

## WEEK 10

The wait is over. Almost...

- The icing on the cake, part two -

May 5, 2023

*Just minutes ago, I learned that Continuar (Jpn) is out of the Derby and that makes way for King Russell. Trained by Ron Moquett and to be ridden by Raphael Bejarano, King Russell is a grey-coated son of Creative Cause who has won once in 6 career starts. He broke his maiden in his 5th start, and that was at Oaklawn Park in a mile and a sixteenth event in which he won by a head as the second choice. Off that race, he was entered in the Arkansas Derby and despite going off at 58-1, he managed to finish second to Angel of Empire. It was a furious come from behind effort in which he finished ahead of Reincarnate and Rocket Can, also in the Derby. Dam of King Russell is the Proud Citizen are Believe You Will who was unraced. King Russell is her second foal, second winner.*

*Ron Moquett has trained since 1998 and his best have been the likes of Breeders Cup Sprint winner Whitmore, G3SW Far Right, G1SW Seek Gold and others. Rafael Bejarano has ridden with the best. In his portfolio are wins in two Breeders Cup events, a Kentucky Oaks, an Arkansas Derby, Pennsylvania, Iowa and West Virginia Derbies, The Gold Cup at Santa Anita and the Santa Anita Handicap and many other graded and non graded events. He was 14th on Happy Jack in the Kentucky Derby last year and 14th with Hidden Stash in 2021.*

So, so much has happened in just the last few days. First, the post positions were drawn on Monday and the 20 stalls were filled with Forte still holding the favorite roll. Then, in a HUGE development, Practical Move spiked a fever and was withdrawn. That was followed by yet another HUGE development and that was the suspension of trainer Saffie Joseph Jr from Churchill Downs. I'll chat about that in a few minutes, but let me cover the horses that move into the starting line up based on these withdrawals.

Cyclone Mischief gets in. Trained is Dale Romans and the scheduled rider is Joel Rosario. Don't want to minimize his presence but this now allows Mandarin Hero (Jpn) in. Trainer is T Fujita and jockey is K Kimura. Mandarin Hero has started 6 times (5 in Japan), and has won 4. In his only US start, the Santa Anita Derby, he was second to Practical Move, by a nose. It was a super impressive race. Unlike the other two Japan entrants, I have more respect for this one as he had his Derby prep on US soil. In my mind's eye, I am picturing pool balls as they are stacked up and then the cueball is struck and makes it's way to them and pow!...they scatter. The defection of Practical Move did that to the Kentucky Derby (not so much Lord Miles), and the entry of Mandarin Hero (Jpn) really effects the scatter!

A bit on Mandarin Hero (Jpn). He is by US-bred Shanghai Bobby, who originally stood in Kentucky but was sold to Japan in 2019. He was undefeated as a two year old, being named the US champion two year old colt of 2012, which included a victory in the Breeders Cup Juvenile (G1). At 3, he made 3 starts, winning one. He had been on the Kentucky Derby trail but did not start due to injury. His one victory at 3 was in the Aljamin Stakes, a 6.5 furlong event at Belmont Park. As a stallion, he sired G2SW Shancelot, G2SW Pirates' Punch, Shanghai Tariff and others in the US as well as SWs in Chile, Japan, Uruguay and Russia. The dam is Namura Naadeshiko (Jpn), which was a non winner in 3 lifetime starts. Mandarin Hero is her only foal to race. Her sire was Fuji Kiseki (Jpn), a son of Kentucky Derby winner Sunday Silence, was JRAs Champion Two Year Old and was the sire of G1SW Straight Girl (Jpn), 2x Japan Dirt Champion Kane Helini (Jpn), G1SW Sadamu Pattek (Jpn), G3SW Brightline, Ch 3 year old Isla Bonita (Jpn), and others.

Cyclone Mischief has a record of 7 starts, 2 wins and 3 thirds. He was 3rd in both the Fountain of Youth Stakes and the Florida Derby to Forte. He is by leading sire Into Mischief out of the non winning mare Areyoucominghere, who is be Preakness winner and 3 year old champion Bernardini. Bernardini is the sire of G1SW Art Collector, G2SW Imperitive, and a host of others. Distance is no issue here. Cyclone Mischief broke his maiden at two, winning at Keeneland in October at a mile and a sixteenth as the favorite. He showed good early speed in that one. He was then 7th in the Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes (again, setting pace), and then won an optional claiming race at Gulfstream Park at a mile in his first start as a three year old. He was then unplaced in the Holy Bull Stakes before the Fountain of Youth and Florida Derby.

