$7 million Longines Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) Recap

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SIERRA LEONE OUTDUELS FIERCENESS TO WIN $7 MILLION LONGINES BREEDERS' CUP CLASSIC

Del Mar, Calif. (Nov. 2, 2024) – Peter Brant, Mrs. John Magnier, Michael Tabor, Derrick Smith, Westerberg and Brook Smith's Sierra Leone ($15.80) charged into contention exiting the far turn and then outdueled Fierceness through the lane to prevail by 1 ½ lengths to win the 41st running of the $7 million Longines Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) at Del Mar Saturday afternoon.

Trained by Chad Brown and ridden by Flavien Prat, Sierra Leone covered the 1 ¼ miles in 2:00.78. The victory is the 19th for Brown in the World Championships and first in the Classic. Prat picked up a second Classic victory to go with the Flightline triumph at Keeneland in 2022 and sixth overall.

Derma Sotogake (JPN) led the field through rapid early fractions of :22.43, :44.96 and 1:09.44 with Fierceness tracking just off his flank. Going into the far turn, Fierceness ranged up to the outside of Derma Sotogake and took over with Sierra Leone on the move right behind him.

Sierra Leone drew on even terms with Fierceness at the top of the stretch and shot on by and slowly extended his margin to the wire. Forever Young (JPN) rallied to finish third, 1 ¼ lengths behind Fierceness and a half-length in front of Newgate.

The victory was worth $3,640,000 and improved Sierra Leone's earnings to $6,008,000 with a record of 9-4-3-2. It is the second Grade 1 victory for the 3-year-old Kentucky-bred son of 2017 Breeders' Cup Classic winner Gun Runner out of the Malibu Moon mare Heavenly Love.

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Winning trainer Chad Brown, Sierra Leone – "Awesome. It's been a challenging Breeders' Cup so far. A couple horses didn't fire. A couple trips didn't go our way. I've such an unbelievable team and had a lot of confidence in this horse. It sure looked like on paper that the race could set up for him.

“I am so proud and happy for the horse. He’s come up short a few times and had some excuses. He’s been so consistent and is such an honest horse. One of the best I’ve ever had. It’s such a great ownership group. Everyone is just so patient. He ran straight and it’s been a long season for him. I thought we took a tough beat in the (Kentucky) Derby, but we did it with class and respect and went back to the drawing board and worked on getting him straight. My team deserves a lot of credit along the way for working with this horse.

“A lot of experience I learned from my mentor Bobby Frankel helped, particularly here in Southern California. Bobby was a very rare person and generous person and a great mentor. At moments like this, I always think of him. My team really worked with this horse. My owners have been so patient. Flavien Prat has really gotten along with him. In hindsight, Saratoga was probably not his favorite track. Listen, he’s a great horse and he took to this track today, got the pace he needed and it was his day today.

“It means so much to have this box checked, if you will. A huge dirt race. Particularly for this horse and his Kentucky Derby. That was a tough moment for everyone involved because you never know when you’re going to get there again. It’s such a tough race to win. For him to redeem himself and close out the year as probably the best 3-year-old in a very deep division, I could not be more happy for this horse. He really deserves it.”

Winning jockey Flavien Prat, Sierra Leone – “Obviously the pace was good and we found ourselves in a good spot. I was able to stay outside and the whole way around (the track) it felt like I was gaining ground on the leaders. Actually I was a bit worried that I got there (to the front) too soon but once I got the lead, I asked him to make his move and that was it.

(On if he knew there was a fast pace) "It felt like they were going fast and to me, it felt like they were all lined up and at no point I felt that anybody was going to hit the brakes so it was good.”

Trainer Todd Pletcher, second with beaten-favorite Fierceness – “Fierceness ran great. The fractions were very fast. I thought he was very courageous to keep fighting for second.”

Jockey John Velazquez, **second with beaten-favorite Fierceness –** “Yeah, there was nothing I can do about the fast pace. I tried to get keep him off the bridle a little but when the two horses came in outside, he grabbed onto the bridle and I knew then I was in trouble.”

“(On if he saw Sierra Leone coming) "Oh, I saw him and there was nothing I could about it. I did all the work in the first part of the race. He did a little too much early.”

Fourth-place trainer Bob Baffert, Newgate – “He ran well. I got excited. It was a little bit long for him. He got the trip. He ran his race, he just got beat. He is probably more or a miler type.”

(On Sierra Leone): “I don’t know he got up there so close. All of sudden he was there. He has been a good horse. Apparently, he likes Del Mar.”

Fourth-place jockey Frankie Dettori with Newgate - "Coming into the stretch I thought we can win this. Sierra Leone came and he spoiled it."

Fifth-place jockey Joel Rosario, Senor Buscador -- "I had a good trip. I had to deal inside with a little bit of traffic. But we got through and for a second it looked like he was going to do something. He ran his race."

Sixth-place trainer Todd Plecher with Tapit Trice -- "Tapit Trice got a little far back. Irad (Ortiz Jr.) said he finished up strongly but had too much to do."

Seventh-place trainer Cherie DeVaux on Pyrenees -- "He ran well enough. He had a little trouble in the second turn, but didn't disappoint."

Eighth-place trainer Aidan O'Brien with City Of Troy -- "He lost it at the start and obviously I didn't have him prepared to come out quick enough. We thought we did but we didn't. He missed it and left Ryan with no chance really, the race was over at the start. He's been an incredible horse and it's so sporting of the lads to let us have a go at this race. It's been a pleasure and a privilege to have him and we'll look forward to having his foals. It's great the lads love the sport so much that they aren't afraid to push the boundaries and put him in somewhere they haven't been before."

Eighth-place jockey Ryan Moore, with City of Troy -- "They went so hard and he just couldn't get going. I let him get comfortable and he's done well to keep going to the line."

Ninth-place trainer Brad Cox with Highland Falls — "He looked like he wasn't traveling quite as well as we needed him to. He may have been a little too close to the hot pace. Going into the far turn he just wasn't moving forward. He just wasn't as close as we hoped he'd be."

11th-place assistant trainer Leandro Moro (Doug O'Neill) with Mixto — "Doug told our rider, Kyle (Frey), to ride him just like he did last time. He broke well and from our post, by the time we reached the first turn, he didn't really have any choice but to maintain his position. They just ran too fast for us. Kyle told us that the inside posts one through six are a little slower than the outside of the track."

13th-place jockey Christophe Lemaire with Derma Sotogake (JPN) - "It was easy for him to take the lead but we got pressure. He didn't have energy at the final bend."