

OVERVIEW:

With no Triple Crown on the line this year, the Belmont Stakes has lost some luster and a lot of interest. But the race is always intriguing and has historically produced the biggest wagering payouts of the Triple Crown races. That's because, at 1 1/2 miles, the race is an oddity. None of these horses have run this far before and most never will again. American dirt racing is focused on shorter races and horses aren't trained with marathon distances in mind. The most difficult part of handicapping this year's race is that most of the prime runners come from way off the pace, a running style that usually doesn't work in this race but may this year.

I've had solid picks in the first two races. I picked Exaggerator to win both races and he finished second in the Derby and won the Preakness. My top four picks in the Preakness in order ran an amazing 1-3-4-5.

THE FIELD:

#1 GOVERNOR MALIBU: The trainer of this horse won the Belmont two years ago and the rider is top notch but this horse is making a major step up in class. He will be close to the pace which is a positive and has a chance if he can get the long distance.

#2 DESTIN: This Todd Pletcher-trained horse ran a decent sixth in the Derby and skipped the Preakness to be primed for a top effort here. He has enough tactical speed to stay close and his grinding style is right for this race. The rider is probably the best in the country. Contender.

#3 CHERRY WINE: He's one of many horses in this field that come from way, way back. He ran second three weeks ago in the Preakness but that race favored deep closers and this one might not. He's not impossible but I prefer others.

#4 SUDDENBREAKINGNEWS: This one came from way back to finish fifth in the Derby. He's a nice horse. What he has going for himself is consistency and by skipping the Preakness he's fresh for this race. His rider for all of his previous races was given the boot as they go to veteran Mike Smith which guarantees the horse won't have traffic trouble but will be wide the whole trip.

#5 STRADIVARI: He's making only his fifth career start and was a decent enough fourth three weeks ago in the Preakness. But they may be asking too much of him to come back this soon. Trainer Pletcher and rider John Velazquez have teamed up to win literally hundreds of races the last 15 years.

#6 GETTYSBURG: This horse is owned by the principal owners of #13 Creator and is being entered to ensure a fast pace. He is certain to be on the lead for most of the race but probably won't last.

#7 SEEKING THE SOUL: This horse and #8 below seem like clones. Both are trained by Dallas Stewart and owned by Charles Fipke. Both are making their fourth career start and both won for the first time on the exact same date, May 29! Both would be toss-outs except for the fact that I think both will be ridden not to win but to try to get a share of the purse, an act Stewart has mastered in Triple Crown races.

#8 FOREVER D'ORO: See above on #7. Of the two, I prefer this one.

#9 TROJAN NATION: This is his eighth career start and he still hasn't won a race. While this is a very weak group of three year olds this year, this horse still seems a cut below and is a yet another one who comes from way off the pace.

#10 LANI: This is the most interesting horse in the race. This Japanese based horse is the only one besides Exaggerator to run in all three Triple Crown races this year. He finished ninth in the Derby and improved a bit to be fifth in the Preakness. It is my belief the Belmont has been the goal all along. There is no horse in America that is trained like Lani. He gallops miles almost every day and has timed workouts every four or five days. This marathon race is right up his alley. There's just one problem. He's not all that fast. He might win at a big price but is likelier to finish in the top three.

#11 EXAGGERATOR: He almost won the Derby and was an easy winner in the Preakness and is, in my opinion, the best three year old in the country. He is ultra-consistent and while he is another that comes from off the pace he won't be as far back as some of the others. But even though I picked him in both races so far, I have qualms. There are red flags. The jockey checked himself into rehab a week ago. The last race may have taken something out of the horse. The distance might be too long for his best. This is the best horse in the field but he will be a short price and is no cinch.

#12 BRODY'S CAUSE: I had him second in the Derby but he ran a non-threatening seventh. While talented, he doesn't seem to be improving. He is yet another who comes from off the pace. He's a possibility but unlike in the Derby, I'm not keen on him here.

#13 CREATOR: This horse is literally named after God. Just ask the principal owner. This is another deep closer but the one with the best shot. The ownership group is very sharp and is targeting this race with a vengeance. They even entered #6 Gettysburg as a rabbit to ensure a fast pace. This horse won the Arkansas Derby but finished a badly beaten 13th in Kentucky. But he had a lousy post position and a bad trip. Prior to the Derby he had been improving with every race and his breeding is perfect for a long race like the Belmont. The former jockey has been replaced with Irad Ortiz Jr., a budding superstar who has a chance to get his first Triple Crown win here. The horse has had four solid workouts since the Derby and is primed for a big effort. Major player.

PREDICTION:

HORSE #	HORSE	PROGRAM ODDS
13	CREATOR	10-1
11	EXAGGERATOR	9-5
10	LANI	20-1
2	DESTIN	6-1
4	SUDDENBREAKINGNEWS	10-1
5	STRADIVARI	5-1

ANALYSIS:

My top three picks will all have to come from the back and really need Gettysburg to set a strong pace. If that doesn't happen, Destin can win. If the closers do rally, Creator might have a little more in the tank than Exaggerator and Lani as those two raced in the Preakness while Creator has been rested since the Derby.

SOME WAGERS:

A win place and show bet on #13

A smaller win place and show bet on #10

\$1 trifecta 11-13 with 2-10-11-13 with all (\$66)

10-cent superfecta 2-10-11-13 with 2-4-10-11-13 with 2-4-10-11-13 with all (\$48)

\$10 exacta box 10-11-13 (\$60)

OTHER RACES:

It's a spectacular card of stakes races at Belmont Park.

I like #5 Curlina in Race 5, the Ogden Phipps.

Let's try longshot #5 Fish Trappe Road in Race 7, the Woody Stephens.

In the Met Mile, Race 9, I like two horses: #3 Donworth and #13 Marking.

And a Daily Double play involving Race 10 the Manhattan and race 11 the Belmont Stakes: 8-10-11 with 10-11-13.