DERBY AND OAKS HOPEFULS DODGE THE RAIN THURSDAY MORNING

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, May 4, 2017) – Several conditioners opted to move Thursday morning training sessions up a bit to beat what was forecast to be a rainy morning.

Instead, the most serious precipitation was a light to steady drizzle that sent one no scurrying for cover.

KENTUCKY DERBY NOTES

ALWAYS DREAMING/MASTER PLAN/PATCH/TAPWRIT – As he has for the previous three days, Florida Derby (GI) winner Always Dreaming led off the Todd Pletcher barn Derby efforts by going trackside at 5:50 a.m. with exercise rider Nick Bush attached and a special set of “draw reins” in place.

And as he has for the past few days, Always Dreaming responded positively during his nine-furlong morning effort, head low and stride long.

“He’s good,” Bush said after the exercise as he headed back to Barn 40. “We had lots of traffic out there this morning – they were coming by all around me – and he never flinched. If they have to rate him Saturday, I think he’ll be good.”

Later during the special Derby/Oaks training period at 8:30, the remainder of the Pletcher crew galloped a mile and three-eighths. Master Plan, who is a Derby also-eligible, had Bush on board. Patch was handled by Isabelle Bourez. And Tapwrit was piloted by Silvio Pioli.

As Pletcher readies his charges for his 17th Kentucky Derby whirl, some folks see his Derby participation over the years not in terms of achievements, but in terms of losses. After 16 Derbies and 45 starters, he shows only one win (with two seconds and three thirds), a fact that some have chosen to knock him for. They see failure, not accomplishments.

“The record is what it is,” Pletcher said. “The Derby is the goal for many of our young horses. It will continue to be the goal. It’s like a shooter in basketball: Just because they’re not going in all the time, you don’t stop shooting. The only way you’re going to make a basket is to shoot. Forget what your percentage is, keep shooting.”

At age 49, the trainer has accomplished things that no one in the history of the Thoroughbred game has even come close to previously.

He has been awarded an unprecedented seven Eclipse Awards. No other trainer has won more than four. He has won a record $336 million-plus in purses. His nearest pursuer in that category is more than $60 million behind. He has sent out more than 4,200 winners. He has averaged 250 winners a year for more than a decade. He has trained 10 Eclipse Award winners. He has won virtually every American race of importance, often several times. He has won dozens of race meet titles.

His records of accomplishment are backboned by his consistency. Look at his output at the major tracks where he races each year (stats, through to May 1 of this year, provided by Equibase):

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<th>Track</th>
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<td>Monmouth Park</td>
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Yet for all of these marvelous professional accomplishments, come Derby time it is brought up that he won the race in 2010 with Super Saver – and that’s all
But in the case of the Derby, the bald numbers don’t tell the true tale. Yes, in 16 attempts at winning the Run for the Roses, he has started 45 horses in the race. And yes, one could say he’s 1-for-45. But know this too about those attempts: Twice he has run five horses in a Derby; three times he has run four; twice he has run three, and six times he has run two. So doing the numbers there shows that Pletcher has run against himself 27 times, meaning that in 60% of his Derby starts his horses had virtually no chance to win. He also has run more than a few horses that even an average handicapper can tell really doesn’t belong. But he’s done it because he knows what it means to the men and women who pay the bills.

“Certainly,” he said, “more than once we’ve run horses in the Derby that really didn’t stand much chance to win it. But it’s hard to tell an owner who has that chance not to do it. They may never see that opportunity again.”

Translation: There’s yet to be found a cure for Derby Fever. And stars in the eyes don’t allow for clear vision.

There is yet another way to look at the Pletcher’s Derby quests. An argument easily can be made that the most important yardstick for measuring a trainer’s value to his owner is in how much that trainer has increased the value of his horse. En route to starting all his horses in the Kentucky Derby, Pletcher invariably has increased their value along the way. In a well-researched story in Daily Racing Form (March 24, 2017), Jay Privman chronicled all the major prep races Pletcher has won getting his horses into the Derby, races that have serious purse rewards and equally serious value as “stud and career makers.” He has won just about all the major Derby preps and often he has won them several times. Along the way to winning them and thus getting a chance to compete in the Derby, there are lots of monetary prizes to be had and honors and accolades of prestige and value to be reaped – no matter how your horse does in the Derby.

Perhaps a better way yet to look at the issue is that Pletcher is 1-for-16 in the Kentucky Derby. Now that’s not beat-your-chest material, but given the difficulty of capturing America’s greatest race (something accomplished by only a fraction of the thousands of trainers who have tried), it isn’t exactly chopped liver, either.

