

WEEK 11

Derby aftermath. Preaknes Stakes is looming

May 19, 2023

I was exhausted after the Kentucky Derby. All that build-up, all that pre-race jitters, and I have to be honest, I felt let down. Not taking anything away from the colt that won, but it was kind of anti-climatic. I was disappointed, of course, that Forte was withdrawn. I was disappointed that Verifying was sent to soon to make the pace and doubly disappointed when he stopped near the 7/16ths pole. I was worried he was injured at that point. It was fun to see the strange apostrophe horse, Two Phil's, looking so good so close to the wire and for the final burst of Angel of Empire. But then Mage happened, Javier Castellano got his first Derby winner, and the race was history. Last year, even with the huge upset of Rich Strike (who I would not have put in the top ten), it was a fantastic and fun race. And I don't know why this years was not for me, but it wasn't. OK...it was great Good Magic got a classic winner in his first crop and it was nice to see a not-familiar trainer face in the winner's circle (I so appreciated two years of a Baffert-less Derby). But...

OK...so let me move on. The Preakness is tomorrow and the weather had not looked good with rain predicted for alot of the east coast but I just checked at it is supposed to be partly cloudy and in the 80s in Baltimore tomorrow. So that's a good thing. There is a fear about the course with its current fatality issues and it doesn't help with those that tend to be superstitious as the Preakness is race #13. And there is already a defection from the small field as First Mission has been withdrawn. And then there were 7 and when you look at the quality of those that are to start...well, it leaves alot to be desired. Forte could not enter due to the scratch circumstance at Churchill Downs (vets list for 20 days) but where or where is another standardbearer from the Pletcher barn which is filled with young talent? Is this years crop of three year olds as poor as I thought the 2017?

OK...so lets move on, as I said! The field is headed by, of course, the Derby winner MAGE, made this choice strictly due to his Churchill Downs win. Was watching the Florida Derby again the other day and the wonderful win by Forte over Mage. I thought it was the best race Forte had run and was happy that something could run with him and challenge him. So we go into the Preakness with Mage having won half of his 4 career starts. He came into his own at the right time, for sure! He has not had a published work out since his win. Trainer Gustavo Delgado must still be pinching himself as this was his biggest win in the 20 plus years he has been training. His "next best" was 2019 Kentucky Derby starter (13th), Bodexpress. That one completed his racing career with just under \$700,000 in winnings after a good win the the Clark Handicap (G1) at Churchill. After his Derby start, he was entered in the Preakness and burst out of the gate in the air, dumping jockey Johnny V, and that was that. He was a maiden in those classic starts and when he was brought back to home track Gulfstream Park in Florida for his next start, he broke his maiden. Hoping Mage has a better day tomorrow. Just in case the weatherman is wrong, he has never raced on a muddy track.

Bob Baffert shipped NATIONAL TREASURE east for this year's Preakness. Quality Road is the sire while Treasure, by Medaglia D'Oro is the dam. National Treasure won his first start, a maiden event as a two year old, and that has been his only victory in 5 career starts. Since that win, he was entered ambitiously in 4 grades stakes (3 Grade 1s) and was second in the American Pharoah and third in the Breeder's Cup Juvenile that completed his two year old season and, this year, at three he was third as favorite in the Sham Stakes (the top two finishers in this five horse race were also Bafferts) and then he followed that win a fourth place in the Santa Anita Derby in an unimpressive race. He will be ridden by John Velazquez who hopefully will have a more successful ride this year than he did in 2019. The sire, Grade One stakes winner Quality Road who I have mentioned in my column before. He's the sire of multiple Grade 1 stakes winners, and had a winner of the day-before-the-Preakness card as well when Aspray won the Hilltop Stakes, a turf event. The dam, Treasure, was winless in 7 career starts but she was second or third in 6 of them, all sprint events. This is another trainer with a barnful of expensive, talented three year olds (some sidelined due to injury) and I wonder why National Treasure is the one he sends east? He did have an impressive workout on May 12th at Santa Anita.

Trainer Ed Mogar Jr has entered CHASE THE CHAOS and the jockey is local favorite Sheldon Russell. Mr Mogar has been around since the 1970s and has had a couple of Grade One winner like Stilleto Boy (Santa Anita Handicap) and Stormin Lucy in the Matriarch Stakes. "Chaos" is a gelded son of Astern (Aus) who has won 3 of 8 starts and comes in from the West Coast. He won the El Camino Real Derby, a listed 9 furlong race at Golden Gate Fields in California which is an all weather track. His last start was on April 29th in the California Derby (at Golden Gate) in which he was favored and finished 8th of 9. In one of his two starts on a dirt course, he was 7th of 9 in the San Felipe Stakes at Santa Anita. He had broken his maiden at 2 on the turf at Canturbury Park. Don't know who suggested to ship cross country. Anyway, the sire was a Grade One winner in his birth country and has stood there and shuttled to Kentucky. He is the sire of Caulfield Guineas winner Golden Mile (Aus), G2 sprinter Aft Cabin (Aus), graded stakes placed Brigantine (Aus) and a few other stakes winners or placing horses in Australia. His best in the US has been the filly Sail By, a Grade 2 stakes winner on turf. Broodmare sire is Medaglia D'Oro (also the broodmare sire of National Treasure). Chase the Chaos has opening odds of 50-1. Feelin lucky?

