



## CALIFORNIA CUP AGAIN SHOWCASES ALL CAL-BREDS

When California Cup Day was launched 36 years ago, borrowing from the structure of the Maryland Million, the goal was to honor and celebrate Thoroughbreds bred in the Golden State.

This year's renewal, held at Santa Anita on Saturday, Jan. 17, provided a diverse collection of storylines that reflected the passion and performance of California breeding.

With stakes, allowance races, maiden allowances and a maiden claiming, the Cal Cup card offered opportunities for every level.

There was the sentimental victory of maiden Start the Ride in the \$175,000 California Chrome Cal Cup Derby, bred by owner Harris Farms, whose patriarch, John Harris, died last July.

Vodka Vodka won the \$175,000 Unusual Heat Turf Classic presented by City National Bank. That gave breeders Jerry and Connie Baker another stakes winner from broodmare Margie's Minute to go with graded victress Om N Joy, who might ap-

pear next in the B. Wayne Hughes Beholder Mile (G1).

Also keeping the breeder-owner path to Cal Cup glory were B&B Zietz Stables' Man O Rose in the \$125,000 Don Valpredo Cal Cup Sprint, My Way Racing's Cee Drew in the \$175,000 Leigh Ann Howard Cal Cup Oaks, and Larry and Marianne Williams' Grand Slam Smile in the \$125,000 Sunshine Millions Filly & Mare Turf Sprint presented by John Deere.

Enough cannot be said about Grand Slam Smile. The now 5-year-old daughter of Smiling Tiger was the Cal-bred 2-year-old champion filly in 2023 and the Cal-bred 3-year-old champion filly in 2024. In 17 career starts, she has 10 wins, eight of them in stakes. This was her second Cal Cup victory, as she won the 2024 Leigh Ann Howard Cal Cup Oaks.

Grand Slam Smile was the last foal of her dam, the prolific Grand Slam mare Royal Grand Slam. The mare produced five other six-figure earners: Slam Dunk Sermon (\$352,386); stakes winners Royal 'n

Rando (\$246,166) and Luck's Royal Flush (\$268,345); and stakes-placed Late 'n Left (\$222,420) and Grand Yodeler (\$172,010).

Grand Slam Smile was previously based in Northern California with trainer Steve Specht, who retired last year and handed off the mare to Sean McCarthy. McCarthy now has four wins with her in six starts.

Northern California connections did well at Cal Cup, with trainer Aggie Ordonez continuing her personal breakout with Vodka Vodka's win. Trainer Bill McLean lit up the tote board when Famous Forza sped to a maiden win on the turf at odds of 67-1, giving French jockey Cesar Belmont his first local win.

Prominent California breeders Richard Barton Enterprises, Rancho San Miguel, Nick Alexander, and the Williamses also found their way into the winner's circle in Cal Cup undercard races.

Total purse money distributed on Cal Cup Day was slightly more than \$1 million, and total all-sources handle was more than \$9.5 million. **CTB**