Nobody knows that better than Pletcher.

“If you’d have told me when I started out,” he said, “that when I was 49 years old I’d have won a Kentucky Derby, I’d have signed on for that right on the spot.”

And, obviously, the figures and the facts tell still another tale: He isn’t done yet.

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 immediately after the track opened at 5:45 a.m.

“We avoided the rain and we went to the paddock and then we galloped and then we came back to the barn,” Hall of Fame trainer Jerry Hollendorfer said.

The probability of more rain leading up to Derby Day isn’t a worry for Battle of Midway, who broke his maiden at first asking over a sealed, wet-fast surface at Santa Anita Park in January.

“We’ve won on an off track and I think we’re one of the few horses that has run on one so that maybe doesn’t concern us as much as some people,” Hollendorfer said.

Battle of Midway likely will hit the track at 5:30 a.m. Friday “unless I decide to stand him in the gate one last time,” Hollendorfer said. “I’ve already stood him twice but maybe I’ll give him a reminder. [Posts] one and 11 go first but they load them fast. The boys on the gate crew here are good. But the start is an important thing and I’d like to get away from the gate good.”

Battle of Midway will break from post position 11.

CLASSIC EMPIRE/STATE OF HONOR – Classic Empire, the 4-1 morning line favorite in Saturday’s Kentucky Derby, along with longshot stablemate State of Honor, galloped 1 ½ miles Thursday morning for trainer Mark Casse.

Classic Empire will be ridden by jockey Julien Leparoux, who will be riding in his 10th Derby in the past 11 years.

“The first Derby I watched was in 2002 on TV in France,” Leparoux said. “Since then I was hooked. The first Derby I actually saw live was when Smarty Jones won in 2004. It’s an amazing experience and has been a dream from then on to win the race.”

Leparoux is no stranger to riding the favorite in the Kentucky Derby, doing so in 2011 with Dialed In.

“It’s always better to have the favorite than the longshot,” Leparoux said with a smile. “I think Classic Empire can put me into the race more than Dialed In. With Dialed In we were so far back and took a lot of dirt that he didn’t like. If we can avoid the traffic we have a chance to win.”

State of Honor has been Casse’s dark horse throughout the past few months, only attempting the dirt for the first time when he shipped to Palm Meadows in South Florida over the winter.

“We treated State of Honor like he was a new horse,” assistant trainer Norm Casse said. “Horses that are based on synthetic need time to acclimate to the dirt. We thought he was a true dirt horse since the winter.”

State of Honor will attempt to be only the third Canadian bred to win the Kentucky Derby, first since Sunny’s Halo in 1983.

FAST AND ACCURATE – Trainer Mike Maker continues to show signs of confidence in his improving gray colt Fast and Accurate, who left Barn 27 early Thursday morning at 6 o’clock to avoid the forecast wet weather.
The son of Hansen -- owned by Kendall Hansen, Skychai Racing, Sand Dollar Stable and Bode Miller -- galloped one mile toward his first run since taking the Spiral (GIII) at Turfway Park on March 25. The victory was his third consecutive win after losing his first three races by a total of 25 1/4 lengths, including a fourth in the $101,000 Mark McDermott Stakes at Presque Isle Downs at second asking. He broke his maiden in his fourth try, a $30,000 Turfway claiming event.

“When he started his career you knew the talent was there, but he wasn’t quite ready to run,” Maker said. “We wanted to capitalize on the Pennsylvania-bred program and pushed him to try to get into a stakes and it likely wasn’t right for him. At the time, Kendall wanted to get as many winners for Hansen as he could, so to separate them, we put him in for $30,000 and, with his form, we weren’t too concerned about anyone putting up the money (to claim him).”

In his first start off the win, he wired a 7 1/2-furlong turf stakes at Gulfstream Park, the $60,000 Sage Of Monticello five weeks prior to his Spiral triumph.

“In the starter stakes at Gulfstream, the deadline was 11 a.m. and the quarantine (from Turfway) had literally just lifted,” Maker said. “It was a last-second entry and we scrambled to get transportation to Gulfstream. We got there exactly 24 hours before the race and still managed to win. So, that win was better than it looked. We kept him at Gulfstream after that and started to see a lot of positive change in him and we saw that in the Spiral.

“We felt he had to be close to the front that day at Turfway to be effective, so he was close to a pretty hot pace,” Maker added. “That and he does have a tendency to wait on horses, so I feel like he could have won by a lot more if he wanted to. He was very professional and does have a lot of stamina for a Hansen.”

