

PRESQUE ISLE DOWNS

RACING NOTES

By Kevin Decker
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Godolphin Does It Again in the Whisman Memorial Stakes

Encino has been to Presque Isle Downs once in his four-year racing career before Monday's start in the 5th Running of the \$100,000 guaranteed Avery Whisman Memorial Stakes for three-year-old and up at one mile and seventy yards. It was a win last year in the Presque Isle Downs Mile on Masters (G2) night in September. Jockey Flavien Prat used a come from behind strategy to capture the race that night.

Fast forward to December at Turfway Park in northern Kentucky for the \$250,000 Prairie Bayou where Prat would flash Encino's versatility by taking a field of nine wire to wire on the lead to win that race.

Encino has been through the rigors of the sport, overcoming a soft tissue injury in 2024 that cost him most of his three-year-old season, including a start in the Kentucky Derby after winning the Lexington Stakes at Keeneland just prior to that.

On Monday, he would need to channel all his experience to win. The question: would he lay off the lead early as he had done successfully in the PI Mile, or go right to the front as he successfully did last December at Turfway?

Answer: Try to lead from the opening of the gates. At the start of the Whisman, Woodcourt (jockey Emmanuel Esquivel) would duel Encino (jockey Axel Concepcion) through the first half mile with Encino riding the rail as the 1:2 odds on betting favorite.

"I just took my time and got the lead," said jockey Axel Concepcion. "I knew he would have to wait for the other horses."

Following an opening quarter mile of 23 25 seconds and a half mile time of 47 seconds flat, Encino was alone on the lead, albeit for just a moment, and waiting for that next challenge.

It would arrive coming off the final turn.

After getting a dream journey behind Encino most of the way was the locally trained Britain's Kitten (jockey Antonio Gallardo) from the Adam Rice stable. He would swing into the two-path to draw on even terms with Encino, but once the duo moved inside the eighth pole, Encino kicked into yet another gear and began to edge away from Britain's Kitten.

"I knew when he would try to pass me, I would have plenty left," Concepcion added.

When Encino made it first to the wire, he held a one length lead, Britain's Kitten was second. It was ten lengths further back to third-place finisher Mackenzie's Novva (jockey Addiel Ayala) for the locally based Ralph Baez operation.

With the Presque Isle Mile just over a month away, the question now is will Encino look to defend his title on Masters night. At this point, it is going to be up to both trainer Brad Cox and the continued good health of Encino to make it happen. If it does, there is one person that would like to be a part of it, and that is his jockey, Axel Concepcion.

"I hope I get to ride him again. He's a nice one, that's for sure," said Concepcion.

Encino is a five-year-old gelding by Nyquist out of the Bernardini mare Glittering Jewel. He has won eight of 17 races lifetime including twice in two tries at Presque Isle. He is owned by Godolphin, LLC and trained by Brad Cox.

The stakes win for Godolphin LLC is the second of the stakes season at Presque Isle Downs in 2026. Quiet Street won the Lady Erie Stakes last month for trainer Bill Mott and apprentice jockey Taylor Kingsley.



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