Wouldn't it be great if Maryland could have another Preakness winner? Well, COFFEEWITHCHRIS is a Maryland-bred with a chance to do so. He has never faced graded stakes starters but he has won 3 of his twelve lifetime starts with 5 additional in the money efforts. Only 1 of his

starts was outside Maryland (when he raced in Virginia) and his maiden win came at Pimlico. That was in a maiden claiming race back in May of last year in which he was awarded the win in the 4 1/2 furlong event due to a DQ of the horse that actually crossed the finish line first. In 7 starts at two, his best was a win in the Heft Stakes (At Laurel). This was a 7 furlong race in which he showed early speed and lasted to win by 2 1/2 lengths at around 16-1. This year, he has started 4 times, all at Laurel. He was second in the 7 furlong Spectacular Bid Stakes and then followed that win in the February one mile Miracle Wood Stakes. In the March 1 1/16-mile Private Terms Stakes, he was second and then in this last start, he was fifth as the favorite at 1 1/8 miles. Jockey Jaime Rodriguez had the mount again. His best year since he began riding in 2010 was last year. He's never won a graded stakes. Trainer is John Salzman Jr who trained for a while in the early 1990s and then came back in the late 2000s. He's had some graded stakes placed horses, his best being SW Limited View, SW Local Motive, GSPW Twelve Pack Shelley and a few others. Sire of the gelded Coffeewithchris is Graded stakes placed winner Ride On Curlin (by HOTY Curlin), who stands in Florida. "Chris" is his best US-raced son. Andiemac is the dam (she by Outflanker). She won twice in claiming events in Maryland and Chris is her only foal to win thusfar. It's been a long while since Maryland could boast a Preakness winner and things will be crazy if he carries his early speed to win this one.

RED ROUTE ONE got my attention when he was second in the Rebel Stakes (G2) back in February to Confidence Game. I guess it's cause I was so impressed with the winner (whose trainer elected to go to the Derby with no starts after that race for some reason). In his career, Red Route One has won 2 of 9 starts and was placed in 3 other races. He won one of 5 as a two year old, that being in a maiden event at Kentucky Downs (8 furlongs on turf) and his next win was in his last start, that being the Bath House Stakes at Oaklawn Park, a come from behind victory at 9 furlongs. In between, he placed in a few graded stakes, including finishing 6th to Angel of Empire in the Arkansas Derby (G1). The trainer is the all time leader Steve Asmussen and in the last two years, he has come so close to winning his 3rd Preakness (he won in 2009 with Rachel Alexandra and in 2007 with Curlin). He as second in 2021 with Midnight Bourbon and last year, 2022, he had victory literally snatched from him with the far-better Epicenter when Early Voting got up to win. He's got to want this one really bad, and I hope he can pull it off. Sire of Red Route One is the sire of Early Voting and that is the Horse of the Year, Gun Runner and that one was in his first crop. Dam of Red Route One is the unraced full sister to Champion Untapable, Red House. She has one other foal, a full brother to Red Route One and that is the minor stakes winner Red Run. She is by Tapit. Enough said! Jockey will be Joel Rosario who was on board Epicenter in last year's Preakness. His list of Graded Stakes wins in long, long, long. Kentucky Derbies with Animal Kingdom and Orb; Belmont with Tonalist; and winning rides on HOTY Knicks Go, G1SWs Accelerate, Frosted, Mind Your Biscuits, Jackie's Warrior, Close Hatches, Uni and so many more.

PEFORM is one of three starters sired by Good Magic (the other two being Mage and Blazing Sevens). I have great respect for trainer Claude "Shug" McGaughey III and he will be ridden by Feagal Lynch. He was a \$230,000 yearling and as a two year old had 4 starts with 2 in the money finishes. This year, he has had 3 starts and won his last two races including the Federico Tesio Stakes at this track, a few weeks after winning his maiden race (at Tampa Bay Downs). He stumbled at the start, recovered and came from last to first to win by a head at 9 furlongs. It's what got him into the Preakness, to me sure. Prior to that, the maiden win was at a mile and 40 yards. I've already spoken about Good Magic so let me comment on the dam. She is Jane Says, a daughter of Wood Memorial winner Tale of Ekati. She raced 4 times, and did not win. Another son, Fieldstone (by Dialed In), has two wins at Fair Grounds in Louisiana. Those wins were at a mile on turf and a mile and 70 yards on dirt, both in claiming events. Irish born jockey Lynch came back from neck and back injuries a few years ago, is riding hot and this is his first mount in the Preakness.

Last of the seven starters is BLAZING SEVENS who will be ridden by Irad Ortiz Jr and is trained by Chad Brown. He is a \$225,000 two year old purchase and has won two of 6 starts. At two, he won the Grade 1 Champagne Stakes over Verifying. This year, he has raced but twice. In March he was 8th of 9 starters in Forte's Fountain of Youth Stakes (G1) and then was sent to Keeneland for the Blue Grass Stakes in which he was third to Tapit Trice with Verifying second. He was ahead of Sun Thunder and Raise Cain and others in what I thought was his best career performance. I did mention his sire was Good Magic. Dam is Trophy Girl by G1S Warrior's Reward. She won back to back starts in 2017, both at Turfway Park, one at 8 furlongs and the other at 8.5 furlongs. Blazing Sevens is her first foal. Trainer Chad Brown won the 2022 and 2017 Preakness with Early Voting and Cloud Computing.

Thought back to 1973 and the Preakness win of Secretariat. I know his 31 length Belmont win was visually his best win and his Kentucky Derby win was heart stopping, but to me his Preakness was the best of the Triple Crown Series. He exhibited incredible power when he circled the field in the first turn. It was just breathtaking.

On the other end, there was a horse named Prego in 1962 who was pulled up in the Kentucky Derby and thereby was last and then was 11th and last in the Preakness. No, he didn't start in the Belmont, which pretty much eliminated a Triple DuncCap!

OK....enjoy the race. Hope all finish with no injuries and no bad rides. Be well!