

OVERVIEW:

This year's crop of three year olds isn't very good. Their race times are slow and none of the horses show the type of brilliance we got last year from Triple Crown winner American Pharoah. Nyqvist is unbeaten and last year's two year old champion but he gets no respect and I'm one of the dis-respecters. Still, somebody has to win. Many believe the wide open and mediocre field points to a big longshot winning. There's a case to be made for that. I've narrowed my top contenders down to six with two of them at the top. In a 20-horse field many horses will have bad racing luck and luck is critical in this race, especially if you're betting it. Consider the following opinions as just that—opinions. In the end, as in most things in life, you're on your own.

THE FIELD (in post position order):

#1 TROJAN NATION - He has never won a race and he has an impossible post position. On the upside, he almost won the Wood Memorial last out and Southern Cal fans might back him.

#2 SUDDENBREAKINGNEWS - This is a late runner that I was prepared to tout. But the post position is really bad. He'll have to be much the best to make a dent. He is a possibility to get a minor piece.

#3 CREATOR - Yet another closer hampered by an inside post position. This one did win the Arkansas Derby and is rapidly improving and with a trainer just voted into the Hall of Fame.

#4 MO TOM - Named after his owner Tom Benson (who also owns the New Orleans Saints). This late runner always seems to get into traffic problems and his post position makes that likely again. He's also not bred for the distance.

#5 GUN RUNNER - Finally one I like. Trained by Steve Asmussen (also trainer of #3) who is still looking for his first Derby winner and has a live one here. He romped to win the Louisiana Derby and his running style should have him close enough to the lead to get an early jump. His jockey, Florent Geroux, is one of the most underrated riders in America. Contender.

#6 MY MAN SAM - He's lightly raced and finished second in the Blue Grass Stakes last out despite a very wide trip. He has an excellent trainer and a great young jockey but the large field may be too much for such an inexperienced horse. He's yet another horse who lacks early speed. Mild contender.

#7 OSCAR NOMINATED - He's not the likeliest winner but in a year of slow three year olds, I can't dismiss him. He won a slow running of the Spiral Stakes to qualify for this race. His owner is obsessed with winning the Derby and will make a ludicrous scene if this horse wins. It's more likely Oscar could come late to fill out the bottom of the superfecta.

#8 LANI - The oddball of the race. He's a horse from Japan but his sire is the best in America. He got here by winning a weak running of the UAE Derby in Dubai. That race has never produced a Kentucky Derby winner. His training regimen at Churchill Downs has been bizarre. The horse sometimes refuses to run at all. On some days they gallop him around the track six times. They used to do that in like 1926. Maybe the Japanese know something we don't. His trainer didn't even show up in the States until Tuesday. I don't give him much of a shot but stranger things have happened.

#9 DESTIN - He won the Tampa Bay Derby eight weeks ago and hasn't raced since. The private clocker I use says he doesn't look good physically right now. On the plus side, his trainer Todd Pletcher and jockey Javier Castellano are both the best in the country.

#10 WHITMORE - It seems like the whole field in this race consists of deep closers who come from way back and this is another one. He always fires but never seems to get there and isn't improving. He's another one with a chance to fill out the trifecta or superfecta.

#11 EXAGGERATOR - They named this one after Trump. Just ask him. He saw it in the Enquirer. In reality this might be the best horse in the race. He came from way back in the Santa Anita Derby to destroy that field. His detractors discount the performance because it came on a very muddy track and that can often lead to aberrational performances. But this horse always runs a big race and he has enough tactical speed to be closer to the lead than the other late runners. His Santa Anita win was the only performance by a member of this bunch that really wowed me. Jockey Kent Desormeaux is erratic but he has won the Derby three times. His brother is the trainer and I'm pretty sure they'd be the first brother combo to win the Derby.

#12 TOM'S READY - This one hasn't run fast enough to win the Derby and he'll be a huge longshot. But he had a very good workout over the track last Friday and his trainer has twice run seemingly overmatched horses who finished in the top three in the Derby and once won the Kentucky Oaks at 50-1. Put this one somewhere on some of your tickets.

