CLASSIC EMPIRE MORNING-LINE DERBY FAVORITE;
GIRVIN MAKES INITIAL CHURCHILL DOWNS APPEARANCE

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Wednesday, May 3, 2017) – John Oxley’s Classic Empire was made the 4-1 morning-line favorite for Kentucky Derby 143 when post positions were drawn Wednesday morning in the Aristides Lounge at Churchill Downs.

Prior to the draw during morning training, Louisiana Derby (Grade II) winner Girvin galloped a mile at 6:30 in his first activity at Churchill Downs since arriving at the track Tuesday afternoon.

KENTUCKY DERBY NOTES

ALWAYS DREAMING/PATCH/TAPWRIT – Florida Derby (GI) hero Always Dreaming continued his early morning routine of training right when the track opens (5:45) and gallops under exercise rider Nick Bush with a special set of “draw reins” attached to give his pilot more control.

The special reins were added Monday with a decent positive outcome, working their intended effect of forcing the high-strung son of Bodemeister to drop his head and concentrate on following his cues. Tuesday the transition continued and then Wednesday morning the sleek, dark runner looked especially sharp moving around the oval for a strong nine-furlong gallop three days ahead of Kentucky Derby 143.

“He’s good,” said Bush afterward. “We’ve got him where we want him. He was professional today. Saturday can’t come soon enough.”

Trainer Todd Pletcher, who again watched his colt exercise from the Churchill grandstand, was pleased with how his charge’s adaptation was coming along.

“I liked what I saw again today,” Pletcher said. “He’s full of himself; he’s feeling good.”

Pletcher had his other two Derby entrants head out during the 8:30 special training period. Patch, with exercise rider Isabelle Bourez up, galloped a mile and a quarter. So did Tapwrit (with Silvio Pioli), though he also spent a bit of time standing in the gate.

Later in the morning just after 11 o’clock at the Derby draw in the Aristides Lounge in the track’s renovated second floor, the Pletcher threesome drew posts five (Always Dreaming), 16 (Tapwrit) and 20 (Patch).

Pletcher offered opinions on his three charge’s positions:
(Always Dreaming -- Five)  “It’s fine. Ideally, I’d have liked to have been a little farther out, but he won the Florida Derby from the four, so that says something. In the end, we’re good with it.”
(Tapwrit – 16) “Love the post for him. He’ll do fine from there. That’s been a good starting spot in the past. We’re glad to have it.” (Four horses have won the Kentucky Derby from post 16 – Animal Kingdom (2011); Monarchos (2001); Charismatic (1999) and Thunder Gulch (1995).
(Patch – 20) – “We’re OK with it. There’s nothing outside to bother him, so that’s good. He’s been a good gate horse and I don’t see any problems. I’d rather have it than have the one.”

BATTLE OF MIDWAY – WinStar Farm and Don Alberto Stable’s Santa Anita Derby (G1) runner-up Battle of Midway galloped 1 ½ miles under regular exercise rider Edgar Rodriguez Wednesday morning.

“He’s been in the paddock every day and I stood him twice in the gate already,” Hall of Fame trainer Jerry Hollendorfer said. “Today he just went in the paddock and galloped.”

Pundits have been harsh on the Southern California contenders this year, in large part because of how the Santa Anita Derby played out, with an unusually slow final time (1:51.16, slowest in 60 years) and a final eighth (:13.61), as well as the way the field was bunched up at the finish (the top five were all within two lengths). However, Hollendorfer – who has 7,276 wins to his credit, third all-time and second among active trainers — attributed those stats more to the racing surface than the quality of the entrants.

“They can discount it all they want,” Hollendorfer said. “The Santa Anita Derby has been a great indicator of horses that would run well in the Kentucky Derby and that’s a proven fact. The time was not as fast as usual but the track was off about two seconds, and I got that from Gary Stevens, who thought the track was real slow that day. We thought we ran pretty good considering all that.”

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Four of the past five Kentucky Derby winners were based in Southern California.

**Battle of Midway** drew post 11 later Wednesday morning for the Derby.

“We like our post quite a bit,” Hollendorfer said. “It’s right in the middle. I need to study the Form and talk to Flavien (Prat) before we make a basic plan but it’ll be a rider’s race and we’ll see what happens.”

**CLASSIC EMPIRE/STATE OF HONOR** – There was a big sigh of relief from the Mark Casse team after Kentucky Derby morning-line favorite Classic Empire drew post position 14 for Saturday’s race.

