

## Arklow seeking repeat score in Kentucky Turf Cup

By: Marty McGee



FRANKLIN, Ky. – Prior success at a certain venue tends to endear a person to that place. Like, Jerry Crawford and Kentucky Downs.

“We happen to love it,” said Crawford.

And why wouldn't he? Crawford oversees the Donegal Racing partnership which co-owns the turf-marathon standout Arklow, a 5-year-old horse seeking a repeat Saturday in the Grade 3, \$1 million Calumet Farm Kentucky Turf Cup, the signature race of the five-day Runhappy meet. Last year, Arklow surged to victory in the Turf Cup, a 1 1/2-mile race in which he's the 5-2 morning-line favorite.

Strangely enough, Arklow has yet to win in six starts since the 2018 Turf Cup despite earning a Beyer Speed Figure of 99 or higher four times. A string of narrow defeats in upper-level races in New York have preceded his return to his native Kentucky, yet trainer Brad Cox is confident that Arklow is primed to win again. Florent Geroux will be back aboard when they break from post 10 in a full field of 12 older horses.

“He's trained as well as you could possibly ask,” said Cox. “We just need him to get a trip. If he does, he ought to be right there.”

Geroux, the all-time leader in mount earnings (\$5.8 million) at Kentucky Downs, is the only rider to have won the Turf Cup as many as three times. Besides Arklow last year, he also won with Suntracer in 2014 and Da Big Hoss in 2016. Geroux took immediate command of the Runhappy meet jockey standings by riding three winners on opening day last Saturday.

Arklow, owned by Donegal with Joseph Bulger and Peter Coneway, has earned more than \$1.3 million, making him one of two millionaires in the Turf Cup field. Bigger Picture, second by a half-length to Arklow in this race last year, is the other, having knocked out more than \$1.6 million.

Bigger Picture (post 5, Tyler Gaffalione), an 8-year-old gelding, is one of three starters in the lineup for Mike Maker, the all-time leading trainer at Kentucky Downs in wins and earnings. The others are Zulu Alpha (post 9, Jose Ortiz) and Noble Thought (post 12, Julien Leparoux).

Zulu Alpha, claimed for \$80,000 by Michael Hui nearly a year ago, might represent the best chance for Maker to extend his own record for most wins (three) by a trainer in this race. Zulu Alpha, bred by the race sponsor, Calumet, has won three graded stakes in this turf marathon niche since carrying Hui's pink silks, winning the Sycamore at Keeneland and the W.L. McKnight and Mac Diarmida at Gulfstream.

Other notable threats include Campaign (post 11, Joel Rosario), who went 2 for 2 here last September and has raced exclusively on dirt since then while based in California with John Sadler; a second Cox starter, Factor This (post 6, Shaun Bridgmohan), winner of the Aug. 4 Turf Cup Preview at Ellis Park; and Pillar Mountain (post 7, Adam Beschizza), a late-running Irish-bred shipping in from New York for Todd Pletcher.

One interesting outsider is My Boy Jack (post 2, James Graham), who suddenly came alive in his most

recent start after a string of disappointments since he won the Lexington at Keeneland in April 2018. The colt was so highly regarded that he was the 6-1 second choice behind Justify in the 2018 Kentucky Derby.

In all, 14 are entered, but only as many as 12 can start. All starters are assigned 123 or 121 pounds.

This is the 28th running of the Turf Cup, first run in 1991 as the Sam Houston Handicap when this track was still known as Dueling Grounds. Two horses have won the race twice: Rochester (2002-03) and Da Big Hoss (2015-16).