



- News, views and insights that matter to breeders, owners and racing industry professionals - February 2026 -

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Book'em Danno for Champion Sprinter

By Bill Finley

It's OK to call me biased. I live in New Jersey and, through good times and bad, have always pulled for horses that were bred in our state.

But that's not why I will be voting for New Jersey-bred Book'em Danno for an Eclipse Award for Champion Sprinter. It's because he deserves it.

Yet, not everyone agrees.

The race is between just two horses, Danno and Grade 1 Breeders' Cup Sprint winner Bentornato. It's true that both have some holes on their resumes and whoever wins

will be a horse that won the title despite their shortcoming. Dr. Fager they are not.

But there's no doubt that Book'em Danno has the superior credentials among the two.

His 2025 campaign consisted of four wins from five starts. He began the year winning a \$150,000 restricted handicap for Virginia-accredited horses at Colonial Downs in March (covering 7 furlongs in 1:20.03) and then headed to Churchill Downs for the Grade 1 Churchill Downs Stakes at 7 furlongs, where he finished fourth in a four-horse photo.

That might have been the deepest sprint race



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run during the year. Grade 1 winner Mindframe won by a neck. Banishing, who earned \$1,615,930 in 2025, and Nysos, your 2025 Grade 1 Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile winner, were in a deadheat for second, just ahead of Danno.

Saratoga was next, and that was where he proved his bona fides. He made history, winning three straight graded sprint stakes at Saratoga – the Grade 3 True North, Grade 2 Alfred G. Vanderbilt and Grade 1 Forego. It was something that no horse has ever done before and something that will be all but impossible to accomplish once racing resumes at the new Belmont Park, which will mean fewer dates and opportunities at Saratoga.

Yet Danno has his detractors. The argument I hear most often from those voting for Bentornato is that they will hold the fact that Book'em Danno skipped the Breeders' Cup Sprint. That the connections never gave a credible reason for their decision not to run in the

Breeders' Cup is something that has hurt their cause.

Bentornato is definitely a gifted horse and his win in the Sprint means something. It is the most important sprint race on the U.S. calendar. Twenty-six winners of the Sprint have been named champion sprinter the same year they won at the Breeders' Cup.

But there's a knock on Bentornato, and it's a big one. He only ran twice all year, in the Breeders' Cup and in a listed race, the Louisville Thoroughbred Society Stakes at Churchill Downs. The Eclipse Awards are supposed to be for the horses who had the best overall year among their division. To me, a horse that ran only twice does not qualify under that criteria.

Still some voters will cast their votes for Bentornato and others have admitted to being torn.

The good news is that, based on my admittedly unscientific study, it looks

like Book'em Danno will win. I polled 20 voters. Thirteen said they would be voting for Danno and five said they would cast their vote for Bentornato. One said they were still deciding. And then there was Eclipse voter Ed DeRosa from Horse Racing Nation. He said he wouldn't vote for either one.

"I'm abstaining," DeRosa said. "Bentornato only started twice, and there's no way I'd ever vote for that. And Book'em Danno ducked the Breeders' Cup."

Should Danno win an Eclipse Award he will become only the second New Jersey-bred to do so. Hall of Famer Open Mind, with back-to-back championships in 1988 and 1989, is the other.

The Eclipse Award winners were to be announced Jan. 22.

The Book'em Danno team is contemplating a schedule for 2026.

Danno is currently resting up for the year in Ocala, Fla., and will have a break of about two-and-a-half months before

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2025 New Jersey-bred Stakes Winners



Bel Pensiero

2025 Earnings \$142,150

Winner of the Eleven North Handicap

Bred by ARM Consulting

Owned by ARM Racing LLC and Hudson Stable

Trained by Anthony R. Margotta Jr.



