

WEEK 08
Kentucky Derby is near.
Lexington Stakes! And more...

April 15, 2023

On April 7th, Keeneland opened its door to yet another season of outstanding racing and the feature race of the day was the Lafayette Stakes which was won by Corona Bolt, from the barn of Brad Cox. He outkicked Baffert's Hejazi (Mike Smith replaced by Johnny Velazquez) and finished with something left, running the 7 furlongs in 1:23:21. Previously highly regarded Gulfport was a disappointing 5th and I am guessing his Derby aspirations are done. Hejazi would not be eligible for the Derby due to his association with Baffert, of course. I thought they would keep him in California for the Laz Barrera Stakes (L) which is to be run on Derby day at Santa Anita.

Corona Bolt is by G1S Bolt D'Oro (by Medaglia D'Oro). He is the sire of another Derby candidate in Pletcher's Major Dude and is also the sire of Instant Coffee, whose off the board finish in the Louisiana Derby after winning the LeComte, appears to have him sidelined as he's had no published workout since. The dam is Stormbeforethecalm (by Quiet American) who is also the dam of GW Proven Strategies. Her race career ended in 2015 after being placed once in 9 starts.

While I am thinking of it, does anyone know why European (and other) race results are not reported as they are in the US and by that I mean with a chart to show placement of a horse during a race...start, quarter, half, stretch, finish. It really provides a good deal of knowledge about a horse.

I took away two things from the April 8th Bay Shore Stakes (G3) at Aqueduct and neither involved the winner, Joey Freshwater. My thought were that Victory Way (3rd) ran one heck of a race and just gave it up at the end and that there may be a Belmont in the future of fourth place finisher, Expected Value. Chad Brown is the trainer of Expected Value who had been away from the races since last September when he broke his maiden at Aqueduct (the Belmont-at-Aqueduct meeting). That race was at a mile and he just got up to win by a nose. Liked him then and was pleased with this Bay Shore result even if he didn't finish in the top three. His sire is SPW Flatter, who liked a distance of ground and is the sire of multiple Grade One stakes winners that liked a distance of ground, those like West Coast (Travers), Flat Out (Jockey Club Gold Cup), Upstart (Razorback), Search Results (Acorn, Gazette), Plainsman (Discovery), Kobe's Back (San Vicente), Taris, and Canadian Champion Ami's Flatter as well as SW sprinter Lucy's Rob Roy. The dam of Expected Value is Midnight Visit (by Henny Hughes) who won half of her eight lifetime starts and that included a minor six-furlong stakes at Aqueduct, trained by Todd Pletcher.

Side note: during the second race on Wood Day, jockey Jose Lezcano suffered a broken wrist as a result of a multiple horse falling incident. He was, of course, scheduled to ride Arctic Arrogance for trainer Linda Rice in the Wood. (I wrote this the day of the race; by now, you already know this but I will leave it in "just in case".

After last weekend's big Derby prep races, the discussions centered around points and the probable elimination of some very capable horses. I refer to Arctic Arrogance (whose speed would be welcomed in the Derby), Red Route One and, especially, Instant Coffee. Apparently, Japan's Continuar has already accepted the invitation via the "Road to the Derby". And then there is the other Japanese horse, the much praised Derma Sotogake. I may make some folks mad at me here but I was and still am against the "Road to" races in Japan and Europe. If any trainer/owner wants their horse in the Kentucky Derby, my strong feeling is that they should be stateside and competing in the US prep races, running against their peers, and not be handed the entry. This is an American race. I don't care about any other race in the US--the Breeders Cup is and should be open to any and all horses as is the Arc, the Melbourne Cup and so many other races. Reserving an entry berth in this of all races, is just unnerving. I remember years back a comment that was made from someone in the Japan racing community after the shock of us finding out that the 1986 Kentucky Derby winner, Ferdinand, had been slaughtered after serving at stud in Japan. That comment basically said that a Kentucky Derby winner is not held in any reverence in Japan as a Japanese Derby winner would not be held to any high esteem in the United States. I differed with that comment then and I still do. But, there have been no Japanese Derby winners who have been imported to stand at stud in the US so the discussion there is moot. Does Japan allow US-owned horses in the Japan Derby yet? I'm not sure. At one point, I know they were not allowed. So, pardon me if I do not get on the Japan bandwagon when it concerns American tradition, the Kentucky Derby. The big Japanese betting dollar is all that appeals to the folks who have made these "Road to" conditions.