“It’s a good spot,” Casse said. “A couple of key contenders are outside of us, which is kind of nice.”

Morning line odds maker Mike Battaglia installed Classic Empire as the 4-1 favorite for America’s Greatest Race with regular rider Julien Leparoux aboard.

Casse’s other hope is Florida Derby (GI) runner-up **State of Honor**, who drew post position six and will be ridden by Jose Lezcano.

“I love having State of Honor right outside **Always Dreaming** (who drew post five),” Casse said.

Both Casse colts galloped 1 ½ miles Wednesday morning and schooled in the gate.

**FAST AND ACCURATE** – Stabled at Churchill Downs for the first time this spring after shipping over from nearby Trackside Louisville on Tuesday afternoon, **Fast and Accurate** had a fluid gallop shortly after 8:30 a.m. with trainer Mike Maker observing. The son of Maker-trained champion Hansen — ninth in the 2012 Kentucky Derby (GI) — went 1 1/2 miles and promptly returned to Barn 27.

He is owned by Kendall Hansen and Skychai Racing, co-owners of his sire, as well as Sand Dollar Stable and Olympic gold medal-earning alpine ski racer Bode Miller.

“It’s great for Kendall to have a son of Hansen in the Derby,” Maker said. “He put so much into Hansen and tried to support him as a stallion. It means a lot.”

Gifted with tactical speed like his sire, the gray colt drew well in post three and was assigned 50-1 morning-line odds.

“I’m not too worried about stuff you have no control over, but I’m pleased with it,” Maker said.

**GIRVIN** – After significant negative buzz swirled around Brad Grady’s Louisiana Derby (GII) winner **Girvin** and his much-publicized quarter crack and postponed final work, Churchill Downs racing fans got to see the son of Tale of Ekati for the first time Wednesday morning. After shipping in late Tuesday afternoon to Barn 33, he hit the track and impressed onlookers in an easy mile gallop at 6:30 under former jockey Rosie Napravnik, assistant to husband/trainer Joe Sharp.

“We like to keep him on his regular schedule and that’s about what time he usually goes out every day,” Sharp said. “He galloped well, like he always does, and I was happy.”

The multiple GII winner landed in post position seven and will be ridden by Hall of Fame jockey Mike Smith for the first time. Smith landed the mount after Brian Hernandez, Jr. opted for McCraken. Girvin was assigned morning-line odds of 15-1.

“That would have been the post position I would have hand-picked if we were still doing it that way,” Sharp said. “We’re happy with it. I guess with it being a 20-horse field, it’s all the trip anyway and he’s run well inside before. I’d rather have a little less distance to travel than some of the others.”

**GORMLEY/ROYAL MO** – Trainer John Shirreffs followed the same pattern Wednesday morning that he’d used Tuesday when his California-based duo of **Gormley** and **Royal Mo** had made their first appearance at Churchill Downs.

Using a borrowed pony, the conditioner led first Royal Mo to the track at 7:45, then came back to ferry Gormley trackside during the special 8:30 training period.

Shirreffs’ regular exercise rider, Cisco Alvarado, was aboard both colts and sent them around the oval for solid mile and a quarter gallops.

At the Derby draw later in the morning, the Jerry and Ann Moss-owned pair drew assignments. Gormley got post 18 while Royal Mo, an also-eligible, would be assigned Post 20 should he draw in. The 18 draw for Gormley was a bit of a disappointment for Shirreffs.

“We wanted to be in the main gate (one through 14), but what are you going to do,” he said. “We’ve got a very experienced rider (three-time Kentucky Derby winner Victor Espinoza) and he’ll know what to do out there.”

**GUNNEVERA** – Peacock Racing Stable’s **Gunnevera** galloped 1 ½ miles at Churchill Downs Wednesday morning, when he was allowed to roll while finishing up his morning exercise under Victor O’Farrel.

“The horse galloped a mile and a half and the last half-mile he had an open gallop,” said trainer Antonio Sano, who scheduled a paddock schooling session for Wednesday’s first race. “He was very good and arrived back to the barn fine. The horse is 100 percent.”

The son of Dialed In drew No. 10 at Wednesday’s post-position draw for Kentucky Derby 143.
“The post position is good. I said I wanted the middle of the field,” said Sano, whose Fountain of Youth (GII) winner was rated at 15-1 on the morning line.