Critics appear to be quick to discredit Spiral winners with turf form, as the Turfway centerpiece is contested over a synthetic surface and has been won by grass horses in recent years. Last year, the Maker-trained Oscar Nominated won the Spiral before finishing 17th of 20 in the Kentucky Derby (GI) and has gone on to strictly be a turf horse.

“I would discount comparisons,” Maker said. “Oscar Nominated was a Kitten’s Joy and though he trained well over the dirt, Hansen is a whole different ballgame and I think Fast and Accurate could go either way. He’s trained well over the dirt and I don’t think it’s the surface that could beat him as much as the competition. These are good horses and he has to step up and run a big race.”

GIRVIN – Just as the dark clouds of controversy began to lift from the Joe Sharp barn, the literal ones closed in Thursday morning. Light rain began to fall just before Brad Grady’s Kentucky Derby (GI) hopeful Girvin made his way to the track during the special 8:30-8:45 a.m. Derby and Oaks training session.

After going out much earlier Wednesday, his first day at the track after shipping in from Keeneland, the dark bay colt made his first high-exposure appearance in front of racing fans since a quarter crack was discovered April 18 and subsequently treated. The son of Tale of Ekati jogged one mile clockwise and then turned around to break off from his pony and gallop one mile counterclockwise. He appeared relaxed and unbothered.

Assistant trainer and former jockey Rosie Napravnik was aboard, while Sharp was on his nearly white pony, Freckles. Unable to see the gallop through the infield apparatus when Girvin was on the frontside, Sharp backed his pony up to watch that portion on Churchill Downs’ ‘Big Board.’ Promptly walking back to Barn 33 after pulling up, the Louisiana Derby (GII) winner handled everything professionally.

“He’s coming in great and doing very well,” Sharp said. “I was very happy with how he trained today. The shoes he has on now are the shoes he’s going to race in and they’re polyflex glue-on shoes. Today was our first day training in those, so we’re glad to see he responded well to them and he should move forward.”

“He feels excellent,” Napravnik said. “Today was the first day that he went with the new shoes and he felt great. I think there was a difference with the shoe. I definitely felt a difference and he’s really doing well.”

Napravnik, who has been the regular rider for Girvin in the mornings since his career commenced, touched on the media exposure that always has seemed to follow her career — first as a high-profile Breeders’ Cup-winning and multiple track title-holding rider and now as an assistant and wife to Sharp.

“The way I feel about it is ‘better him than me,’ because I’m sure a few members of the media can tell you how much it was my specialty,” she deadpanned before transitioning into a more serious tone. “I’m really glad Joe is getting the attention and the credit. I didn’t really ever mind media, but my thing is I always like to stay in my routine and it can get a little overwhelming. Overall, the media has been great to me and they’re really being great to Joe. Honestly, I feel like I have been there done that and I’m glad for Joe to be getting the recognition he earned.”

GORMLEY/ROYAL MO – Trainer John Shirreffs and his two Kentucky Derby hopefuls — Gormley and also-eligible Royal Mo — stuck to their Churchill Downs routine Thursday morning, with “Mo” going trackside at 7:30 and Gormley, who is named for an English artist and sculptor, going off for an exercise during the special Derby/Oaks training period at 8:30.

Shirreffs led both horses trackside aboard a borrowed pony and had his man Cisco Alvarado in the saddle for both trips. The colts also followed a same pattern on the track, galloping around the big Churchill oval twice. Alvarado gave both a thumbs up afterward, noting that Gormley especially seemed to take kindly to the surface.
Shirreffs, who won Derby 131 in 2005 with 50-1 shot Giacomo, indicated that he’d go early Friday morning with his charges when the track opens at 5:30 for Derby and Oaks runners only.

GUNNEVERA – Peacock Racing Stable’s Gunnevera galloped 1 ¼ miles under exercise rider Victor O’Farrel Thursday morning at Churchill Downs.

“He went very good, very quiet,” trainer Antonio Sano said. “He’s ready.”

The son of Dialed In was purchased at the 2015 Keeneland September Sale for $16,000, the lowest sales price of all Kentucky Derby entrants bought at auction.

Sano’s son, Allessandro, tabbed Gunnevera as a colt that figured to perform well in South Florida, where his father’s stable has been based since 2010.

“Every year during sale season, my dad tells me to look over some pedigrees I might like. That year for the September sale, my dad sent me a bunch of horses that he might be interested in, 60 or 70 horses, more or less. I was able to narrow it down to about 20 horses, and Gunnevera was one of them,” the 20-year-old college student said.