OK...let me move on. My blood pressure is already up.

You had to like the performance of Tapit Trice in the Blue Grass, going 5 wide from the middle of the pack to winning by a neck as the favorite over second choice, Verifying, whose race was also impressive. The time was a flat 1:50 (track record is 1:47:75) and the split times were not overwhelming, but he got the job done, got a lot of conditioning and education in the process and Luis Saez gave him a great ride. Sun Thunder (4th) and Raise Cain (5th) were elevated into the Derby top 20 eligibility list off this race. The Santa Anita Derby was run faster (same distance)

as favored Practical Move, ridden by Ramon Vazquez, was up in time to hold off Japan-bred Mandarin Hero by a nose. Practical Move is 2cd on the eligibility list, Mandarin Hero at this point is 23rd. This is one Japan-bred horse that came to the US to meet his generational competition at least one time before the first Saturday in May. . Third was Skinner, who was bumped off the top 20 list by the "road to" horses. Time for the SA Derby was 1:48:69. Same distance, the Wood Memorial winner won in 1:51:17. That was the 59-1 Lord Miles who jumped into the Top 20 off that effort. (6th).

Lord Miles is a son of Horse of the Year, Curlin and is trained by Saffie Joseph Jr who had entered half the field horses in the Florida Derby a few weeks back and two in the Tampa Bay Derby, in which Lord Miles was 5th. The Wood Memorial was only his second win in 5 starts (completely off my radar!), unimpressive in the Holy Bull Stakes prior to the Tampa Bay Derby. Dam of Lord Miles is the Majestic Warrior mare Lady Esme, who was unraced. Lord Miles is her first foal. Her dam is Come a Callin (by Dixie Union) who won once in 10 starts but has been a productive broodmare. When bred to Quality Road she produced Breeder's Cup Juvenile Fillies winner, Champion Caledonia Road who brought 2.3 million dollars when sold after her racing career. When bred to Champion Blame, she foaled the G3SW colt Officiating who is still in training. He won last year's Cornhusker Handicap at 9 furlongs. When bred to Lemon Drop Kid, Come a Callin got the minor stakes winner (at 8.5 furlongs), One of a Kind.

Second in the Wood, of course, was a horse I really like and that is Hit Show which I think got quite an education in this race, even if it was run slower than slow. Arctic Arrogance, I noted before, provided much of the speed and it is a sin he will probably not be in the Derby line-up. Looks as if the majority of entrants are come-from-behind horses. Interesting.

Bill Mott's Rocket Can is 10th on the list right now and he gets in after a 4th in the Arkansas Derby, second in the Fountain of Youth and winning the G3 Holy Bull Stakes, in reverse order. He has 2 wins in 7 starts. He's a son of Into Mischief and out of the Tapit mare, Tension, also a non-winner like Lady Esme.

Wild On Ice is a Texas-bred gelded son of Tapizar, trained by Joel Mar and gets into the top 20 by virtue of a win in the Sunland Park Derby at 35-1. Keep in mind that Mine That Bird was 4th in the Sunland Park Derby prior to his stunning upset in the Kentucky Derby (but he was Canadian Champion Two Year Old colt the year before.) Wild On Ice has won 3 of his 5 career starts, including his first two races at Zia Park. He's never raced outside of New Mexico. The trainer is best known a handling the career of the undefeated New Mexican champion mare Peppers Pride (19 wins). He also had great success (in New Mexico) with \$700,000+ earner That's Who. The dam of Wild On Ice is Slamitagain (by Grand Slam) whose career was also in New Mexico and Colorado. She produced two other winners, both in the southwest. Now, this is the American dream...little known trainer brings lesser known horse to Churchill Downs on the First Saturday in May....I like the story better than Japanese-bred ship in...but, come on....he just doesn't belong.