HENCE/LOOKIN AT LEE/UNTRAPPED - Hall of Fame trainer Steve Asmussen was having mixed emotions shortly after his three Kentucky Derby hopefuls drew posts between one and eight. L and N Racing LLC's Lookin At Lee drew the rail, Mike Langford's Untrapped drew post four and Calumet Farm's Hence drew post eight.

“I didn't want the one hole, but if any horse can handle the one hole in the Kentucky Derby, it's Lookin At Lee,” said Asmussen, who also drew the rail with the Kentucky Oaks hopeful Ever So Clever. “With Untrapped, the four is a bit of a concern because Always Dreaming is just to his outside and he'll probably be the pace horse. The eight for Hence is one of the preferred spots statistically. I think, looking at the stats the last 20 years, the eight, 13 and 16 posts have produced the most in-the-money finishes.”

Earlier in the morning, all three colts returned to the track after walking the shedrow Tuesday and galloped just more than one mile. Lookin At Lee trained early with exercise rider Juan Vargas aboard, while Hence, with Angel Garcia up, and Untrapped, with Vargas up, both galloped during the special 8:30 training session.

Hence was particularly sharp Wednesday morning so Asmussen pushed him a little harder than the other two and had him jog a mile before his gallop.

“Hence is on fire,” Asmussen said. “He's sharp, very sharp. He can get hot, which is why we did a little more with him off the work than the others, that and the fact that he's had a little more time since his last race. He walked out of the barn and was a little excited, but came back and cooled out beautifully. He is warm, but he just has a very high energy level right now.”

Hence, Lookin At Lee and Untrapped were scheduled to school in the paddock during race four Wednesday.

IRAP – The Blue Grass Stakes (GII) winner had a busy Wednesday morning at Churchill Downs, heading out for the 8:30 special training session with regular exercise rider Tony Romero at the controls.

The husky son of Tiznow completed the morning trifecta – a good gallop of a mile and one eighth, a trip to the paddock and a stand in the gate. Romero said it all went great.

The Doug O'Neill stable is feeling good about their chances come Saturday and they’ll have their guy Mario Gutierrez aboard as they point for their third Derby in six years.

Later that morning they drew post nine in the 20-horse Derby field.

“Just about perfect,” O'Neill said afterward. “We wanted the 10, but nine is next best. The way they load them – one and 11, two and 12 – we wanted to stand in there the least amount of time. But this is next best. We’re very happy with it.”

IRISH WAR CRY – Isabelle de Tomaso’s Irish War Cry galloped 1 5/8 miles under exercise rider David Nava Wednesday morning at Churchill Downs.

“He was a little bit more settled this morning,” said trainer Graham Motion, whose Kentucky Derby hopeful arrived from Fair Hills Training Center in Northeast Maryland late Monday afternoon.

The son of Curlin drew No. 17 at Wednesday’s post-position draw.

“Animal Kingdom was 16, so I can’t be disappointed with 17,” said Motion, who visited the Churchill Downs winner’s circle in 2011 after Animal Kingdom captured the Derby from No. 16. “It can be done from out there. I’m happy enough with it.”

Irish War Cry, who won the Wood Memorial (GII) at Aqueduct last time out, was rated fourth on the morning line at 6-1.

J BOYS ECHO – The Albaugh family was on hand at Wednesday’s Kentucky Derby draw, watching their colt J Boys Echo draw post position 13 for the “Run for the Roses.”

“Thirteen is a lucky number,” trainer Dale Romans said. “It’s a good spot to be in. We just didn’t want the one or 20 post. We have horses on both sides of us so, if given the option, we couldn’t have hand picked a better spot.”

The Gotham (GIII) winner will be ridden in Saturday’s race by Luis Saez.

J Boys Echo galloped 1 ½ miles Wednesday morning at 8:30 with Tammy Fox aboard.

McCRAKEN -- Whitham Thoroughbreds' McCraken galloped a mile and half after the morning renovation break with exercise rider Yoni Orantes aboard for trainer Ian Wilkes.

McCraken had a paddock schooling session Tuesday afternoon that he passed with flying colors.

“He did very well,” Wilkes said. “I was happy with it and that will be his only session there.”

Listed at 5-1 on the morning line and the co-second choice, McCraken drew post position 15.

“It is a very good draw,” Wilkes said. “They were trying to tease us a little bit with the one and 20 still out for the second half of the draw. We have a good spot because there is that small gap between the main gate and the auxiliary gate.”