“One of the reasons Gunnevera was included in the 20 was because his sire, Dialed In, won the Florida Derby at Gulfstream Park. That caught my attention. Also, Unbridled on the dam’s side is a nice pedigree, so I thought it was worth giving it a shot. He wasn’t on the top of my list. He was one that I thought was worth experimenting with.”

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“I’m currently studying biology, pre-veterinary science, at the University of Central Florida, so hopefully in two years after I finish my undergrad I get to become a veterinarian in vet school,” he said. “I want to work at the track in the barn with my father’s horses.”

HENCE/LOOKIN AT LEE/UNTRAPPED – Hall of Fame trainer Steve Asmussen stuck to the exact schedule he’s had all week with Lookin At Lee going to the track around 7 a.m. and Hence and Untrapped going out at the special 8:30 a.m. training time. All three horses galloped just over a mile and each schooled in the starting gate. They were scheduled to school in the paddock later in the day depending on the weather. Exercise rider Angel Garcia was on Hence, as he has been all week, and Juan Vargas was on the other two.

“Lookin At Lee is in great physical shape. He’s actually very sharp right now. He’s waking up. I think all the excitement has gotten to him and it needed to.”

Lanerie never has been on Lookin At Lee, but he has been watching him all winter.

“I know he’ll be coming late, which is really great for the mile and a quarter distance,” Lanerie said. “Especially after watching the Arkansas Derby, the mile and a quarter is going to be perfect for him. I’m excited to ride him. We just need a good, good trip.”

Untrapped drew post position four and Hence drew post position eight. Asmussen has been equally impressed with how they have been training this week.

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“Untrapped looks beautiful on the racetrack,” Asmussen said. “I love the way they're all traveling.”

IRAP – Like several of the other Derby and Oaks outfits, trainer Doug O’Neill chose to get out early with his Kentucky Derby 143 colt Irap in an attempt to avoid the heavy rains that were predicted for later in the morning in Louisville. His plan worked as hoped.

The husky Tiznow colt went trackside under Tony Romero at 7:15 with a bit of rain falling, but nothing serious. He had a short visit to the gate, then galloped a mile and one-half to finish up his morning duties.

O’Neill was happy to have missed any sort of heavy soaking, as well as with the effort put forth by his Blue Grass Stakes (GII) winner.

“He’s been doing good all week,” O’Neill said. “He’s getting better and better.”

O’Neill said he’d have his charge out first thing on Friday morning – Oaks Day – when the special training period for Derby and Oaks horses moves up to the 5:30-5:45 slot.

IRISH WAR CRY – Isabelle de Tomaso’s Irish War Cry schooled in the starting gate and galloped 1 5/8 miles under exercise rider David Nava Thursday morning at Churchill Downs.

“He was pretty relaxed. When there’s nobody else on the track, he’s very relaxed. When he gets behind another horse, he’ll get a little bit on the muscle,” trainer Graham Motion said. “I’m glad to see him so relaxed. He’s kind of settled every day. He’s settled in.”

Motion already has enjoyed Kentucky Derby success, having saddled Animal Kingdom for a triumph in the 2011 Run for the Roses. The thrill of visiting the Kentucky Derby winner’s circle was everything that the Cambridge, England-born trainer had expected it to be.

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“And then some. When I set out training I wasn’t necessarily thinking it was something I had to win. To be honest, I was just happy to be a part of it,” he said. “To have won it, you had to pinch yourself a little bit, and to be back here again with one of the favorites, I feel very lucky.”

Animal Kingdom was a late bloomer on the road to the Kentucky Derby, for which he qualified with a triumph in the Spiral Stakes (GIII) over Turfway’s synthetic racing surface.

“In terms of what he’s done, [Irish War Cry] has definitely accomplished more than Animal Kingdom had done to this point,” said Motion, whose Derby winner never had run on dirt prior to his 2 ¼-length Derby tally. “Animal Kingdom just scraped into the Spiral and won the Spiral. That’s how he got here. This horse has already won a couple of stakes races, legitimate Triple Crown prep type races.”

Irish War Cry, who debuted with maiden and stakes wins at Laurel in his juvenile season, captured the Holy Bull (GII) at Gulfstream by 3 ¾ lengths Feb.4. After finishing a disappointing seventh in the Fountain of Youth (GII) March 4, Irish War Cry was shipped to Fair Hill Training Center in Northeast Maryland and pointed to the Wood Memorial (GII) at Aqueduct April 8.

The son of Curlin returned to his winning ways, scoring a 3 ½-length victory to punch his ticket to Louisville.

