KENTUCKY DERBY NOTES, FRIDAY, MAY 5, 2017

ALWAYS DREAMING/PATCH/TAPWRIT – The Todd Pletcher barn was busy and humming Friday morning, a day before Kentucky Derby 143.

The trainer had his four Derby candidates on the track at 5:30 to take advantage of a special 5:30-5:45 exercise period for Derby and Kentucky Oaks horses. As the quartet headed out, a steady rain fell and the sealed Churchill Downs surface was sloppy following overnight rains that were predicted to continue on through the morning.

The foursome – Always Dreaming (with exercise rider Nick Bush up), Master Plan (Adele Bellenger), Patch (Isabelle Bourez) and Tapwrit (Silvio Pioli) – all made one trip around the track.

Always Dreaming did his on the jog going counterclockwise. The other three galloped the regular way in good fashion.

Tapwrit, the gray son of Tapit, appeared to all but relish the wet conditions, going along strongly. Perhaps not surprisingly, a check of his PPs shows a handy victory against overnight stakes company in the slop at Gulfstream Park last December.

The trainer was happy with his last bit of serious Derby preparation.

“Everybody was good this morning,” he said. “They’ll only walk tomorrow.”

At 9 a.m., Master Plan, a Derby also-eligible, officially was eliminated from the race at scratch time. Previously, Pletcher had indicated that Plan B for the colt was the Peter Pan Stakes (Grade III) at Belmont Park on May 13.

BATTLE OF MIDWAY – WinStar Farm and Don Alberto Stable’s Santa Anita Derby (G1) runner-up Battle of Midway visited the track for light exercise at 6:30 a.m. to take advantage of gate schooling.

“I wanted to stand in the gate one more time because we’ll get loaded first being in the 11 hole,” Hall of Fame trainer Jerry Hollendorfer said. “He stood good here already but I wanted to stand him again just so he won’t get nervous in there.”

Battle of Midway has been forwardly placed in all four of his starts. Hollendorfer was reluctant to make predictions about the shape of the race from a pace perspective.

“Each Derby is individual,” he said. “There’s plenty of speed lined up for this race and nobody’s going to get an easy lead.”

CLASSIC EMPIRE/STATE OF HONOR – Trainer Mark Casse’s duo of Classic Empire and State of Honor jogged Friday morning over the sloppy surface at Churchill Downs in their last training session before Saturday’s Kentucky Derby.

“We’re very happy with all of the preparations,” assistant trainer Norm Casse said. “We’re eager to get this weekend started.”

Over the course of Friday and Saturday, the Casses have 24 horses entered including Salty in Friday’s Kentucky Oaks. Classic Empire is listed as the 4-1 morning-line favorite and will break from post position 14. The morning-line favorite has won the Kentucky Derby the past four years. Julien Leparoux will have the mount on Classic Empire, his 10th Kentucky Derby start.

State of Honor will break from post position six and will attempt to be the first horse to win out of this position since Sea Hero in 1993. Jose Lezcano will ride the Ontario-bred son of To Honor and Serve, his fifth Kentucky Derby start.

FAST AND ACCURATE – It was an uneventful Friday morning for Kendall Hansen, Skychai Racing, Sand Dollar Stable and Bode Miller’s Mike Maker-trained Kentucky Derby runner Fast and Accurate, aside from the rainy and chilly conditions. The gray son of Hansen left Barn 27 just before 6 o’clock and jogged one mile with exercise rider Joel Cano in the irons.

Additional precipitation in the forecast did not dampen Maker’s spirits.

“I don’t mind (the rain),” he said. “I think it may help us.”

GIRVIN – As the days go on, the Joe Sharp barn has grown noticeably more confident in its Kentucky Derby chances with Brad Grady’s Girvin. After a couple of tough weeks that have risen and fallen with the discovery, treatment and successful healing of a quarter crack in Girvin’s right front hoof, the 32-year-old trainer and his team have taken their cue from the son of Tale of Ekati, whose straightforward and classy demeanor categorize him best as unbothered.

The Louisiana Derby (GII) winner left Churchill Downs’ Barn 33 at 6:20 a.m. Friday with Rosie Napravnik aboard and escorted by Sharp on a pony. The multiple graded-stakes winner, named after a West Texas town with a population hovering around 30, jogged two miles with Sharp watching.
In fewer than three years as a head trainer, Sharp has his first Derby starter. The former assistant to Mike Maker and Mike Stidham appears to have taken the expected and unforeseen stresses in stride.