Hernandez also liked the draw.

“We got a little nervous with the one still out there,” Hernandez said. “I told Ian this was the only time to get nervous because we couldn’t control it. We drew well. I am very happy with it.”

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PRACTICAL JOKE – Klaravich Stables and William H. Lawrence’s Practical Joke once again galloped about 1 1/2 times around the Churchill Downs oval under exercise rider Fernando Rivera during the Kentucky Oaks and Derby training session.

“He did great today,” trainer Chad Brown said. “He just continues to train so well over the surface. He’s just moving smooth and happy. At this point that’s all we can do is bring him in sound and happy. It now gets to the point where things are out of our hands.”

At the Derby post-position draw, Practical Joke landed in post 19.

“I’m disappointed with the draw,” Brown said. “Nineteen is obviously not where we want to be but we’ll just have to work out a trip from there.”

SONNETEER – Calumet Farm’s maiden Sonneteer, who drew post 12 for the Derby, walked the shedrow Wednesday and was scheduled to school in the paddock during the second race. The Midnight Lute colt fired a bullet half-mile workout Monday and jogged Tuesday.

Assistant trainer Julie Clark reported that he was doing “great” and said trainer Keith Desormeaux would arrive later Wednesday.

Three-time Kentucky Derby-winning rider Kent Desormeaux will be aboard Sonneteer and was happy with the draw.

“It is good,” Desormeaux said. “He is just going to drop out to the back anyway.”

THUNDER SNOW – Godolphin Racing’s homebred UAE Derby (Group II) winner Thunder Snow cantered one mile during the Oaks and Derby training session under Godolphin exercise rider Daragh O’Donohoe.

“The good thing about this horse is he handled the dirt really well,” trainer Saeed bin Suroor said on his first morning at Churchill Downs this week. “I talked to his work rider and he’s so happy with him and that’s good for Saturday. The horse was doing really well in Dubai before he came here but it is not easy to send a horse to the Kentucky Derby unless you know he has the class. I know it’s a tough race, the best horses in the world, but our horse has the class.”

Godolphin waited to make a final decision whether to contest the Kentucky Derby until after he arrived at Godolphin Stables in Newmarket, England from Dubai early last week.

“Sheikh Mohammed made the decision to keep our options open between the English Guineas (Saturday’s 2000 Guineas at Newmarket Racebook), or French or Irish or Kentucky Derbies. I suggested we wait to see how the horse traveled from Dubai to England and that’s the reason why we waited. When he traveled and he worked well, that’s when Sheikh Mohammed gave me the clear to run him in the Kentucky Derby. The horse is doing really well and we’re looking for a good result.”

In medication news, Bin Suroor confirmed that Thunder Snow will race on Lasix for the first time in the Derby.

Thunder Snow drew post position two for Saturday’s Derby.

“We’re happy with that,” bin Suroor said of the post position draw. “We need to be handy in the race. The horse has a good turn of foot and he can be there and kick readily and that is the plan.”

KENTUCKY DERBY FIELD

The field for the Kentucky Derby with jockey and morning-line odds from the rail out, is: Lookin At Lee (Corey Lanerie, 30-1), Thunder Snow (IRE) (Christophe Soumillon, 20-1), Fast and Accurate (Channing Hill, 50-1), Untrapped (Ricardo Santana Jr., 30-1), Always Dreaming (John Velazquez, 5-1), State of Honor (Jose Lezcano, 30-1), Girvin (Mike Smith, 15-1), Hence (Florent Geroux, 15-1), Irap (Mario Gutierrez, 20-1), Gunnevera (Javier Castellano, 15-1), Battle of Midway (Flavien Prat, 30-1), Sonneteer (Kent Desormeaux, 50-1), J Boys Echo (Luis Saez, 20-1), Classic Empire (Julien Leparoux, 4-1), McCraken (Brian Hernandez Jr., 5-1), Tapwrit (Jose Ortiz, 20-1), Irish War Cry (Rajiv Maragh, 6-1), Gormley (Victor Espinoza, 15-1), Practical Joke (Joel Rosario, 20-1) and Patch (Tyler Gaffalione, 30-1). Also-eligibles: Royal Mo (Gary Stevens, 20-1) and Master Plan (John Velazquez, 50-1). All starters will carry 126 pounds.

