

OVERVIEW:

This year's Kentucky Derby has an outstanding field. Any one of the top five or six contenders would be good enough to win the race most years. For that reason, I believe a huge longshot is unlikely to win. Too many good horses would have to clunk for that to happen. Still, the history of the Derby is for horses at fat prices to run well and create huge payouts in the exacta, trifecta and superfecta pools.

I look for a fast pace. This will help closers who come from well off the pace and the winner will have to be a horse of considerable stamina. One of my theories (I have lots of them) is that most American horses can't get the 1 1/4 mile distance of the Derby and that the key to figuring the race out is to focus on only those that can handle the distance.

The weather should be excellent and I expect the track to favor speed. I'll analyze each horse in post-position order and then make my picks.

THE FIELD:

#1 OCHO OCHO OCHO: He's not that good and the post position is absolute death.

#2 CARPE DIEM: Todd Pletcher trainee (one of four in the race) looked very good in winning the Blue Grass Stakes four weeks ago (dusting a horse I co-own named Unrivaled). But the post position is bad and the horse is likely to get in traffic trouble in the long run to the first turn.

#3 MATERIALITY: This horse is very, very good but has a lot to overcome. He is trying to win the Derby without having run as a two year old. That should be the last time that happened was in 1882! He's lightly raced and the post position isn't good. This is only his fourth career start. Despite all that, he has a good chance to win. He has one asset: he is incredibly good. His win in the Florida Derby five weeks ago (I was there) was stunning as he showed tremendous stamina in finishing strongly on a very tiring track. Pletcher trains and John Velazquez rides.

#4 TENCENDUR: He ran a very good second to Frosted in the Wood Memorial and appears to be improving. I'm not sold on his ability to get the distance.

#5 DANZIG MOOD: I have mixed feelings about him. He ran a decent second in the Blue Grass but his speed figures are well short of what is needed to win this race.

#6 MUJTAHIJ: The toughest call in the race. He won the UAE Derby in Dubai in eye-popping fashion five weeks to go but none of the foreign-based horses who have tried the Dubai-to-Kentucky route has come close to winning. Trainer Michael De Kock is one of the best in the world. He has run only eight horses in the US and they have all run well. Rider Christophe Soumillon is world class but has little experience on dirt tracks in roughly run races like the Derby. I love De Kock (he briefly trained a horse I once co-owned) and I'd love to pick him here but I think the competition is just too tough.

#7 EL KABEIR: This horse runs the same every race. Always decent but never good enough to win a race like this.

#8 DORTMUND: He's raced six times and has six wins. Trained by Bob Baffert, who has three Derby wins. He is a very game horse who digs in and refuses to be passed. Many are picking him to win. But I think the pace will be too hot for him. He's an unusually tall horse and may have trouble maneuvering in the hectic Derby traffic.

#9 BOLO: He has an outside shot. His turf-style breeding usually works at Churchill Downs and his two races in California in which he ran behind Dortmund were very good. He'd be a prime contender in an easier year.

#10 FIRING LINE: He'll be one of the frontrunners and almost beat Dortmund two races back. But he's not bred to get the distance and I stated in the overview what I think about horses like that in this race.

#11 STANFORD: Trained by Pletcher, this is the most attractive longshot in the race. He's run three strong races this year after showing dramatic improvement from his form last year. While he has tactical speed, he's shown the ability to come from just off the pace too. That is essential in this year's running. The jockey, Florent Geroux, is one of the most underrated young riders in America.

#12 INTERNATIONAL STAR: He comes from way off the pace and that is probably the preferred running style this year. He's won three races in a row and his very effusive owner desperately wants to win the Derby before he dies. I question whether the distance might be too long for his best. I prefer others for the win but this is a good horse.

#13 ITSAKNOCKOUT: No it isn't. Pacquiao and Mayweather will probably go the distance. Oops, that's later tonight. He's trained by Pletcher but his speed figures seem too slow.

#14 KEEN ICE: Every year some huge longshot comes from way back and clunks up to pass the exhausted field and finish third or fourth without ever threatening for the win. Keen Ice can be that horse this year. He won't win but put him in the bottom of your tri's and supers.

#15 FROSTED: He won the Wood Memorial from off the pace in impressive fashion. That running style will be a huge asset in the Derby. He is the best bred horse in the race and is peaking at the right time. The trainer is very good and the jockey is future Hall of Famer. This is a very strong contender.

#16 WAR STORY: All of his races this year have been in New Orleans and while all have been decent, none has been good enough to win this race.

#17 MR. Z: He has to be considered only because he is trained by multiple Derby winning trainer D. Wayne Lukas. The horse has won only one of his twelve career starts and hasn't improved since last year but he has tactical speed and a pedigree right up the Derby alley. He's not impossible.

#18 AMERICAN PHAROAH: The horse with the misspelled name is something special. He's won his last four races without breaking a sweat and his win last out in the Arkansas Derby was extraordinary. He has tactical speed but also the ability to sit off other horses. He had an outstanding workout over the Churchill track last Saturday and he appears to be thriving since arriving in Kentucky. He has a stride that is a thing of beauty. The best horse usually doesn't win the Derby and this one might fold when facing intense pressure for the first time. But every factor I look at with this horse is positive. I'm no fan of trainer Bob Baffert but he knows how to win this race. The jockey, Victor Espinoza, won last year with California Chrome and also won years ago with War Emblem. The Derby is incredibly hard to win but if this horse does it, I predict he'll win the Triple Crown.

#19 UPSTART: This is another contender. He's run seven times and each race has been impressive. He has a strong foundation and that gives him an edge over some of the others here. He'll likely have to come from about six lengths off the pace and his talented, but inexperienced, rider will have to navigate through traffic from an outside post position. A legit threat to win.

#20 FAR RIGHT: Well, you know I like his name. This horse will have to come from the clouds. He might pick up some pieces late but his breeding isn't ideal for this race.

PREDICTION:

HORSE #	HORSE	PROGRAM ODDS
18	AMERICAN PHAROAH	5-2
3	MATERIALITY	12-1
15	FROSTED	15-1
19	UPSTART	15-1
11	STANFORD	30-1
8	DORTMUND	3-1
2	CARPE DIEM	8-1
6	MUBTAAHIJ	20-1
12	INTERNATIONAL STAR	20-1
9	BOLO	30-1
17	MR. Z	50-1
4	TENCENDUR	30-1
5	DANZIG MOON	30-1

ANALYSIS:

Listed above are the horses I consider possibilities for the win, in order of preference. American Pharaoh and Materiality are the two most talented horses and Frosted has the preferred running style. If somebody blows up the board, it will be Stanford. If you bet trifectas or superfectas, include the deep closers in your final spot, especially Keen Ice.

TV AND WAGERING

You can bet the Derby at any of the big Indian casinos in Wisconsin, including Potawatomi in Milwaukee. Live racing, including betting on the Derby and all the Churchill Downs races, is available at Arlington Park, about a 90 minute drive from Milwaukee. There are many legal online wagering outlets that accept accounts from Wisconsin residents. If you are a novice bettor, remember to place your wagers by the horse's number and not its name.

TV coverage of the early Churchill Downs races airs from 11-to-3 on NBC Sports Network.

Coverage of the Derby itself airs on the regular NBC Network (Channel 4 in Milwaukee from 3:00 to 6:15. The race itself will go off a little after 5:30 (all times central).