“To me it doesn’t feel any different than any other day,” Sharp said. “I didn’t expect (to be in the Derby), but I’m not surprised. From Day One, I tried to take off from where I left off as an assistant (to Maker) and have that kind of barn. We have tried to hit the numbers the same way, while quickly building the quality of our horses and operation.

“We’ve been on eggshells for two weeks with the quarter crack being thrown at us and dealing with media, but honestly at the end of the day I think that we, the owners and the horse, handled it well,” he continued. “That’s behind us and we’re grateful to be here. Hopefully tomorrow’s a big day. He’s a nice horse, regardless, and we’re grateful to have horses like him in the barn at this stage of the game.”

Girvin has three wins from four career starts. He has been racing steadily since December, with all four of his outings coming at Fair Grounds in New Orleans. His only loss was a game second in his lone turf try, the Keith Gee Memorial in early February at second asking.

“He never has a bad day and in the rare case that he does, there’s a reason,” Sharp said. “He’s resilient to change of surface, change of distance and change of track, so I don’t think these new challenges or a change of rider (from Brian Hernandez, Jr., to Mike Smith) or track will change the outcome.”

All three of Girvin’s dirt tries have been over a fast surface. With a profusion of precipitation pummeling Derby weekend, Sharp’s self-assurance has been slightly assuaged.

“I don’t think the slop would be his preferred surface,” he said. “It’s hard to say, though, because I know he’ll run his race across asphalt. He always tries and he wants to win.”

The last son of Tale of Ekati to race in a Triple Crown event was Charles Fipke’s Dallas Stewart-trained Tale of Verve, second in the 2015 Preakness (GI) behind American Pharoah over a sloppy surface before finishing unplaced in the Belmont Stakes (GI). The Barclay Tagg-trained Tale of Ekati was one-for-three over wet surfaces, including a victory in Belmont’s Jerome (GII) in the slop for Fipke.

GORMLEY/ROYAL MO – The Santa Anita Derby (GI) winner Gormley went to the track Friday morning at 5:30 in the rain under exercise rider Cisco Alvarado. The bay son of Malibu Moon galloped a mile strongly and appeared unhappy that he only got one trip around the sloppy surface. “He wanted more,” Alvarado said.

Right after Gormley got back to Barn 42, Alvarado switched over to trainer John Shirreffs other Derby hopeful, Royal Mo, for another one-time-around-the-track gallop. Gormley is a go for Derby 143 and will break from post 18 in the 20-horse field with three-time Derby winner Victor Espinoza on his back. Royal Mo, however, was anchored on the also-eligible list and at 9 o’clock Friday morning he officially was scratched from the race.

“He’s a candidate for the Preakness (May 20 at Pimlico in Maryland),” Shirreffs said. “Same with Gormley. The race tomorrow will tell us how that might go, and whether or not we might want to go back to California.”

GUNNEVERA – Peacock Racing Stable’s Gunnevera jogged a mile under exercise rider Victor O’Farrel Friday morning at Churchill Downs.

“My horse is in very good condition – 100 percent,” trainer Antonio Sano said. “He likes the track. I’m happy.”

Sano said he wasn’t overly concerned about the prospects for a wet racetrack for the Kentucky Derby.

“My horse has run very well in the slop. In his first race he ran in the slop and ran very good,” said Sano, whose trainee debuted with a late-closing second behind future multiple-stakes winner Three Rules in a five-furlong maiden race over a sloppy Gulfstream Park track last June.

Gunnevera drew post position 10, which has yielded the highest percentage of winners of all posts since the introduction of the starting gate in 1930. Nine of 80 starters breaking from the 10 have won for an 11.3 percent win rate. Post position 10 also has yielded the highest percentage (30%) of 1-2-3 finishes.

HENCE/LOOKIN AT LEE/UNTRAPPED – Hall of Fame trainer Steve Asmussen wasted no time getting his three Kentucky Derby hopefuls to the track Friday morning, sending them all out to gallop over the sloppy track as soon as the track opened at 5:30. He reported that everything was “super” with his three colts and Kentucky Oaks runner Ever So Clever.

Asmussen, who will be saddling his 16th, 17th and 18th Kentucky Derby starters Saturday, has two Preakness Stakes wins and a Belmont victory, but is still seeking his first Derby triumph. His best finish was a second by Nehro in 2011 and he was third in 2007 with two-time Horse of the Year Curlin and again last year with Gun Runner.