KENTUCKY OAKS NOTES

ABEL TASMAN – China Horse Club and Clearsky Farms’ Santa Anita Oaks (GI) runner-up Abel Tasman galloped 1 3/8 miles under regular exercise rider Dana Barnes.

“It was very nice and she’s settled in great,” said Jimmy Barnes, lead assistant to Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert. “We’re looking forward to running her.”

The threat of rain on Oaks Day prompted questions about how the Quality Road filly would respond to a muddy surface.

“I don’t know what kind of weather we’re going to get but we’re ready for anything,” Barnes said. “You really don’t know until they get out there but it seems like with a sloppy track here horses do come from off the pace, from what I’ve seen. As long as the track’s fair we’ll be fine. She’s trained over muddy tracks so it’s not a factor.”

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DADDYS LIL DARLING – Normandy Farm’s Daddys Lil Darling jogged Wednesday morning, two days out from the Kentucky Oaks, for trainer Kenny McPeek.

With regular jockey Robby Albarado sidelined because of injury, Julien Leparoux picked up the mount on the Ashland (GI) runner-up.

“I think she ran very good in the Ashland,” Leparoux said. “I’m excited about the mount. Of course, it’s a shame with what happened to Robby but it’s a good thing he’s going to heal and be back with us soon.”

The daughter of Scat Daddy is expected to gallop Thursday morning at 5:45.

EVER SO CLEVER – Clearview Farm’s Ever So Clever schooled in the gate and then galloped a mile under regular exercise rider Angel Garcia.

“She’s doing very well,” trainer Steve Asmussen said. “The cooler air has put a little pep in everyone’s step. They all stepped out of the barn on their toes this morning.”

FARRELL – It was another routine day for high-energy Kentucky Oaks (GI) morning line 5-1 third-choice Farrell. The three-time GII winner exited Barn 30 at 8:35 a.m. under Antonio Ramos, escorted by Sara Tittle on a pony. Trainer Wayne Catalano and longtime assistant Fernando Canteria followed the Coffeepot Stables homebred astern with haste.

The daughter of Malibu Moon and half-sister to 2015 Kentucky Derby (GI) alum Carpe Diem stood in the paddock, stood in the gate and the finally galloped 1 3/4 miles on the main track.

“Everything was great again today,” Catalano said. “We’re happy.”

Jockey Channing Hill, son-in-law to Catalano, also was in attendance. After stating that he would prefer post seven or eight prior to the draw, he was pleased with receiving the former.

“Hopefully it’s all coming together,” Hill said. “I’m really happy with the post. I’m just going to let her break and run into the first turn. I was happy Paradise Woods drew inside (post four) of us and I’m fine with Miss Sky Warrior being outside (post 10). We have an eighth of a mile going into the turn, so I think they’ll already be in front of us if that’s the case. If my filly decides to be forward and we’re not ‘rocket-shipping’, then I’ll stay where I’m at. They’re really going to have to run into the turn to outrun me. They’ll have to use horse to get there and I know my filly will come back to me or she’ll just outrun them. My post is good because I can apply pressure and I can avoid pressure at the same time.”

A bit of a “hot” filly who is dominant around the barn and requires two handlers nearly at all times, Farrell may find the Kentucky Oaks Day crowd — which can hover in excess of 100,000 people — to be one of her challenges. Hill remains confident that his charge can handle it.

“She’s the boss,” Hill said. “She was pumped up when she broke her maiden before a pretty small (Churchill Downs) crowd and she’s acted exactly the same before every start, no matter how many people are there. I think it’s just her. She’s just ready to go. I have been married long enough to know that you just drop your hands, talk to them nicely and try not to fire her up any more than she is.”

JORDAN’S HENNY – Erv Woolsey and Ralph Kinder’s Jordan’s Henny walked the shedrow at trainer Mike Tomlinson’s barn Wednesday morning.

“We changed things up this morning and gave her a walk day,” Tomlinson said. “We looked at the weather (with rain forecast the next two days) and it looks like she may have to run in it so she may as well train in it. She will gallop a mile and a half tomorrow and go to the gate and the paddock.”

Tomlinson has his horses housed in Barn 1, which is located by the half-mile pole. From there, Tomlinson has a good view of the morning activity on the track.

“I have been watching the Oaks fillies,” Tomlinson said. “Miss Sky Warrior is a big, handsome filly and Salty has been, well, salty. She has been training really well and so has Paradise Woods.