“He had to step up and prove his other races weren’t a fluke,” Motion said. “It was a huge relief. It was pretty emotional getting him back on track. That was a big deal."

J BOYS ECHO – Local Louisville, Kentucky-based trainer Dale Romans is no stranger to being in the spotlight for America’s Greatest Race as J Boys Echo marks his eighth starter in the Derby.

But, J Boys Echo, owned by Albaugh Family Stables, wasn’t always Romans’ first option for the Derby.

“We had a good group of horses that came in last year,” Romans said. “Not This Time was the one that was my Derby horse. After he was injured, J Boys Echo stepped it up.”

“The Albaugh’s are big Cowboys fans,” Romans continued. “When (Tony Romo) went down, Dak (Prescott) stepped up.”

J Boys Echo galloped 1 ¼ miles and schooled in the gate Thursday morning with exercise rider Yoni Orantes aboard.

McCRAKEN – With Thoroughbreds’ McCraken was accompanied by a pony to the starting gate where he stood before galloping 1 ¼ miles under exercise rider Yoni Orantes after the Thursday morning renovation break.

“Everything is good this morning,” trainer Ian Wilkes said of McCraken, the co-second choice at 5-1 for Derby 143 and who will exit post position 15.

Although McCraken represents Wilkes’ first Derby starter, it is far from his first experience with the race. He was the exercise rider for 1990 winner Unbridled and assistant to trainer Carl Nafzger with Street Sense in 2007.

Neither of those horses had any hiccups on the road to the Derby, but McCraken hit one speed bump when a slight injury to his left front ankle forced him to miss the Tampa Bay Derby (GII) on March 11.

“I felt confident we would be OK; it was very minor,” Wilkes said. “Things happen for a reason, so we will find out in the long run.”

Watching McCraken this morning as he has the past few mornings this week was Nafzger.

“I’m so proud of him,” Nafzger said of Wilkes. “It is like watching your son score the winning touchdown in the big game for the home team.

“Ian was a big influence with Unbridled and Street Sense. We always bounced stuff off each other. ‘Ian, what do you think? We always worked together.’"

PRACTICAL JOKE – Klaravich Stables and William H. Lawrence’s Practical Joke galloped “about a mile and three-eighths” under exercise rider Fernando Rivera during the special Oaks and Derby training session, according to trainer Chad Brown.

“The horse did terrific,” Brown said. “He continues to train really well here.”

Practical Joke has no wet-track races in his past performances, which leaves handicappers little to go on should the Derby surface come up muddy.

“He doesn’t have any experience on it but there’s nothing about the horse that tells me he wouldn’t love it,” Brown said. “It’s an unknown. I’d prefer clear conditions for everybody just because it makes a more enjoyable day, first and foremost, for the people and the horses. But if it were to come up a wet track, I’d be just as curious as anyone else to see how my horse would handle it.”

SONNETEER – Trainer Keith Desormeaux was on hand for the first time this week to watch Calumet Farm’s Sonneteer gallop one mile under rider Maurillo Garcia and found himself in a bit of a different situation than last year when he had leading contender Exaggerator.

“It’s a definitely a different atmosphere,” Desormeaux said. “It’s a whole lot different when your 50-1 versus 2-1. No crowd’s following him back to the barn, no crowd’s following me back to barn. It’s kind of nice. I can be a normal trainer.”

Despite the fact that his horse is such a longshot and looking to become the first horse since 1933 to win the Kentucky Derby as a maiden, Desormeaux, who finished second last year with Exaggerator before going on to win the Preakness Stakes, says he’s very confident in his horse.

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“The horse looks great,” Desormeaux said. “That’s the other thing that takes the pressure off, he’s doing so well. The rider (Maurillo) gets along with him great. The horse is relaxed and hitting the ground fine. There’s nothing to be stressed out about. What keeps me positive is the fact that the Derby favorite (Classic Empire) only beat him two lengths in the Arkansas Derby and we were coming. Add another eighth of a mile and a good trip and it could get fun. I think I have a stronger horse this week than in Arkansas.”

Desormeaux also doesn’t have to worry about the chance of an off track Saturday after Sonneteer worked a bullet half-mile Monday on a track rated good.

“His work Monday was on a wet track and he just skimmed over it,” Desormeaux said. “We have mud experience. He’s running for a Louisiana-bred, mud loving trainer. It won’t be a problem.”

**THUNDER SNOW –** Godolphin Racing’s homebred UAE Derby (Group II) winner Thunder Snow cantered 1 ¼ miles during the Oaks and Derby training session under Godolphin exercise rider Daragh O’Donohoe.