The news out of Kentucky this week has not been good as it was reported 5 horses have died. Derby entrant Wild On Ice I had mentioned before had been humanely destroyed after an injury in a workout on the 27th of April. That was followed by one being euthanized after an injury during a race and another having suffered a heart attack while on the way to the unsaddling paddock after a race. Each were trained by different trainers. And then two from the barn of Saffie Joseph Jr - Parents Pride and Chasing Artie -ended up with injuries that required they be put down. Both were owned by Ken Ramsey. The fifth horse, Code of Kings, flipped over in the walking ring and hit his head and died. Since then, Mr Joseph scratched horses on Thursday and Friday and said he was unsure of what he would do with his Saturday entries, which included not only White Abarrio (an entrant in last year's Derby) but upset Wood Memorial winner Lord Miles as well. That had the "also eligibles" on alert. With the scratch of Practical Move, Cyclone Mischief got in the lineup. The Kentucky Racing Commission made the decision for Mr Joseph and they suspended him indefinitely, ending up in the scratch of Mandarin Hero (Jpn). Thus, the story above. So much has changed in such a short period of time!

Another aspect, the weather forecast. Why any five-day forecast is posted is beyond me as it's never right (unless you live in Hawaii I guess!) and the anticipated days of rain which included Saturday, has been changed. The weather in Louisville for Saturday is now predicted to be 74 degrees with no rain before or on the day so the track should be fast. Perfect horse racing weather.

So...that's it...at least for this hour of this day!...the field is set: Hit Show, Verifying, Two Phil's, Confidence Game, Tapit Trice, Kingsbarns, Reincarnate, Mage, Skinner, Disarm, Jace's Road, Sun Thunder, Angel of Empire, Forte, Raise Cain, Derma Sotogake (Jpn), Rocket Can, Coninuar (Jpn), Cyclone Mischief and Mandarin Hero (Jpn). My confidence in Confidence Game has wavered as I just can't deal with the length of time between his last start (February 25th) and the Derby itself. But his is a Derby pedigree for sure. Kingsbarns has been so, so impressive in his three starts and three wins but can he handle the crowd, the distance, the big field? Can't go with the favorite, despite how good he looks. Dust is settling...Brad Cox has 4 in, 2 which look good and one which looks great....but there are two days to go. Who are you picking?

The Kentucky Oaks tomorrow (May 5th) is, as usual, very competitive. Favored is Wet Paint (trained by Brad Cox who could be looking at an Oaks/Derby double!). The daughter of Blame has won 4 of her 6 starts including her last three. In her last start, the Fantasy Stakes (G3) at Oaklawn Park, she was 5-wide and won by 2 1/2 lengths over Taxed. Taxed is in the Oaks field. Morning line odds at 20-1 on this daughter of Collected. She has won only once in her 7 race career thusfar, that in a \$50,000 maiden claiming race at Churchill Downs last year in which she was claimed by her current connections. She was second in 4 started since then (including the Fantasy). She was second in the Martha Washington at Oaklawn, also to Wet Paint. Third in the race was Defining Purpose who is in the Oaks as well. Defining Purpose, a grey daughter of Cross Traffic, has won 3 of her 7 starts and in her last start, triumphed in the Ashland Stakes at Keeneland. Trainer is Ken McPeck and at odds of 12-1 looks really tempting. Fourth in the Martha Washington was D Wayne Lucas' Take Charge Briana who was, unfortunately, one of the horses that died this week. Brad Cox has the 4-1 second choice in the Oaks as well and she is Botanical, a daughter of Medaglia D'Oro, which has won her last four starts, all at Turfway Park. She was a \$220,000 yearling purchase and has had 6 lifetime starts. UAE Oaks winner Mimi Kakushi won her last 3, in a total of 5 starts, all at Meydan racecourse. City of Light is her sire and he won the Pegasus World Cup and Breeders Cup Mile as well as other races in his career. The Alys Look (trainer, Brad Cox) enters the Oaks with a lifetime record of 6 starts, two wins and 5 in the money altogether. Owners Ike and Dawn Thrash have been in horse racing for over 20 years and have campaigned such as Line of David, Dawn After Dawn, Turnerloose and others. She won the Silverbulletday Stakes and then was 3rd in the Fair Grounds Oaks to Southlawn. Southlawn will be in the starting gate for the Kentucky Oaks, too.

