

WEEK 05  
Florida Derby & Arkansas Derby

April 1, 2023

SForte, Forte, Forte. If you are reading anything about the Kentucky Derby for 2023, you are reading about this horse. I get it, people are hoping for a second coming of Secretariat and it would, of course, be good for racing. But, there are other horses...and it is those horses I will talk about tonight.

There are a couple Derby preps this weekend of major interest. Although it is not the richest race on the road to Louisville, the Florida Derby has the most attention focused on it due to the presence of Forte. He drew a bad post (11) in the 12 horse field but there is little else negative to be said about this colt. The 2022 Champion Two Year Old Colt has won five of his 6 starts, all in impressive style. The best, as I see it, was his last. On March 4th, he won the Fountain Of Youth Stakes (G2) by a commanding 4 1/2 lengths after encountering some bumping at the start. Irad Ortiz Jr (who will ride tomorrow as well) kept him to the task at hand and when called on, he responded. Time for the 8.5 furlongs was 1:43:12, well off the 1:40:97 set by Social Inclusion in an allowance event back in 2014 that he won by 10 lengths. He would go on to finish 3rd in the Wood Memorial & Preakness. Violence is the sire of Forte whose racing career ended in the Fountain of Youth Stakes back in 2013 (the winner was Orb, which went on to win the Kentucky Derby). His four career starts earned him 3 wins (with Todd Pletcher training). Sprinter, Dr Schivel, is his second best US racing son. The stamina part of this pedigree is from the grandsire, Medaglia d'Oro.

Moving on from the 4-5 favorite, the Fountain of Youth third place finisher, Cyclone Mischief, is in and will be ridden by Jose Castellano. Trainer is Dale Romans. This colt, who will be actually three years old at the end of April, has won twice in six starts. He broke his maiden last year at Keeneland at 8.5 furlongs as the favorite and his next win came in a one mile AOC at Gulfstream Park on January 8th, a race in which he defeated Litigate who went on to win the Sam Davis at Tampa Bay Downs later on. In between, Cyclone Mischief was 7th in the Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes last year and after the AOC win, he disappointed in the Holy Bull Stakes (G3) in February, that race being won by Rocket Can. There is a jockey change and maybe Romans has got this colt's head right. On pedigree, he is by leading sire Tapit out of the Bernardini mare, Areyoucoming here, a non winner in a very abbreviated race career. She is a half sister to the gelded SW Suddenbreakingnews, which was 5th in the 2016 Kentucky Derby. He was by Mineshaft. Her only other foal is a non winner (full sister to Cyclone Mischief).

Tim Yakteen will saddle Fort Bragg in the Florida Derby while he is on hiatus from....well, you-know-who-any-why's barn. Scheduled to ride is Joel Rosario. Fort Bragg is another son of Tapit, and he cost \$700,000 as a yearling. Dam is sprint turf stakes winner March X Express who is by two year old champion colt Shanghai Bobby. Fort Bragg has won once in 5 starts, that being a 8.5 furlong maiden in November in his third start. He was then 3rd to Practical Move in the Los Alamitos Futurity, while still being trained by Bob Baffert. Practical Move, by the way, was trained by Yakteen. Baffert had 3 in the race and the overwhelming choice, Arabian Lion, finished last of 5. Fort Bragg comes in highly regarded, but he doesn't do much for me.

Dubuyhnell (how I hate that name! I prefer to see Kentucky Derby winners with regal names, don't you?)..anyway, he is trained by Danny Gargan, who has been around a long time. His best horse was Tax, which earned over a million dollars and was 14th in the Maximum Security Kentucky Derby...sorry, the Country House Kentucky Derby. He had been second in the Wood Memorial prior to the Kentucky start. Anyway, Dubuyhnell is by Champion Good Magic and he has won half of his 4 career starts. His best race to date was in last year's Remsen Stakes in November at Aqueduct. Jose Ortiz, who is to ride tomorrow, rode him that day as well and who was aboard him when he was 8th in his last start, the Sam Davis Stakes. The most exciting thing about this colt (to me anyway, since I love pedigrees) is that fact that his dam is the millionaire Wild Gams who was a fantastic sprinter in her day. She is the dam of stakes winning sprinters Cazadero & Mt Brave and Ohio Derby 3rd Almost Famous. Not feeling it here.