“Unless things change, I know my filly will show up. Miss Sky Warrior only beat her a half-length in the Davona Dale (GII) and my filly gave her all she wanted that day.”

LOCKDOWN – Juddmonte Farms’ Lockdown walked the shedrow Wednesday after completing her Oaks preparations with a three-furlong blowout in :35 Tuesday.

“She looks good,” trainer Bill Mott said.

One day after drawing post two for the Oaks, Mott was happy with the post.

“I think it’s a pretty good spot,” Mott said. “The fastest way around the track is the inside.”
MISS SKY WARRIOR – Streaking multiple graded-stakes winner Miss Sky Warrior galloped a mile under Aurelio Gomez.

Escorted by trainer Kelly Breen on a pony and observed by Breen on horseback during her gallop, the Arlene's Sun Star Stable-owned Gazelle (GII) winner is joined in the barn by fellow Breen-trained 3-year-old Derek’s Smile, who is slated to take on elders in the Twin Spires Turf Sprint (GIII) earlier on the Oaks card.

“It’s nice to have a couple horses here with her,” Breen said. “They enjoy it. When she shipped into New York (for the Gazelle), we shipped into someone else’s barn and she liked being around them. They like the action and seeing horses walking around them. They really thrive on camaraderie and entertainment.”

MOPOTISM – The Uncle Mo filly Mopotism was out with the rest of the Derby/Oaks runners taking advantage of the special 8:30 training period for a mile gallop under veteran rider Amir Cedeno.

Trainer Doug O'Neill, who also had his Derby hopeful Irap out during the same session, did double duty watching both go through their exercises.

“She’s feeling good,” said Cedeno, who has worked for the O’Neill outfit for about five years and whose history goes back to working with Hall of Famer Laz Barrera and galloping a mighty steed named Affirmed.

Mopotism will break from post three Friday under Mario Gutierrez in the 143rd edition of the Kentucky Oaks (GI).

PARADISE WOODS – Richard Mandella, the California-based Hall of Fame conditioner, had his filly star Paradise Woods out for a solid gallop Wednesday morning at 7:30 with his assistant trainer and exercise rider Alex Bisono in the saddle.

The Union Rags filly went a strong mile and a quarter in her gallop and both rider and trainer seemed pleased.

“She went well,” Mandella said. “She got some of her frustrations out today. She really wanted to go yesterday, but we held her back. Today we let her go some. It was good for her.”

Paradise Woods was scheduled for a paddock schooling session with the third race Wednesday and the sixth race Thursday.

SAILOR'S VALENTINE – It was another low-key day for Ashland (GI) winner Sailor’s Valentine as the 3-year-old filly continues to fly under the radar for trainer Eddie Kenneally and owners Semaphore Racing LLC and Homewrecker Racing LLC. She was assigned 30-1 morning-line odds for the Kentucky Oaks (GI).

On Wednesday, the gray filly left Barn 31 at 8:30 a.m. with exercise rider Kelly Wheeler aboard and trainer Kenneally on a pony and galloped 1 1/2 miles.

“Everything’s perfect and I’m really happy,” Kenneally said. “I really couldn’t be happier, actually. She’s doing as well as she can be.”

Like many Mizzen Mast offspring, Sailor’s Valentine has shown ample speed, but displayed marked improvement stalking while attempting two-turn dirt company for the first time last out in the Ashland at Keeneland. In the Oaks, she drew favorably for such a style in post eight.

“Ideally, we think stalking will be her running style going forward in two-turn dirt races,” Kenneally said. “She has natural speed, but she’s content to lay off leaders and relaxes beautifully, which was key in the Ashland. She wasn’t quite as relaxed as a 2-year-old last fall, but she has matured. Whoever is on the lead, depending on how quick they’re going, hopefully she relaxes nicely behind them.

“Like a lot of Mizzen Masts, she has a great constitution. She continues to eat and nothing fazes her and she’s just tough. He’s not a commercial sire, but they’re hard-knocking, sturdy and sound horses. She’s also a big, pretty filly and has a nice female side, as well, which is why she was maybe a little more expensive than (Mizzen Mast’s) usually are.”

SALTY/SUMMER LUCK – Gulfstream Park Oaks (GII) winner Salty galloped 1 ½ miles and visited the gate Wednesday morning at 8:30 for trainer Mark Casse.

The daughter of Quality Road will attempt to claim the opening leg of the Oaks-Derby double for Casse.

