

WEEK 07

Santa Anita Derby, Blue Grass Stakes & Wood Memorial
And more...

April 8, 2023

I don't know if I would or would not like to be in Todd Pletcher's shoes at this point in time. I mean, having a stable full of Kentucky Derby possibilities must make one feel over the moon but, on the other hand, the stress that goes with every decision especially for horses that have different owners, must be overwhelming. He, of course, has the potential favorite in Forte whose victory in the Florida Derby (no matter what the winning time was) did a lot to advance his lessons and his goal of that infamous mile and a quarter. He really toughed it out and I personally think that's a better thing than winning in a canter. But so many horses that have been hyped pre-Derby end up as also rans or never rans so I hold back right now.

I don't think I mentioned this in prior columns but I remember the year that Meadow Stable (yes, the owner - Chris Chenery - of Secretariat) had the one and two top choices in the Derby about two weeks out. They included Secretariat's half brother, Sir Gaylord and the Champion Filly, Cicada. Sir Gaylord had won 3 stakes at two and won the Bahamas and Everglades Stakes, which were two very important races on the way to Kentucky that were run at now unused but gorgeous Hialeah Race Course in Florida. He was outstanding. And while the others were being loaded into the gate, he'd be recovering from major surgery which not only saved his leg, but his life. He was injured in a workout and that was that. And Cicada, well, it was decided that she would go into the Kentucky Oaks instead of facing her stablemate. She won that and I often think, "what if....". But that was long, long ago. We need to talk about this weekend instead!

Big final prep races, the Blue Grass Stakes (G1) at Keeneland, the Santa Anita Derby (G1) and the Wood Memorial Stakes (G2), all at a mile and an eighth. The Wood Memorial lost its Grade One status with the 2017 running and going from New York to Kentucky seemed to lose its appeal. The last Wood winner to go on to win the Kentucky Derby was Fu-Peg in 2000. Two have placed in the Wood since then and went on to win in Kentucky and they were Monarchos (2001) and Funny Cide (2003). Four that placed in the Wood went on to win the Preakness (since 2000)- Red Bullet, Funny Cide, Early Voting and Cloud Computing and Jazil went on to win the Belmont Stakes. The "also rans" in the Wood also include Medaglia D'Oro, Uncle Mo, Any Given Saturday, War Pass, Aptitude and others so this race produces outstanding horses. I was dismayed when the Wood was demoted to a Grade Two status while races in California that attract just 4 and 5 horse fields continue to carry the Grade One status (and most of those entries are trained by one person.) But who am I?

WOOD MEMORIAL

All that being said, I find the Wood the most interesting for this weekend, if not the most competitive by a bettors view. Todd Pletcher will start Classic Catch, Crupi and Dreamlike. Classic Catch appears to be the strongest of the trio, even tho he has not started in a stakes race. He has won half of his four starts, his last being a mile and an eighth allowance event at Gulfstream Park on March 2cd. Trevor McCarthy is scheduled to ride and he will be the fourth jockey to sit astride him. Classic Catch is by Classic Empire, who was 4th in the Kentucky Derby after winning the Arkansas Derby. Classic Empire is the sire of last weeks Arkansas Derby winner, Angel of Empire. Dam is Delaware Oaks winner Moon Catcher (by Malibu Moon, sire of Kentucky Derby winner Orb). There is no shortage of distance pedigree with this one. Of the 3 Pletcher sends into the Wood, I find Dreamlike more interesting, even tho he comes into this race as a maiden. He's by Gun Runner out of the Tapit mare, unraced Tip To Tap. She is the dam of stakes placed Backlash as well as mile winner (on dirt and turf) Margaux Mania. Pletcher has indicated he's been high on this horses ability and the addition of Juan Ortiz as the pilot gives him additional credibility. The third of the trio is Crupi, a son of Curlin. Crupi and was a \$700,000 yearling purchase. He is also a maiden coming into the Wood, having had 6 starts and placing in 5. He was unplaced in the Risen Star Stakes, his only effort outside of maiden events. He is a definite come from behind horse and will need speed up front to set it up for him. Kendrick Carmouche has the ride. Not feelin it here!

Enter into my spotlight, and that is Hit Show who I have mentioned before. He is a son of Candy Ride (Arg) which won the 9 furlong Withers Stakes(G3) in February. He has won 3 of 4 starts. The only race he lost was back on November 26th of last year and the winner of that race (At Churchill Downs) was none other than Confidence Game. Second was Rocket Can and both have Derby goals. Dam of Hit Show is G2SW Actress, a Tapit mare. Brad Cox is the trainer of Hit Show and he will be ridden by Manny Franco, who rode him in the Withers.