“He was very happy, very fresh,” trainer Saeed bin Suroor said. “He’s in good form and looks very well.”

Asked to rate Thunder Snow’s chances in the Derby relative to other Godolphin horses that shipped in from Dubai, dating to Worldly Manner in 1999 (seventh), the trainer replied: “I think this one’s a better chance, a better quality.”

Thunder Snow is one of the few Derby entrants with wet-track experience at a high level, having won the UAE Derby last time out over a muddy surface at Meydan Racecourse. The classy Helmet colt also has won over fast dirt, good turf and soft turf, suggesting a versatility that could come in handy should the Derby be run on an off Churchill Downs main track.

“The way he’s received exercise, the way he moves, I think he’d be fine,” bin Suroor said. “He’s really brilliant.”

### 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 1/2 miles under regular exercise rider Dana Barnes.

“It was a normal, right-before-the-race type of gallop,” said Jimmy Barnes, lead assistant to Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert. “We’re very happy and looking good.”

The entire Baffert team has raved about Oaks favorite Paradise Woods, who beat them by nearly 12 lengths in the Santa Anita Oaks, but Barnes is hopeful that the addition of blinkers and a change in venue could help them reign in the budding super filly.

“We’re on a different racetrack and everyone’s had to ship so you never know,” Barnes said. “It’s an all new ballgame now coming to a new racetrack. A lot of it will depend on how the track is playing. If they back up we’ll be rolling, that’s for sure. I think she’s going to enjoy the long stretch.”

**DADDYS LIL DARLING –** Trainer Kenny McPeek was on hand early Thursday morning as Daddys Lil Darling galloped 1 ½ miles in the drizzling rain at 5:45, just one day away from the 143rd Kentucky Oaks.

“We hope there is speed in the race,” McPeek said. “She’s a filly that comes from off the pace. So, she’ll make her run late and hopefully it sets up for a closer.”

With the National Weather Service forecast calling for a 70 percent chance of showers on Oaks Day, McPeek isn’t too concerned.

“I only worry about things I can control,” McPeek said. “We’ll see what the day brings.”

Daddys Lil Darling won in the mud as a 2-year-old in Churchill Downs’ Pocahontas Stakes (GII) to kick off her road to the Kentucky Oaks.

**EVER SO CLEVER –** Clearview Stable LLC’s Fantasy Stakes (GIII) winner Ever So Clever completed her Kentucky Oaks preparations by galloping just over a mile under her regular exercise rider Angel Garcia a bit before 7 a.m. Thursday.

The Medaglia d’Oro filly, who drew the rail in the 14-horse field, was scheduled to school in the paddock along with her three Kentucky Derby bound stablemates Thursday afternoon depending on the weather.

-more-
FARRELL – Trainer Wayne Catalano was focused and quiet for his standards Thursday morning at Barn 30. His Kentucky Oaks (GI) runner Farrell, installed as the 5-1 third choice, went out at 7:15 for her last bit of exercise before Friday’s $1 million event. She jogged clockwise to the paddock gap, schooled in the paddock, then jogged the wrong way again from the paddock gap to complete a clockwise circuit of the Churchill Downs main track.

“We’re happy with her and how everything has gone,” Catalano said of the Coffeepot Stables homebred. “When we run her tomorrow, we’re going to find out where we stand when stacking up against the rest of them. So far, she has been great and we are happy to be involved with a filly like this. It’s not going to be easy. When you go in there, you are running against good horses. That’s how they got there -- they’re good horses. I know Mr. [Richard] Mandella has a really nice filly (in race favorite Paradise Woods), but so do we. That’s what they line them up in the gates for.”

Touching on the passing of his brother two days ago and the compounded significance of a possible victory in the country’s premier race for fillies, Catalano became serious, if not somber.

“A win would mean a lot, obviously, especially to my family,” he said. “It’ll also mean a lot to the owners and breeders, Mr. Bob (Cummings) and Ms. Annette (Bacola), and my whole team. It’s a big thing. When you go to these races, you have been working hard for them, Catalano became serious, if not somber.

LOCKDOWN – Juddmonte Farms’ Lockdown completed her Kentucky Oaks preparations by galloping just over a mile under exercise rider Jo Lawson during the special 8:30 a.m. training session.

The First Defense filly broke her maiden by more than three lengths on a track rated “good” at Aqueduct last December, so the chance of an off track Friday was not a concern to her Hall Fame trainer Bill Mott.

“It’s not a worry with this horse,” Mott said. “It’s more of a concern with my turf horses. Churchill is usually a good track even when it’s wet.”