“Let’s just go one day at a time,” Casse joked. “She’s doing well and we’re excited for Friday.”

One of Salty’s co-owners, Chris Baccari, typically doesn’t find himself in the position to have one of the horses he owns in a premier race. Baccari, along with longtime partner Chester Prince, bred Salty as part of their operation with Baccari Bloodstock.

“I think it’s a great feeling to have a filly in the Oaks,” Baccari said. “Salty went through some growing pains when she was younger and we held onto her to make sure she developed more. I used to race a lot more than I should have, so I’ve since cut back and sell most of the horses we breed. I thought this was one horse to give it a go with.”

Salty will break from post position 14 with morning line odds of 6-1.

Summer Luck, who was most recently fifth in the Ashland, galloped 1 ½ miles Wednesday and still hopes to sneak into the race with a defection. The scratch time for the Oaks is 4 p.m. Thursday.
TEQUILITA – Dorothy Alexander Matz’s Tequilita was sent to the Churchill Downs track Wednesday morning for some light exercise under Jo Robinson.

“She backed up and jogged two miles. We took it real easy today,” said Michael Matz, who trains the Kentucky Oaks hopeful for his wife.

Dorothy Alexander Matz bred Tequilita, as well as her dam Sangrita, who won the seven-furlong Chilukki (GII) at Churchill Downs in 2006.

Tequilita was sired by Union Rags, the 2012 Belmont Stakes winner trained by Michael Matz.

“This is a real family affair,” he said.

The Union Rags-Sangrita mating turned out to be a match made in heaven.

“Her dam won going shorter. She was a big mare but short-coupled. I felt like we needed to stretch her out a little bit, and I knew he also had speed. I just thought it would be a good physical combo and when you looked at it on paper, the cross was good too,” Dorothy Alexander Matz said. “I’ve always been a big believer that Union Rags would make a nice sire. He has a great female side. He was a very sound horse, so I said, ‘What the heck, why not try it?’ ”

Michael Matz said Union Rags’ success as a stallion was gratifying.

“It’s certainly gratifying. When Lane’s End came up to vet him, the veterinarian said, ‘I'll tell you one thing, this will be the soundest horse Lane’s End ever got off the track.’ That made me feel good,” he said. “I’m just happy he’s doing well as a stallion.”

He also trained Sangrita, who won three of eight starts.

“I’d say her mother was just a little bit more high-strung than Tequilita,” he said.

Like her dam, Tequilita became a Grade II winner at seven furlongs by capturing the Forward Gal last winter. Although she didn’t go on to win the 1 1/16-mile Gulfstream Park Oaks (GII), she did show her trainer two-turn promise with her second-place finish behind Salty.

“I think she was a little bit anxious going into the first turn. Hopefully, now she’ll relax a little bit more,” he said.

VEXATIOUS – Calumet Farm’s Vexatious galloped 1 ½ miles under exercise rider Freddy Quevero at the end of training hours, avoiding the hubbub of the Oaks and Derby training session. The full sister to multiple Grade I winner Creative Cause and last year’s Belmont Stakes runner-up Destin will be ridden Friday by Hall of Fame jockey Kent Desormeaux, who has been aboard for all five of her starts.

“We’ve had some success over the years,” said trainer Neil Drysdale, who teamed with Desormeaux to win the 2000 Derby with Fusaichi Pegasus. “He’s riding well. He was available to ride her in her first start at Del Mar and we’ve just left it at that.”

Drysdale has one other Triple Crown win, the 1992 Belmont Stakes with A.P. Indy, while Desormeaux has three Kentucky Derby victories and seven Triple Crown wins overall.

WICKED LICK – Lee Mauberret’s Wicked Lick galloped 1 ½ miles after the morning renovation break with exercise rider Leo Garcia aboard for trainer Brendan Walsh.

Wicked Lick, listed at 30-1 on the morning line for the Oaks, will break from post position nine under Brian Hernandez Jr.

Hernandez Jr. has ridden Wicked Lick in six of her eight starts.

“She is a hard-trying filly and is always right there,” Hernandez said. “The one time she was off the board with me (a fourth in the Rachel Alexandra), that was pilot error. I got pushed out wider but she came back running. She tries every time.”

Hernandez was aboard for the filly’s first two starts that were on grass.

