens from January through December. It all depended upon which view you took. What got me worried was when they announced that [Super Corredora] won the 2-year-old filly championship. I didn't think she should have won because her only win was a maiden and the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies. I thought that Cy Fair should have won. She had beaten boys and she was a neck back from being undefeated. When I saw that, I was worried. I thought it was going to keep

going to the Breeders' Cup winners. So I was getting nervous.”

Book'em Danno was given time off over the late fall and early winter and was sent to Ocala. Ryan reported that the now-5-year-old gelding is back in training with him at Tampa Downs. Briscione added that the reports out of Ocala are that Book'em Danno is thriving.

“They tell us he's more muscular and powerful this year, which is supposed to be the case when you are five years old,” Briscione said.

After mulling over a possible trip to Saudi Arabia or Dubai for the rich sprint races offered in the Middle East, the connections have decided to stay home this year. The focus, this time around, will be on making the Breeders' Cup Sprint.

“At the Eclipse Awards, we talked as a group and what we talked about was we didn't know we had a Breeders' Cup horse when we started out in Virginia last year,” Briscione said. “Now we know we have a Breeders' Cup horse. Wherever we start, the idea will be to work back from the Breeders' Cup. That's the way we will approach this year. He will have a similar campaign to what he did last year, probably four or five races.”

While Ryan and the team have yet to pick out a starting point for Book'em Danno's 2026 campaign, the connections are looking at the spring stakes schedules in Kentucky. Options include the April 4 Commonwealth Stakes-G3 at Keeneland and/or a return trip to the Churchill Downs Stakes-G1, which is where Book'em Danno suffered his only defeat in 2025.

Ridden throughout the year by Paco Lopez, Book'em Danno began his season with a win in a restricted handicap at Colonial Downs. He was then fourth, but beaten only a neck, in the Churchill

Downs Stakes, which featured an all-star cast that also included Mindframe and Nysos. Next up was his historic campaign in Saratoga, where he won three graded stakes races – the True North-G3, Alfred G. Vanderbilt-G2 and Forego.

“It's an incredible feeling to buy a horse like that and all you're planning on is to run in Jersey-bred races,” Briscione said. “Then he wins all those stakes at Saratoga and you wind up accepting an Eclipse Award. What a great year.”

With the Thoroughbred Breeders' Association of New Jersey and Darby Development, the management team that runs Monmouth Park, having come to an agreement on the number of racing dates that the Monmouth meet may include going forward, what could have been nothing less than a crisis appears to have been averted. At least for now. But that doesn't mean that the racing and breeding programs in New Jersey don't need help, which includes receiving commitments from the state to continue to agree to a \$10 million annual purse subsidy.

Mike Campbell, the executive director of the breeders' group, said that his organization plans to tell politicians the story of Book'em Danno and the ability the state's breeding industry has to produce championship caliber horses.

“This is a pivotal year for the New Jersey Thoroughbred industry, with the potential expansion of gambling beyond Atlantic City and the continuation of purse subsidies for 2027,” Campbell said. “Book'em Danno's Eclipse Award demonstrates that champions can be born and raised in New Jersey. We will continue working with Darby Development and the NJTHA to educate the New Jersey Legislature on the importance of the state's equine industry. With their support, New Jersey racing can reach new heights and have sustained success.”



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Monmouth Park 2026 Stakes Schedule