Saffie Joseph Jr has 4 in this race and they include West Coast Cowboy, Mr Peeks, Nautical Star and Mr Ripple. Sonny Leon (Rich Strikes jockey) will be on West Coast Cowboy (by West Coast) whose 3 career starts have all come at Gulfstream Park. He won his maiden race, which was his first start, at a mile. He was 4th of 6 in his next start, also at a mile and for some reason, he was bumped into stakes company, finishing 3rd in the Holy Bull Stakes. All things considered, he showed some fight in that race and hopefully came out of it with some lessons learned. Edgar Zayas had ridden him that way but tomorrow, that jockey will ride Mr Ripple. Mr Ripple is by Dialed In and has won one of his three starts. All three starts, like West Coast Cowboy, were at Gulfstream which is Mr Josephs' homebase. Mr Ripple's only win came in a maiden event in his first start last October at a mile. He won by an impressive 9 1/2 lengths and followed that by finishing third to Cyclone Mischief and Litigate at a mile in an AOC. In his last start, he was second in an allowance event to favorite, Todd Pletcher's Classic Catch at a mile and an eighth. He must have something as jockey Zayas chose to stay with him. Dialed In, by the way, won the Florida Derby in 2011 & went on to finish 8th in the Kentucky Derby. His sire, Mineshaft, was Horse of the Year and he was by Horse of the Year, A P Indy. Dialed In is the sire of Gunnevera, a winner of over 5 1/2 million dollars. Stamina here. The dam of Mr Ripple is Palace Pier (Can), who won stakes at 8.5 furlongs, and is the daughter of Out of Place, a distance loving graded stakes winner. Mr Peeks will be ridden by Edwin Gonzalez. He is a son of California Chrome,

one of the most popular Kentucky Derby winners in years, but that's about his only credential. He is a maiden after two starts, both this year and both at Gulfstream Park. He was second in his last start, finishing second in a six furlongs maiden event. He's in to provide speed...but for who? Mr Ripple likes the front end and it appears West Coast Cowboy does also. Is this trio out to out run Forte? Mr Saffie won last year's Florida Derby with White Abarrio and he's got Derby fever b-a-d!

And I almost forgot Nautical Star. Nautical Star is an Oklahoma-bred son of Dixie Chatter, whose best races were at a mile (tho he did win the 8.5 furlong Norfolk Stakes) and on turf. Dam, also Oklahoma bred, is Kiss Me Chocolate which had a 35-race career and won 8 of them, not in stakes company. Both starts for Nautical Star came at Oaklawn Park where he was trained by Nathaniel Quinonez. On February 18th, he won a six furlong maiden race by a nose. (Nathaniel is the son of the jockey in these two starts, Luis Quinonz). The owners of White Abarrio also own Nautical Star and Mr Peeks. So maybe it's not just the trainer who has Derby dreams. I don't think it is the best interest of the horse to put him in a race in which he has no business.

Jungfrau is trained by Bill Mott and will be ridden by Paco Lopez & represents Juddmonte Farms. He has won one of 4 starts and tho I respect the trainer greatly, don't see why this son of Arrogate is being pushed this far this early. Others in the race include Mage (by Good Magic) and Il Miracolo (by Gun Runner).

Looks like Pletcher has his seventh Florida Derby winner.

Move to Oaklawn Park and you have the G1 Arkansas Derby with a purse of \$1,250,000. The 9 furlong event looks to be better matched than the Florida Derby is. The supporting program offers the Fantasy Stakes for three year old fillies and looks to be the better of both of them! But, since it's been made almost impossible for a filly to race in the Kentucky Derby again under the current rules, I have to skip talking about that (and the Kentucky Oaks, my favorite race) and move ahead with the 2023 Kentucky Derby trials. Rocket Can skipped town after placing in the Fountain of Youth Stakes after winning the February 4th Holy Bull Stakes (G3, 8.5f). He was 3/4 lengths the best in that race, defeating Shadow Dragon and West Coast Cowboy. (Il Miracolo and Cyclone Mischief were also in the beaten field). Junior Alvarado will ride again (Bill Mott trains) and I am on his bandwagon. He is a gray son of Into Mischief out of Tension, by Tapit. Tension was a non winner (trainer by Baffert) and was retired after just 2 starts. In 2017, she sold in foal to Curlin for \$750,000 and looked like a bargain when sold again (in 2023) in foal to Collected for \$100,000. The Curlin colt never ran. Her only other foal to run was the filly by Pioneer of the Nile, Goddess of the Nile, a non winner to date. Rocket Can has won two of 6 races but looks to be getting better all the time. His loss in the Fountain of Youth was a good one as he fought all the way and then was overtaken by Forte and one cannot blame the trainer for heading to Arkansas to run for a million plus rather than run for second in the Florida Derby (tho no race is pre-determined). In October, at Churchill Downs, he broke his maiden in a 8.5 furlong race.