Another entrant in the Wood is Linda Rice's Arctic Arrogance. He has won 2 of six starts and was second in 5 stakes races. Granted, half his starts have been restricted to New York bred but he did place in the Withers Stakes in his last start. This colt may be the speed horse that is needed by Crupi. Anyway, he is to be ridden by Jose Lezcano who was on him in the Withers. Belmont second Frosted is the sire and the dam is Modest Maven, a daughter of Uncle Mo. She was unraced. Half brother won at a mile in February at Aqueduct.

Others in the Wood are Slip Mahoney, Lord Miles, Shadow Dragon, Clear the Air (cross-entered in the Blue Grass as well. But, why?), Mr Swagger, Knox, General Banker, and Uncle Jake.

THE BLUE GRASS STAKES

The Blue Grass Stakes features Tapit Trice who is another from the Pletcher barn. We've talked about him before and since that time, this son of Tapit won Tampa Bay Derby for his third win in a row in 4 starts. He won by two lengths over Classic Car Wash (I cringe whenever I say or hear that horrible name!) and Classic Legacy. (Luis Saez rode). The stretch running Raise Cain has been getting attention since his victory in the one mile Gotham Stakes (G3) at Aqueduct on March 4th. Jose Lezcano again be aboard this son of Violence out of the Lemon Drop Kid mare, Lemon Belle. Raise Cain has won 2 of his 6 starts. At two, he broke his maiden at Keeneland. Ben Colebrook trains (he was the original trainer of Horse of the Year Knicks Go before that one rose to stardom in the hands of Brad Cox.) He also trained G2SW Limousine Liberal in the past. He base is Kentucky so he may have the home court advantage but I am not seeing this one improve beyond perhaps a lesser placing. Joel Rosario picks up the mount.

Brad Cox has Verifying entered on Saturday and that colt will be ridden by Tyler Gaffalione. His sire is Justify and he is out of G3SW Diva Delite, who is by Louisiana Derby winner Repent. As a yearling, he brought \$775,000 and in his first start the next year, at Saratoga, he broke his maiden at six furlongs and followed that up by finishing second to Blazing Sevens in the Champagne Stakes at the same track. He was 6th in the BC Juvenile which was his last start at 2. His first start at three was at Oaklawn Park and he won an AOC event at a mile in January. In the sloppy Rebel Stakes (G2), he ended up fourth as the favorite (to Confidence Game).

Ken McPeck will saddle Sun Thunder in the Blue Grass Stakes and at 10-1, this one looks appealing. Florent Geroux is in to ride, replacing Brian Hernandez Jr who rode him in his last start, the Louisiana Derby in which he was 5th. He has one victory in 5 lifetime starts at Oaklawn at 6 furlongs in December by 6 1/2 furlongs as the favorite. He was second to Angel of Empire in the Rebel Stakes, losing only by a length, ahead of Two Phil's. All 3 of the top finishers are late runners. Sun Thunder is by Into Mischief. His dam is Greenfield D'Oro who was a non-winner in an abbreviated career. She is by Medaglia D'Oro out of Champion Maryfield (Can).

Good Magic's son Blazing Sevens is owned by Radio Creek Racing and this is the best they have ever owned and he is in the capable hands of Chad Brown. Irad Ortiz will improve this ones chances. Blazing Sevens made 4 starts at 2, winning twice, including the Champagne Stakes which I mentioned before. This season, he's raced but once, having finished 8th of 9 in the Fountain of Youth Stakes. Good Magic, I've mentioned in the past, was the two year old champion of his generation and he, by the way, won the Blue Grass Stakes (and second in the Kentucky Derby). His dam was Trophy Girl, which won 2 of 7 in her racing career (at a mile and a mile an a sixteenth on Turfway's all weather track). Her sire was Warriors Reward (by Medaglia D'Oro) who was best at sprints. Love the fact that Medaglia D'Oro is featured in so many of these pedigrees.

Others in the race are Classic Car Wash (ugh), Hayes Strike (which won the Private Terms stakes in his last start), Scoobie Quando, D Wayne Lukas' Major Blue (his last win was a 5 1/2 furlongs), and the undefeated Mendelssohns March. The last named broke his maiden at a mile on grass at Fair Grounds in early February and followed that with an AOC win at 8.5 furlongs at Oaklawn Park. Sire is Mendelssohn (UAE Derby and BC Juvenile Turf winner) and the dam is Unappeased (Ire), a non-winning daughter of the fantastic sire Galileo (Ire). She is the dam of SW Mr Big News (3rd to Authentic in the Kentucky Derby).