Bingo's Birkin

2025 Earnings \$98,820

Winner of the Pinot Grigio Handicap

Bred by Colonial Farms

Owned by Gerardo Franco

Trained by Jose Sanchez



Book'em Danno

2025 Earnings \$817,300

Winner of the Forego Stakes (Gr. 1),

Alfred G. Vanderbilt Stakes (Gr. 2),

True North Stakes (Gr. 3),

Boston Handicap

Bred by Gregory J. Kilka and

Bright View Farm

Owned by Atlantic Six Racing LLC

Trained by Derek Ryan



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Forever Chocolate

2025 Earnings \$91,037
Winner of the Friendly Lover Handicap
Bred by Janet A. Laszlo
Owned by Janet A. Laszlo
Trained by Rory Huston



Gold Trust

2025 Earnings \$142,050
Winner of the Joey P. Handicap
Bred by Mike Dini
Owned by Ballybrit Stable
Trained by Mike Dini



Great Navigator

2025 Earnings \$159,985
Winner of the New Jersey
Breeders Handicap
Bred by Holly Crest Farm
Owned by Holly Crest Farm
Trained by Eddie Owens Jr.



He'spuregold

2025 Earnings \$59,200
Winner of the Irish War Cry Handicap
Bred by John Bowers Jr.
Owned by John Bowers Jr.
Trained by Kelly J. Breen



Mia's Crusade

2025 Earnings \$63,200
Winner of the Smart N Classy Handicap
Bred by Dianne Boyken
Owned by Prancing Horse Farm LLC
Trained by Chuck Spina



Riding Pretty

2025 Earnings \$157,205
Winner of the Jersey Girl Handicap,
Charles Hesse III Handicap
Bred by Holly Crest Farm
Owned by Holly Crest Farm
Trained by Eddie Owens Jr.



Speaking

2025 Earnings \$54,510
Winner of the John J. Reilly Handicap
Bred by Holly Crest Farm
Owned by Holly Crest Farm
Trained by Eddie Owens Jr.

Summer's Comin

2025 Earnings \$140,095
Winner of the Spruce Fir Handicap
Bred by Helen and Joseph Barbazon
Owned by Mike Dini
Trained by Mike Dini



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Book'em Danno continued from page 2

returning to serious training at trainer Derek Ryan's winter base at Tampa Bay Downs.

"We have no definite plans as to where to go," Jay Briscione, who heads the Atlantic Six ownership group, said in November. "I have had conversations with the people in Saudi Arabia and we have nominated him for two races there, including the [Group 3] Riyadh Dirt

Sprint. There's more of a chance that he will go in the [March 28 running of the Group 1] Dubai Golden Shaheen."

Briscione said that the 2026 Breeders' Cup Sprint will be a major goal this time around.

"It's not set in stone, but if he stays together and has the same kind of year we would go, working backwards, the Breeders' Cup, the Phoenix, one of

those races at Saratoga and maybe that Keeneland race in the spring [the Grade 3 Commonwealth. A lot would depend on whether or not we got to Dubai. It won't be a 10-race campaign. He just runs too hard to do that."

Because he is a gelding and is now 5, Book'em Danno should be around for a while. Will there be more Eclipse Awards in his future? First things first.

THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY

Membership Application

Member Information

NAME _____		SS#/FEDERAL I.D.# _____
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STATE _____	ZIP _____	COUNTY _____
TELEPHONE: _____		E-MAIL: _____

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- ☐ Owner An owner member shall be a person who owns a registered New Jersey-bred; who submits an application for membership, and pays the membership dues. An owner member will not have voting rights.
- ☐ Associate An associate member is a person who is interested in owning, breeding, or racing horses in the State of New Jersey or in fostering economic activity through the breeding, ownership and/or racing of horses in the State of New Jersey. An associate member will not have voting rights.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Membership Dues

A check or money order for \$100.00 must accompany this form. Spouses are encouraged to join the **TBANJ** under joint membership status. This fee would total \$150.00 per couple. Each spouse must fill out a separate form to accompany the payment. Membership will be effective upon receipt and will be in force each calendar year and must be renewed annually.

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265 Hwy 36
Suite 1R
W. Long Branch, NJ 07764
732-542-8880
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