Reincarnate will have the services of Johnny Velazquez and will be trained (on paper) by Tim Yakteen. He is a son of Good Magic who won the Grade 3 Sham Stakes in California in January and then was third in the Rebel Stakes (to Confidence Game). I spoke a bit about the sire under Dubyuhnell. The dam of Reincarnate is Allanah (by Scat Daddy), who was a stakes winner in a career that lasted through 19 races.

Red Route One was tenacious when second to Confidence Game and lost by just a length in a trip that was anything but perfect. The trainer, Steve Asmussen, switches to the more experienced jockey in Tyler Gaffalione (previously ridden by Cristian Torres) and because of the connections and this colts improvement in each start, I think he'll get part of the purse. Sire is Champion Gun Runner with the dam being the Tapit mare, unraced Red House. A full brother to Red Route One is a stakes winner. She is the daughter of Kentucky Broodmare of the Year, Fun House, who was also the dam of Kentucky Oaks winner Untapable and millionaire Paddy o'Prado.

Angel of Empire is a Pennsylvania bred son of Classic Empire (Arkansas Derby winner in 2017) who won the Risen Star at Fair Grounds (defeating Two Phils, who won the Jeff Ruby last weekend) after placing in the Smarty Jones Stakes to Victory Formation. The dam of Angel of Empire is Armony's Angel (by To Honor and Serve) who was a non-winner. Angel of Empire has 3 wins in 5 starts. Trainer is Brad Cox while the jockey is Flavien Prat. Two Eagles River is a gelded son of Preakness winner Cloud Computing who has won 2 of his 5 starts including a win in his last start, a one mile event at Oaklawn. Chris Hartman is the trainer and he's been around since the early 1990s, training stakes horses like Alsvig, Tejano Twist, River Run Deep and others. The rider will be Nik Juarez. The dam is Majestic Island, by Majestic Warrior and she won once in 13 starts, that being a maiden event at Horsehoe Indianapolis at 8.5 furlongs on turf.

D Wayne Lukas will saddle Bourbon Bash for Brian Coelho and John Bellinger. He has won once in 9 starts, that being a maiden event at Saratoga last year. Reylu Gutierrez will ride. Sire Pegasus World Cup and Breeders Cup Mile winner City of Light and Bourbon Bash is part of his first crop. He has also sired stakes winner Chop Chop, who is best on turf. I respect D Wayne and it would be great to see him at Louisville once again but...

Others in the race include Interlock Empire (Ken McPeek), Harlocap (Steve Asmussen), Airtime (Robertino Diodoro), King Russell (Ron Moquett), and . (J Keith Desormeaux, who better have made the right decision in not running Confidence Game here!).

The one-mile Hot Springs Stakes at Oaklawn has Asmussen's Gun Pilot (by Gun Runner) and Powerful (by Nyquist); Bob Baffert will start Carmel Road (Quality Road) with Johnny V (it would be a pity if he were to win this minor Derby prep as, due to Baffert's "problem" with Churchill Downs, he would not be eligible to run in the Kentucky Derby); D Wayne Lukas' American Pharoah colt, Rocking Rocket; Eyeing Clover (Brad Cox); Cactus (Randy Morse) and Ken McPeck Frosted Departure, who I guess will be my pick.

What did you think of last week's races? Two Phils won the Jeff Ruby Steaks, the Rushaway went to Ken McPeck trained Rarified Flair and the Louisiana Derby, of course, went to Todd Pletcher's impressive Kingbarns.

Spring is desperately trying to make progress here with one day it being in the high fifties, then the next being rainy and in the 40s and by the end of this weekend, it is supposed to be 44 by Sunday with rain tomorrow. Hoping that Oaklawn will get the forecast 72 degrees and full sun. Today (the 31st) they had one race cancelled due to weather conditions and by the time they got gong again, the course was muddy. All over the southwest, they've had outbreaks of tornados and just plain bad weather. For Gulfstream Park in Hallandale, Florida, the weather for Florida Derby day is supposed to be partly cloudy and 85 degrees. Makes for good racing.

Enjoy!