This one is trained by Norm Casse and has won 3 of her 7 starts. Gambling Girl is scheduled to start and will have as a rider Irad Ortiz Jr (Todd Pletcher, trainer) who can only improve her chances. Gambling Girl has won 2 of nine starts and is trained by Todd Pletcher. Her wins were both as a two year old but she was second in her latest start, the Gazelle Stakes (G3) at Aqueduct to Promiseher America. And that one is in the Kentucky Oaks as well! Promiseher America is by American Pharoah and has won half of her 4 career starts. She won the Gazelle at odds of 26-1, the longest shot in the field, and will be ridden by Jorge Vargas Jr, who rode her in the Gazelle.

Wonder Wheel caught my eye early in her career when she won her first start. That was at Churchill last June, in a maiden event at 5.5 furlongs. Southlawn was unplaced in that race, also her first start. Since then, Wonder Wheel has won 3 more times, including the Breeders Cup Juvenile Fillies and then she walked off with the Eclipse Award for Champion two Year Old Filly. She is a daughter of Into Mischief. She's had but two starts this year and hasn't won. In her last start, she was a disappointing 6th (Of 7) in the Ashland and has had jockey Tyler Gaffalione replaced by Joel Rosario. Tyler got the mount of Pretty Mischievous, another daughter of Into Mischief. This one is a representative of Godolphin and is trained by Brandon Walsh. She's started 6 times and has a record of 4-1-1. Her last start was the Fair Grounds Oaks. Prior to that she won the Grade 2 Rachel Alexandra Stakes at Fair Grounds. In the beaten field in that 8.5 furlong race was Hoosier Philly, who was 3rd. Hoosier Philly (by Into Mischief) also won the Grade 2 Golden Rod Stakes. She is an "also eligible" at this point for the Oaks, as is Taxed and Julia Shining. Julie Shining won both her starts last year, including the Demoiselle Stakes. This year, she's had two starts and was third in both. She's a daughter of Curlin and is trained by Todd Pletcher.

And then there is And Tell Me Nolies, a \$230,000 two year old in training purchase who has since won 3 of 7 starts. Horse of the Year Arrogate is the sire. She comes in from California, is trained by Pete Miller and is to be ridden by Ramon Vazquez. In her last start, she was second in the Santa Anita Oaks (G2) to Faiza. Faiza isn't here, she's a Bob Baffert trained filly and we all know the issues there. Flying Connection is trained by Todd Fincher (not Pletcher!) and she comes up from New Mexico, having won 4 of her 5 starts there, including the Sunland Oaks. Two prior starts were in California. Florent Geroux is scheduled to ride the daughter of Nyquist. Dorth Vader appears to be the rank outsider, even though her record is 4 for 8. All her starts were in Florida (she is a Florida bred). She was 4th in her last start, the Gulfstream Park Oaks. Trainer is Michael Yates who has been around a long time but hasn't had Graded Stakes luck until Dorth Vader. Sire is Girvin, who won the Haskell Invitational. He started his stud career in Florida and has since been relocated to Kentucky. The winner of the Gulfstream Park Oaks was Affirmative Lady, a daughter of Arrogate that has won 2 of 6 starts and she's in the Kentucky Oaks field as well. Graham Motion is the trainer and Johnny Velazquez will ride. Prior to the Gulfstream Park Oaks, she had broken her maiden in a 8.5 furlong race, also at Gulfstream.

So, there's a capsulized version of the entrants in the Kentucky Oaks, a 9 furlong Grade One race to be run tomorrow at Churchill Downs. In years past, this race was won by the likes of Susan's Girl, Davona Dale, Optimistic Gal, Bold n Determined, Princess Rooney, Open Mind, Ashado, Silverbulletday and so many other really good ones.

Bottom line of the 2023 Kentucky Derby is that it is the 50th anniversary of Secretariat's win, on his way to the Triple Crown, the first since Citation's 1948 sweep. Every year that goes by that we did not have a Triple Crown winner, the announcers and "color" people for broadcasts would lament the short time between the races, the distance of the Belmont and so on and so on. The Triple Crown isn't ordinary, it isn't meant to be easy. That is what makes each horse that accomplishes the feat a true Champion. Instead of fretting about the distance of the Derby and the time frames, perhaps breeders should stop breeding for the sales ring and breed for the racetrack, aiming for a Classic winner at a Classic distance. What happened to the horsemen?

Anyway, two days left. So much can still change. Hope you get to watch and enjoy. Just want them all to come home safe and for the race to be run clean. Happy Derby!