

OVERVIEW:

You might have thought it couldn't have gotten any weirder than last year when the Belmont Stakes was run before the Kentucky Derby. Well, here we are at the Preakness and we don't know who won this year's Derby. Medina Spirit is very likely to be disqualified once the second sample of his drug test comes back in a few weeks, unless, as has happened repeatedly, racing regulators allow trainer Bob Baffert to get away with breaking the rules again.

More on Baffert later in this analysis.

As for the Preakness, only three horses who ran two weeks ago in the Kentucky Derby are here, including Medina Spirit. But, with or without Baffert's pixie dust, Medina may not be Baffert's best horse in the race. He also has Concert Tour, a dominant horse before a clunk in April's Arkansas Derby that saw Baffert bypass Kentucky and point to this race.

I correctly assessed that the Louisiana Derby in March was the key Kentucky Derby prep and focused my Derby picks on horses that came out of that race. Those horses ran 2-3-5-6, including the two longshots I liked. Unfortunately, none of them were able to beat Medina Spirit and whatever Baffert injected in the horse to get him to run the best race of his life. One of those Louisiana Derby horses, Midnight Bourbon, had a terrible trip in the Derby after getting squeezed at the break. He's one of the three Derby horses in the Preakness. He has a new jockey who just happens to be the hottest rider in the country the last few years. This all makes for an interesting race. And would anybody shocked if one of the Baffert horses wins again, and if that horse tests positive again?

BAFFERT

Bob Baffert isn't the only cheat in horse racing. I have suspicions about two other of the most prominent trainers in the sport. Two more are already under federal indictment. Horse racing is corrupted with cheaters. But the type of cheating Baffert was caught doing in the Derby isn't the real problem. It is not the use of therapeutic medication too close to race day. It is the use of designer drugs for which there are no tests. Remember, Lance Armstrong never had a positive test and the two racing trainers under indictment didn't have many positive tests either.

Baffert originally denied giving Medina Spirit a corticosteroid. Some people believed it, not understanding Baffert's long track record of denying everything. A day later he changed his story and said the horse received a cream to deal with a skin issue. Spare me. The horse likely was injected in his knees or ankles with the anti-inflammatory. Baffert hoped the drug would clear the horse's system in time for the post-race test. It didn't. It's the fifth time in ten months he's been caught this way.

A few years ago, a bunch of Baffert horses started dropping dead on the race track with heart attacks. He played dumb about that too. Federal legislation taking regulatory authority away from ineffectual state commissions might help deal with the cheating problem and the decision to bring in the US Anti-Doping Agency, the entity that caught Lance Armstrong, may help.

THE FIELD:

- #1 RAM** After a slow start, he's won two races in a row but is entered only because legendary trainer D. Wayne Lukas wants to be in a Triple Crown race for maybe the last time.
- #2 KEEPMEINMIND** He came from way back to finish seventh in the Derby but hasn't improved much since his two-year-old season last year. The trainer of this one has also aroused suspicions.
- #3 MEDINA SPIRIT** The cheater returns. You can't count him out here. Derby winners often run strongly in the Preakness and this field is softer than the one he faced two weeks ago. He's never been worse than second in six career starts. He went wire to wire in the Derby but will face strong pace pressure in the Preakness.
- #4 CROWDED TRADE** He's a grinder that finished third in the Wood Memorial. The top two horses in that race did nothing in the Derby.
- #5 MIDNIGHT BOURBON** I picked him second in the Kentucky Derby despite his long odds, but he lost all chance when he broke slowly and was squeezed at the gate. His over the hill rider, Hall of Famer Mike Smith, merely kept the horse wide the rest of the race. The fact that the horse, normally a frontrunner, closed to finish sixth really impresses me. Smith, a passive rider whose better days are behind him, is jumping off to ride Concert Tour for Baffert. That's good news because the new jockey, Irad Ortiz, is one of the best two in America and is as aggressive as Smith is passive. I expect Ortiz to put Midnight into the race early and contest the pace. If he's good enough, he will take the lead at the top of the stretch and win. The biggest concern is the best three horses in the race are all speed types and some, or all, may be burned up by a hot pace.
- #6 ROMBAUER** If a longshot wins, it might be this one. He comes from off the pace in a speed filled race. He was a decent third in the Blue Grass Stakes at Keeneland and his trainer wisely skipped the Derby and is at the Preakness with a fresh horse. The jockey, Flavien Prat, is very good.
- #7 FRANCE GO DE INA** He's a foreign horse but he's not from France. He had two impressive races in Japan before running poorly in March in Dubai. Almost impossible to assess but I suspect he will contest the early pace.
- #8 UNBRIDLED HONOR** This horse was the regular workmate of a horse I co-own, Untreated. Our horse is on the sidelines with an injury, but our guy routinely outworked this one. Enough said.
- #9 RISK TAKING** I'm taking a risk not including him. He's the better of the two Chad Brown-trained horses in the field but he ran so poorly in the Wood Memorial I can't use him. Jockey Irad Ortiz gives up the mount to ride Midnight Bourbon, but his brother Jose takes over.
- #10 CONCERT TOUR** Bob Baffert's "other" horse but maybe the better of the two in here. Concert won his first three races and was favored in the Arkansas Derby but got burned up in a really hot pace. Baffert skipped the Derby and pointed to the Preakness. Hall of Fame rider Mike Smith, who doesn't ride many races anymore, is set to ride. Smith is a passive rider, but his strength is also his weakness. He doesn't like to ride in tight quarters but sometimes that helps because the horse isn't stuck in traffic. With the wide post, I look for this horse to be close to the lead two or three wide and might be good enough to win. Whether Baffert's magic juices are at play or not is unknown.

PREDICTION:

HORSE #	HORSE	PROGRAM ODDS
5	MIDNIGHT BOURBON	5-1
10	CONCERT TOUR	5-2
3	MEDINA SPIRIT	9-5
6	ROMBAUER	12-1
7	FRANCE GO DE INA	20-1

ANALYSIS:

I think Midnight Bourbon is the likeliest winner of the race. The top three choices will all be close to the lead which could set it up for a deep closer like Rombauer. Since the Japanese horse is an unknown, I'll throw him in to some wagers.

SOME WAGERS

(in order of preference; adjust wager size up or down to your preference and comfort)

\$20 to win place and show on #5 (\$60)

\$1 trifecta 5 with 3-6-7-10 with all (\$32)

50-cent trifecta 3-6-7-10 with 5 with all (\$16)

\$2 exacta 5 with all (\$18)

\$1 exacta All with 5 (\$9)

25-cent superfecta 5 with 3-6-7-10 with 3-6-7-10 with all (\$21)

OTHER RACES

Two other Saturday plays at Pimlico, site of the Preakness.

In Race 4, a big longshot worth a small stab is #1 Nokomis (15-1), switching to turf in her second career start. I would only bet a little on that one.

In Race 9, a strong play on #8, French Empire (3-1).