Mott is scheduled to run horses in four turf stakes between Friday and Saturday. He has Bernadiva in the Edgewood Stakes (GIII) Friday and on Saturday he has entered Harmonize in the Churchill Downs Distaff Turf Mile (GII), Good Samaritan in the American Turf Stakes (GI) and Ballagh Rocks in the Woodford Reserve Turf Classic (GI).

MISS SKY WARRIOR – Arlene’s Sun Star Stable’s Miss Sky Warrior went out early from Barn 43 to avoid the skies opening on Thursday morning. Heading out just past 6 o’clock, the Kelly Breen-trained daughter of First Samurai appears to be flying slightly under the radar in a race filled with talent, including a trio of Grade I winners. The streaking filly, who is looking for her sixth consecutive victory and fifth consecutive graded stakes, galloped a mile under Aurelio Gomez.

“I don’t make the odds, the public does, and I can’t change anything. I just get my horse as ready as I can to run and lead them over there,” Breen said. “I can’t change the draw or whether they’ll like the mud or anything else. I’m just trying to do what I can do and hope she reacts in the right way to do what we are trying to do. We’re trying to help her win.”

Appearing to progress with each successive victory, the tall dark bay filly put an exclamation point on her preparation last out in the Gazelle (GI), defeating fellow Kentucky Oaks runner Lockdown by 13 lengths. She is the lone filly in the field with a victory -- two, actually -- at the nine-furlong distance. She also has more graded stakes victories -- four -- than any of her competitors.

“She’s matured a little bit and she’s still getting better,” Breen said. “She and (jockey) Paco Lopez make a great team and she can relax on a loose rein and not go too fast. I think if someone wants to zing out and go for the lead, I think she can rate reasonably. I hope with 100,000 people screaming as she’s going into the gate, that she’s as composed as she is now.”

MOPOTISM – The Uncle Mo filly Mopotism got to work early Thursday morning, just a day ahead of her date with destiny and 13 other 3-year-old fillies in the 143rd Kentucky Oaks (GI).

Exercise rider Amir Cedeno went trackside with the Doug O’Neill-trained filly at 7 a.m., getting ahead of the threat of rain later in the morning in Louisville. Rider and horse toured nine furlongs around the Churchill oval and Mopotism earned a thumbs up for her efforts.

Mario Gutierrez will ride Mopotism in the Oaks and they’ll break from post position three.

-MORE-
PARADISE WOODS – The racy Union Rags filly went about her business with zest Thursday morning, heading out from Barn 42 at 7:30 with exercise rider/assistant trainer Alex Bisono aboard and trainer Richard Mandella a most interested observer.

The bay, winner of the Santa Anita Oaks (GI) by nearly 12 lengths on April 8 and a sharp looker and worker in the mornings since, went 12 furlongs in her Thursday exercise, just a day before taking on many of the best 3-year-old fillies in the land in the 143rd edition of the $1 million Kentucky Oaks (GI).

Though she only has raced three times and will be taking on several well-seasoned rivals, Paradise Woods’ efforts thus far led Churchill Downs linemaker Mike Battaglia to make her the 5/2 favorite in the 14-horse field. She'll break from post four and be handled by her regular guy, the West Coast-based Frenchman Flavien Prat.

Mandella and Bisono both agreed their filly was and is doing famously since coming to Kentucky and are hopeful of a big effort Friday.

The Hall of Fame trainer has used some of his extra time in the Bluegrass State to go visit one of his all-time favorites, the recently retired multiple champion Beholder, who was a much-troubled second in the 2013 Kentucky Oaks.

Mandella reported that the four-time Eclipse Award winner is looking large and lovely, in foal to the high-ranking sire Uncle Mo.

“I told them I'd love to train the foal,” he said. “If it’s a colt, I'll even paint his stall blue.”

SAILOR’S VALENTINE – Semaphore Racing LLC and Homewrecker Racing LLC’s Sailor’s Valentine routinely continues to impress in the mornings at Churchill Downs for trainer Eddie Kenneally. The Grade I-winning Kentucky Oaks (GI) runner schooled well Wednesday afternoon and then jogged and galloped Thursday morning under Kelly Wheeler.

On Friday, the Ashland (GI) winner will break from post position eight in the $1 million race.

“Everything is going well,” Kenneally said. “She schooled really well yesterday. Today she jogged three-quarters of a mile and then galloped a mile and a half. I think we're all set.”

Based in Barn 31, the gray daughter of Mizzen Mast is Kenneally and Homewrecker’s second team-up in the Kentucky Oaks, having finished third across the wire in 2006 with subsequent Eclipse finalist Bushfire before she was disqualified to sixth for interference. Also an Ashland winner, Bushfire would go on to win six of 13 starts and three Grade I events.