| Run Date | Stakes Name | | Purse | Division | Distance | Closing Date |
|-----------|----------------------------|----------|-------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 9-May-26 | Long Branch Stakes | | \$100,000 | 3 YO | 1 mile 70 yards | 25-Apr-26 |
| 16-May-26 | Serena's Song Stakes | | \$100,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 1 mile 70 yards | 2-May-26 |
| 23-May-26 | Cliff Hanger Stakes | | \$100,000 | 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles (Turf) | 9-May-26 |
| 24-May-26 | Miss Liberty Stakes | Listed | \$100,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles (Turf) | 9-May-26 |
| 30-May-26 | Jersey Derby | | \$100,000 | 3 YO | 1 mile (Turf) | 16-May-26 |
| 6-Jun-26 | Spruce Fir Handicap | NJ Breds | \$75,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 6 furlongs | 23-May-26 |
| 7-Jun-26 | John J. Reilly Handicap | NJ Breds | \$75,000 | 3 and up | 6 furlongs | 23-May-26 |
| 13-Jun-26 | Salvator Mile | G3 | \$150,000 | 3 and up | 1 mile | 30-May-26 |
| 13-Jun-26 | Eatontown Stakes | G3 | \$150,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles (Turf) | 30-May-26 |
| 13-Jun-26 | Pegasus Stakes | Listed | \$125,000 | 3 YO | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles | 30-May-26 |
| 13-Jun-26 | Monmouth Stakes | Listed | \$125,000 | 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ miles (Turf) | 30-May-26 |
| 20-Jun-26 | Lady's Secret Stakes | Listed | \$100,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles | 6-Jun-26 |
| 21-Jun-26 | Get Serious Stakes | | \$100,000 | 3 and up | 5 furlongs (Turf) | 6-Jun-26 |
| 27-Jun-26 | Jersey Girl Handicap | NJ Breds | \$75,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 1 mile (Turf) | 13-Jun-26 |
| 4-Jul-26 | Irish War Cry Handicap | NJ Breds | \$75,000 | 3 and up | 1 mile (Turf) | 20-Jun-26 |
| 5-Jul-26 | Monmouth County Stakes | | \$100,000 | 3 YO Fillies | 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs (Turf) | 20-Jun-26 |
| 11-Jul-26 | My Frenchman Stakes | | \$100,000 | 3 YO | 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs (Turf) | 27-Jun-26 |
| 17-Jul-26 | Mr. Prospector Stakes | | \$100,000 | 3 and up | 6 furlongs | 4-Jul-26 |
| 18-Jul-26 | Haskell Stakes | G1 | \$1,000,000 | 3 YO | 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ miles | 4-Jul-26 |
| 18-Jul-26 | United Nations Stakes | G2 | \$500,000 | 3 and up | 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ miles (Turf) | 4-Jul-26 |
| 18-Jul-26 | Molly Pitcher Stakes | G2 | \$500,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles | 4-Jul-26 |
| 18-Jul-26 | Monmouth Cup | G3 | \$350,000 | 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ miles | 4-Jul-26 |
| 18-Jul-26 | WinStar Matchmaker Stakes | G3 | \$300,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ miles (Turf) | 4-Jul-26 |
| 18-Jul-26 | Wolf Hill Stakes | | \$100,000 | 3 and up | 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs (Turf) | 4-Jul-26 |
| 19-Jul-26 | Regret Stakes | | \$100,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 6 furlongs | 4-Jul-26 |
| 25-Jul-26 | Monmouth Oaks | G3 | \$150,000 | 3 YO Fillies | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles | 11-Jul-26 |
| 1-Aug-26 | Incredible Revenge Stakes | | \$100,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs (Turf) | 18-Jul-26 |
| 8-Aug-26 | Oceanport Stakes | | \$100,000 | 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles (Turf) | 25-Jul-26 |
| 15-Aug-26 | Philip H. Iselin Stakes | G3 | \$150,000 | 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles | 1-Aug-26 |
| 22-Aug-26 | Violet Stakes | | \$100,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles (Turf) | 8-Aug-26 |
| 23-Aug-26 | Charles Hesse III Handicap | NJ Breds | \$100,000 | 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles | 8-Aug-26 |
| 23-Aug-26 | NJ Breeders Handicap | NJ Breds | \$75,000 | 3 and up | 6 furlongs | 8-Aug-26 |
| 23-Aug-26 | Eleven North Handicap | NJ Breds | \$75,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 6 furlongs | 8-Aug-26 |
| 29-Aug-26 | Sorority Stakes | | \$100,000 | 2 YO Fillies | 1 mile | 15-Aug-26 |
| 5-Sep-26 | Sapling Stakes | | \$100,000 | 2 YO | 1 mile | 22-Aug-26 |
| 6-Sep-26 | Red Bank Stakes | | \$100,000 | 3 and up | 1 mile (Turf) | 22-Aug-26 |



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TBANJ & Darby Development reach agreement on racing dates bill

The Thoroughbred Breeders' Association of New Jersey (TBANJ) is pleased to announce that we have reached a definitive agreement with Darby Development, the permit holder at Monmouth Park, to support an amended bill that protects Thoroughbred racing and breeding in New Jersey.

The amended bill, which will be introduced in the upcoming legislative session, explicitly states that the minimum number of Thoroughbred race dates cannot be reduced to 25 unless the New Jersey Thoroughbred industry fails to receive a \$10-million

purse subsidy from the State of New Jersey. Furthermore, if the purse subsidy is reduced to \$5 million, the minimum number of Thoroughbred race dates can be reduced to 40.

"The Thoroughbred Breeders' Association of New Jersey will continue to work in lockstep with Darby Development and the New Jersey Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association to pursue additional revenue streams to strengthen purses and expand the New Jersey-bred incentive program," said Rory Huston, President of the TBANJ. "We are committed to defending an industry

that generates a \$780 million economic impact statewide and supports thousands of jobs across the Garden State."

"The New Jersey Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, together with Dennis Drazin, assumed day-to-day operations of Monmouth Park to protect and preserve Thoroughbred racing and breeding in New Jersey," said Michael Campbell, Executive Director. "Without Dennis Drazin's leadership, dedication, and tireless efforts, Monmouth Park would not be operating today."

2026 New Jersey-bred stakes schedule at Monmouth Park

| <i>Run Date</i> | <i>Stakes Name</i> | <i>Purse</i> | <i>Division</i> | <i>Distance</i> |
|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| June 6 | Spruce Fir Handicap | \$75,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 6 furlongs |
| June 7 | John J. Reilly Handicap | \$75,000 | 3 and up | 6 furlongs |
| June 27 | Jersey Girl Handicap | \$75,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 1 mile (Turf) |
| July 4 | Irish War Cry Handicap | \$75,000 | 3 and up | 1 mile (Turf) |
| August 23 | Charles Hesse III Handicap | \$100,000 | 3 and up | 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles |
| August 23 | NJ Breeders Handicap | \$75,000 | 3 and up | 6 furlongs |
| August 23 | Eleven North Handicap | \$75,000 | F & M, 3 and up | 6 furlongs |



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