“She started on the grass and we wanted to run in a stake at Kentucky Downs, but she didn’t get in,” Hernandez said. “On dirt, she has been getting better each race. She has been second to (Oaks rival) Farrell twice and that is nothing to sneeze at.”

Hernandez will be one of many riders attempting an Oaks-Derby double this weekend. He also has the Derby assignment on McCraken.

Seven riders have won the Oaks and Derby in the same year with the most recent sweep coming in 2009 when Calvin Borel won the Oaks on Rachel Alexandra and the Derby on Mine That Bird.

“That would be some pretty exclusive company,” Hernandez said of the riders who have done that. Six of the seven are in the Hall of Fame.

KENTUCKY OAKS FIELD

The field for the Longines Kentucky Oaks with jockey and morning-line odds from the rail out, is: Ever So Clever (Luis Contreras, 20-1), Lockdown (Jose Ortiz, 20-1), Mopotism (Mario Gutierrez, 20-1), Paradise Woods (Flavien Prat, 5-2), Jordan’s Henny (Joe Rocco, 30-1), Vexatious (Kent Desormeaux, 20-1), Farrell (Channing Hill, 5-1), Sailor’s Valentine (Corey Lanerie, 30-1), Wicked Lick (Brian Hernandez Jr., 30-1), Miss Sky Warrior (Paco Lopez, 9-2), Tequilita (Luis Saez, 20-1), Daddys Lil Darling (Julien Leparoux, 20-1), Abel Tasman (Mike Smith, 5-1) and Salty (Joel Rosario, 6-1). Also-Eligible: Summer Luck (Javier Castellano, 30-1). All starters will carry 121 pounds.

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IN CASE YOU MISSED IT …

DERBYGIVES.COM 50/50 RAFFLE – The Churchill Downs Incorporated Foundation will host a trio of nationwide online 50/50 charitable raffle drawings on Thurby (May 4), Kentucky Oaks Day (May 5) and Kentucky Derby Day (May 6) to help raise money for its charitable initiatives, including Thoroughbred aftercare; arts and educational opportunities for stable area employees; and breast and ovarian cancer research and prevention. Raffle tickets are on sale now at www.DerbyGives.com for $5 in jurisdictions where online wagering is permitted. The winner will receive half of each day’s sale and the other half will go toward the charitable initiative. The Churchill Downs Incorporated Foundation has donated more than $2.2 million and thousands of volunteer hours to charitable partners, including more than $740,000 for education and prevention of breast cancer and more than $140,000 to Thoroughbred retirement aftercare.

ENHANCED APP FOR ON-TRACK GUESTS – Churchill Downs Racetrack has launched a new version of its on-track mobile app to provide guests with additional features and information to enhance their experience at the racetrack and The Kentucky Derby presented by Yum! Brands. The new features offer fans easy access to equine, racing and wagering information, as well as up-to-date information about each day’s events and news. Additionally, guests can wager from their mobile device; find parking and get directions to seating locations; skip food and beverage lines in seats where Express Pickup or In-Seat Delivery is offered; and buy, manage and scan mobile admission tickets. The updated app is available at iTunes at https://appsto.re/us/USS6bb.i and the Google Play Store at https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.venuenext.churchilldowns&hl=en.

WORKOUT VIDEOS

Wednesday, May 3, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sX3Y5sKbcxA

Tuesday, May 2, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8ZZUYbTc2A

Monday, May 1, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMw0voefXts

Sunday, April 30, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8ZZUYbTc2A

Saturday, April 29, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kxsPlKI4Uo

Friday, April 28, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRX3vhe1k6k

Thursday, April 27, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFEIUxoKKLs

Wednesday, April 26, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwvX6Fl1Hc4

Tuesday, April 25, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MULqY6_vM0

Monday, April 24, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uF3Fs4JUYkM&ct=1s

Sunday, April 23, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40LNE7itWks

Saturday, April 22, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97zKsR_qh0U

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PAST PERFORMANCES COURTESY OF BRISNET.COM

Kentucky Derby:

Kentucky Oaks:

Both Derby & Oaks:

TWINSPIRES.COM “TURF TALK” WITH GARY YOUNG

Tuesday, May 2, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycqU1bGDf8o

Monday, May 1, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yS0cKMHPIfg

Sunday, April 30, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp8noanH8_M&t=2s

Saturday, April 29, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_uQP4xfWo10

Friday, April 28, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPe2aWoz_to&feature=youtu.be&a

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