Mage (#16) has only had 3 lifetime starts, all at Gulfstream Park, and has won once. After breaking his maiden in his first start

(in January at 7 furlongs), he was thrust into the deep end of the pool when he was a starter in the Fountain of Youth (#17, Blazing Sevens, 3rd in the Blue Grass), finishing 4th. He had a troubled start, got bumped during the running, finishing almost 7 lengths in back on the winner, Forte. His sire is Curlin's son, Good Magic, winner of the Haskell and 2cd in the Ky Derby. Dam is stakes winner Puca (by Kentucky Derby winner Big Brown). Puca's half brother is millionaire Finnegan's Wake, a distance loving turf horse.

OK, with this and my prior columns, I've discussed all on the Derby's Top Twenty, except the Japan bred horses. More on them next time 'round, when I see that their entry is more solid.

This column is for Triple Crown horses so I am not going to stop with just the Kentucky Derby (did I say "just"??). The Preakness, scheduled to be run May 20th, had a prep race coming up this Saturday at Laurel Park in Maryland and that is the Federico Tesio Stakes at 9 furlongs. Ungraded, it hasn't produced anything by way of Grade One winners but it does sport a lot of hard hitting horses in its history. Favored in this event this year will be CoffeewithChris who is a son of Ride on Curlin (by Curlin), who was second in the Preakness. He has been in the money 8 of his 11 starts, winning 3 which included the one mile Miracle Wood Stakes and before that, the 7 furlong Heft Stakes, both at Laurel. It has been a long, long time since a Maryland-bred has won its state's feature race but he'd have his work cut out for him. Second choice in Saturday's event is Brittany Russell's Prince of Jericho who was 2cd in the Miracle Wood and prior to that, won the 7 furlong Spectacular Bid Stakes after finishing 2cd to CoffeewithChris in the Heft Stakes. Brittany recently won the Grade 1 Carter Handicap with Doppleganger (ex Baffert) and will be ridden by her husband, Sheldon. He is an accomplished rider on the Maryland circuit but this year has had only 2 mounts and continues on a comeback after multiple racetrack injuries. Prince of Jericho is by G2SW Munnings (by Spieghtstown). A consistently good sire (his fee is \$100,000), he has such G1SW I'm a Chatterbox, G2SW Om, G1SW Kimari, G3SW Warriors Charge and last years outstanding Jack Christopher. Medaglia D'Oro is the broodmare sire (of Prince of Jericho), while the dam is another unraced mare, Golden Review.

And then there is the G3 Lexington Stakes at Keeneland, which is a Kentucky Derby point qualifying race (the last one). It offers points of 20-8-6-4-2. Co-favorite will probably be Baffert's Arabian Lion, who won't gain a single point as his trainer makes him non-Derby eligible. This will be a Preakness Prep for him. The other co-favorite is from the barn of Steve Asmussen and is Disarm who will be ridden by Jose Ortiz. Disarm

currently 40 points and a win would bring him to 60 (who says I can't do math?) which is the 10-11 spot on the eligible list. He had two starts last year and two this year. His only win was last year when he broke his maiden in a 7 furlong event (in the beaten field was Crupi and Rocket Can). This year, he has had two seconds, the last in the Louisiana Derby (to Kingsbarns, a horse that has a front running style). Disarm is by Gun Runner out of Easy Tap, by Tapit.

Brad Cox will saddle First Mission for this Street Sense's first stakes race. His last start was at Gair Grounds when he broke his maiden going 8.5 furlongs by almost 7 lengths as the favorite. With no Derby points, even if he wins, he's not in. A Preakness probable?

OK, I will end here for this week. Given you a lot to read again and I hope I have been helpful. As of today, only 23 days til the Kentucky Derby. My birthday is the week before. Always thought it was the absolute best birthday present.