SANTA ANITA DERBY:

Moving to the West Coast, the Santa Anita Derby has drawn a field of 9 with the heavy favorite being Practical Move. If trainer Tim Yakteen is to win the Santa Anita Derby, I would hope it is with a horse he has trained and not one temporarily in his barn due to the problems of you-know-who. Practical Moves last start was his best and he is improving all the time. He has won half of his 6 starts, the last being the San Felipe Stakes (G2). My only concern is that this has been his only 2013 start. Ramon Vazquez has the return ride on this son of Practical Joke who won the Dwyer and was 2cd in the Blue Grass in 2017 as well as being 5th in Kentucky Derby to Always Dreaming. Preakness/Belmont winner Afleet Alex is the broodmare sire. Dam SPW Ack Naughty was a stakes placed winner and this is her first foal.

Yakteen's other entrant is the Baffert-renal, National Treasure. He comes into the SA Derby off one start this year as well, that being in the Sham Stakes, another California short field, in which he was 3rd of 5 (3 saddled by Baffert). Winner Reincarnate and second placed Newgate are off the Derby trail. National Treasure is by Quality Road which won the Florida Derby, and was the sire of last year's hot Kentucky Derby prospect, Corniche, before that one went wrong. Dam is Treasure, a non winning daughter of Medaglia D'Oro. Johnny V to ride.

Skinner was 3rd in the San Felipe after breaking his maiden in February in a mile event (in which I Don't Get It was unplaced). John Shirreffs is not known to rush his prospects but I was kind of surprised to see him entered here. He has just the one victory in 5 starts. His sire is Curlin, two time horse of the year and dam is sprinting stakes winner Winding Way (by Malibu Moon). Victor Espinoza will ride.

I Don't Get It is trained by 2 time Kentucky Derby winning trainer Doug O'Neill and will be ridden by Mario Gutierrez, who rode both of them. I Don't Get It has had 3 starts in his career, and won his last which was a 8.5 furlongs. Preakness winner Cloud Computing is his sire while Flat Out Gittin It (by Flat Out) is the dam. She was a minor stakes placed winner of 3 races, all sprints. I Don't Get It is her first foal.

Geaux Rocket Ride has had but two lifetime starts, both this year. He won his initial start which was a 6 furlong event (defeating Baffert's favored Sonoran, which won his next start). He was then a starter in the San Felipe and raced forwardly, helping set the pace with Hejazi before being passed by the ultimate winner, previously mentioned Practical Move. What makes him a contender here, despite his abbreviated career, is the presence of jockey Flavien Prat. Richard Mandella is the trainer. Sire is the brilliant Candy Ride (Arg) and the dam is Beyond Grace (by Uncle Mo) which was a non winner in a two-start racing career. This colt is her first foal to race.

Other in the SA Derby are Dazzlemesilver, One in Vermillion, Low Expectatons and the Japanese-bred Mandarin Hero. The last named is making his first US start after winning 4 of five starts in his native land. Sire is the US-bred Champion Shanghai Bobby, now residing at Arrow Stud in Japan. The dam of Mandarin Hero is the non-winner Namura Nadeshinko who is by the undefeated deceased Fuji Kiseki which won at 1600-2000 meters on turf.

Miscellaneous:

Saturday, also at Aqueduct, the Bay Shore Stakes will be run and tho I don't think there will be a Kentucky Derby starter that comes out of this race, we can look to either the Preakness or maybe even the Belmont. Bill Mott is starting a City of Light colt named Victory Way who is making just his second lifetime start after winning his maiden on March 4th. Dam Sweet Way is a 3/4 sister to Champion Sweet Catomine and G1SW Life is Sweet. Sweet Way, which was also trained by Mott, won once in 7 starts and that was in her Hollywood Park debut at a mile and a sixteenth. Victory Way is a half brother to G2SPW Saint Vigeur.

By the way, Secretariat won the Bay Shore Stakes when it was part of a series of races leading up to the Wood Memorial (which he lost). Also winners of this event in the past were Damascus, Hoist The Flag, Bold Forbes, Gulch, Houston, and Lost in the Fog. Last year's winner was Todd Pletcher's Wit, a son of Practical Joke which won the Sanford Stakes as well.

Going way, way back, in 1963 Candy Spots won the Santa Anita Derby and during that race there was a 4 horse spill. Candy Spots went on to win the Preakness that year. Anyway, in that race was a colt named Sum Dum Kid. During the telecast, the owners were asked how the colt got his name and they told the story that after he was born, folks were standing around looking at him wondering what to name him. One of the children of the owners was disinterested in the goings on in the barn and was outside tossing a ball against the barn. When asked what the noise was, someone went out to check and reported the ball being thrown by "Some Dumb Kid", hence, the name. Never forgot that!