SALTY/SUMMER LUCK – Highly regarded Kentucky Oaks contender Salty galloped 1 ½ miles Thursday morning with Janelle Castonguay aboard for trainer Mark Casse.

“She doesn’t have a lot of speed so I’m not worried with post position 14,” Casse said. “Hopefully she settles into the first turn and has a good target to run at.”

Salty is listed as 6-1 on the morning line with her last victory coming in a closing effort in the April 1 Gulfstream Park Oaks (GII).

Summer Luck, on the also eligible list, galloped 1 ½ miles Thursday morning with Froylan Garcia aboard.

TEQUILITA – Dorothy Alexander Matz’s Tequilita was given two miles of light exercise under exercise rider Jo Robinson for the second morning in a row at Churchill Downs Thursday.

“She jogged and cantered backwards,” trainer Michael Matz said. “She’s plenty fit enough. We just need her to stay settled.”

The homebred daughter of Union Rags captured the Forward Gal (GII) and finished second in the Gulfstream Park Oaks (GII) in her two most recent starts.

“She has some class to her, there’s no doubt about that,” Matz said. “Now it’s just a matter of if she’s good enough.”

VEXATIOUS – Calumet Farm’s Vexatious galloped her usual 1 ½ miles under exercise rider Freddy Quevero toward the end of training hours, according to Hall of Fame trainer Neil Drysdale.

Drysdale, 69, is seeking a second Oaks win 37 years after taking the lillies in 1980 with future Hall of Fame filly Bold ’n Determined.

“We were concerned about the distance but I had Eddie Delahoussaye riding and that makes a difference,” Drysdale said. “She was a miler but she was even able to win the CCA Oaks (then run at 1 1/2 miles). She was so courageous.”

Added Drysdale: “We won the Oaks and Genuine Risk won the Derby. Then we were giving her weight in the Maskette and we beat her and then he (LeRoy Jolley, trainer of Genuine Risk) wouldn't run against us again because he knew she’d beat her again. We gave her four pounds and beat her legitimately.

“I knew she’d come down here to run in the Spinster (at Keeneland), so we came down as well to run in the Spinster against her and he ducked us. We needed to beat her one more time (to earn championship filly honors).”

Although Bold ‘n Determined won six Grade 1 events that year, Genuine Risk took the Eclipse Award on the basis of her Kentucky Derby win, seconds in the Preakness and Belmont, and a win against older mares in the Ruffian.

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WICKED LICK – With owner and breeder Lee Mauberret looking on, Wicked Lick galloped a mile and a half after the renovation break with exercise rider Leo Garcia up for trainer Brendan Walsh. Wicked Lick, the first horse bred by Mauberret, comes into the Oaks off a runner-up finish to Farrell in the Fair Grounds Oaks (GI) on April 1. “She is doing well and is in as good a form as she can be,” said Walsh, noting that Wicked Lick would train in the morning. “I just hope she runs her race. There are a lot of nice fillies in there. I hope she gets a good trip as I am sure everybody else does.” Brian Hernandez Jr. has the mount.

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.

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

Thursday, May 04, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CRLTw0WmY

Wednesday, May 3, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sX3Y5xsKbcxA

Tuesday, May 2, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8ZZUYbTe2A

Monday, May 1, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMw0voefXtx

Sunday, April 30, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8ZZUYbTe2A

Saturday, April 29, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kxsPlKJ4Uo

-more-
Kentucky Derby and Kentucky Oaks Daily Update
Thursday, May 04, 2017
Page 10 of 10

Friday, April 28, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRX3vheIkJk

Thursday, April 27, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxFEjUx0KKLs

Wednesday, April 26, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwV6fHlhIc4

Tuesday, April 25, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MULqY6_yM0

Monday, April 24, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uF3Fs4JYkM&t=1s

Sunday, April 23, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oLNE7itWks

Saturday, April 22, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97zKxR_qbf0U

PAST PERFORMANCES COURTESY OF BRISNET.COM

Kentucky Derby:

Kentucky Oaks:

Both Derby & Oaks:

TWINSPIRES.COM “TURF TALK” WITH GARY YOUNG

Wednesday, May 3, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqTlz2XDng

Tuesday, May 2, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycqU1hGDf8o

Monday, May 1, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y80eKMHPlfg

Sunday, April 30, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma8noanH8_M&t=2s

Saturday, April 29, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= uQP4tfWo10

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

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