#13 NYQUIST - He's unbeaten in seven starts and won last year's Breeders' Cup Juvenile on the way to winning the two year old championship. He crushed highly touted Mohaymen last out to cruise in the Florida Derby. But his speed figures aren't that fast and his pedigree says he won't the 1 1/4 mile Derby distance. He will likely be the race favorite but this is a game of opinions and mine is that he won't hit the board.

#14 MOHAYMEN - He was unbeaten before Nyqvist beat him in the Florida Derby. He folded up badly in that race and hasn't looked good training since. On the other hand, he looked brilliant prior to the Florida race and probably wasn't fully cranked up for it. He has tactical speed and will be in good position. This one is a tough call.

#15 OUTWORK - Trained by Todd Pletcher, this one won a very odd running of the Wood Memorial in a sea of mud as he plodded home in brutally slow time but also refused to yield the lead. A much respected private clocker says no horse looks better at Churchill Downs this week. His breeding makes the Derby distance iffy. But jockey John Velazquez is a great rider and the case can be made that the taxing nature of his last race will have him right on edge for the Derby. Contender.

#16 SHAGAF - He's lightly raced and very talented but might be one of those horses who won't peak until later in the year. His jockey in the last race jumped off to ride My Man Sam.

#17 MOR SPIRIT - He's trained by Bob Baffert who won the Triple Crown last year and has won the Derby four times. This horse finished a decent second to Exaggerator last time at Santa Anita. He's finished first or second in all seven starts. This horse wouldn't be good enough most years but might be this year. Mild contender.

#18 MAJESTO - He was a non-threatening second to Nyqvist in the Florida Derby and might still be improving. He's bred to get the distance but needs to make a major step forward.

#19 BRODY'S CAUSE - Not many horses are trained for six months with the Kentucky Derby in mind but that's the case with this one. Trainer Dale Romans grew up blocks from Churchill Downs and is dying to win this race. Romans has a long history of horses over-achieving in the Derby. This horse won the Blue Grass Stakes last out in rather slow time but showed a sharp acceleration in doing so. The breeding is fine and the jockey is decent enough. Here's a little inside info: the private clocker I use says this horse looks spectacular right now. He is a steal at odds over 7-1 if you can get them. Major player.

#20 DANZING CANDY - His trainer didn't want to run but the owners overruled him. He has the best early speed in the race and may lead for a longtime but it's hard to imagine him going all the way.

HORSE PROGRAM ODDS:

HORSE #	HORSE	PROGRAM ODDS
11	EXAGGERATOR	8-1
19	BRODY'S CAUSE	12-1
5	GUN RUNNER	10-1
15	OUTWORK	15-1
6	MY MAN SAM	20-1
17	MOR SPIRIT	12-1

ANALYSIS:

The six above are the ones I think can win. Exaggerator and Brody's Cause are very close and I will bet both to win. If you are betting trifectas and superfectas, make sure to include some of the closers I mentioned above in the bottom slots of the wager. Horses are on fumes at the end of the Derby and there's always a horse or two that clunks up into the prize money without ever threatening to win. Exaggerator may get the first jump on Brody so I give him the slight edge. Gun Runner is being totally overlooked because his prep race rarely produces the Derby winner but the horse always runs well. If the pace is slow, Outwork might get the lead in the final turn and not look back.

Here's one 50-cent trifecta wager if you want to spend \$55: 11-19 with 5-6-11-15-17-19 with 2-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-16-17-18-19. Less complicated is a \$2 exacta 11-19 with 5-6-11-15-17-19. That'll cost you \$20. Or just bet #11 and #19 to win. Better yet, do what you want.

KENTUCKY OAKSI

I'm shooting for an upset in Friday's race. I like #4 Go Maggie Go (12-1), #1 Terra Promessa (10-1) and #13 Land Over Sea (5-1) in that order.