Gun Runner, who most recently finished second in the $10 million Dubai World Cup, easily brings a smile to his trainer’s face.
Kentucky Derby and Kentucky Oaks Daily Update  
Friday, May 5, 2017  
Page 3 of 6

“He’s enjoying Derby week this year,” Asmussen said of Gun Runner, who is being pointed to the Stephen Foster Handicap (GI) at Churchill Downs June 17. “He wants another shot. He wants another shot at everything. That’s what we love about him. Gun Runner has qualities we all wish we had in ourselves. The way he accepts challenges and responds to toughness is an amazing quality.”

IRAP — The Blue Grass Stakes (GI) winner went trackside Friday morning in the rain at 6:15 and galloped a mile and a quarter on the sloppy strip. Regular exercise rider Tony Romero was at the controls.

“He went fine,” the colt’s assistant trainer Leandro Mora said. “No problems. We’ll just walk him tomorrow morning. He’s ready to go.”

Irap, a husky son of Tiznow, will be handled by Mario Gutierrez in the Run for the Roses and they’ll break from post nine in the 20-horse lineup.

Irap is owned by Paul Reddam and trained by Doug O’Neill. The Reddam-O’Neill-Gutierrez trio has had great Derby success already, having combined forces to win the 2012 edition (with I’ll Have Another) followed by similar success in 2016 (Nyquist).

For those who have not heard the tale of the colt’s unique name, it goes like this:

As a farm horse, he had some issues with leg joints and was sent to a farm to undergo a special anti-inflammatory treatment. The folks at the farm didn’t know the young horse’s name, only that he was there for a treatment with a product named IRAP (Interleukin-1 Receptor Antagonist Protein), so they simply referred to him as “Irap.” Reddam, who is famous for a wry sense of humor in many regards, including the naming of his horses, heard about it and had the colt’s original name change to Irap.

That story undoubtedly will be retold and expanded upon should the Reddam connection pull off a third Derby victory Saturday.

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

Trainer Graham Motion will make a bid for his second Kentucky Derby success Saturday, having visited the winner’s circle following Animal Kingdom’s 20-1 upset victory in 2011.

“It’s a little bit different this time around because he’s one of the liked horses. Animal Kingdom flew under the radar a little bit. People talked him up a bit after his workout (the Saturday before the Derby at Churchill Downs), but basically we were under the radar,” said Motion, whose Wood Memorial (GI) winner is rated at 6-1 this year’s morning line. “This is the first time I’ve come here with a horse that’s considered a real contender. It’s definitely a different situation. It puts on a little more pressure, perhaps. But I don’t feel a lot of pressure. I feel really comfortable with him. If it weren’t for that one bad race, I’d feel even more confident.”

After winning his first two races at Laurel and running away with the Holy Bull (GII) by 3 ¾ lengths, the son of Curlin finished a disappointing seventh after chasing a quick early pace in the Fountain of Youth (GI) at Gulfstream.

“I think it was a perfect storm and an odd track that day. It was really windy and the track dried out and became a little cuppy,” Motion said. “I hate to make too many excuses, but I honestly think he was a little too close (early) on a cuppy track. He could have bounced a little bit coming out of the Holy Bull.”

Motion is confident that Irish War Cry has the tools to become a Kentucky Derby champion.

“I think he has a tremendous stride on him, that’s one of his strongest attributes,” Motion said. “His disposition (is also a strong attribute) – he handles everything so well.”

J BOYS ECHO – Gotham (GIll) winner J Boys Echo galloped 1 ½ miles over the sloppy track Friday morning at 5:30 with regular exercise rider Tammy Fox aboard.

“That’s it,” trainer Dale Romans said. “Now, all we have to do is give the jock a leg up and hold our breath.”

J Boys Echo is one of nine horses primarily based at Churchill Downs running in Saturday’s Kentucky Derby. The most recent horse who was based at Churchill and won the Kentucky Derby was Street Sense in 2007.

Jockey Luis Saez will ride in his fifth consecutive Derby after he picked up the mount on J Boys Echo for an injured Robby Albarado.

McCRAKEN – Whitham Thoroughbreds’ McCraken, the co-second choice at 5-1 on the morning line for Kentucky Derby 143, galloped 1 3/8 miles under exercise rider Yoni Orantes shortly after the track opened for training at 5:30 Friday morning.

With rain pouring, trainer Ian Wilkes watched his colt backtrack to the frontside before starting his gallop. Wilkes was asked if McCraken would go to the track Saturday morning.

“I’m not sure,” Wilkes said. “I want to see what he does this morning. I will either track him or shed him.”

After McCraken completed his gallop, Wilkes said: “I’ll shed him tomorrow.”

With rain in the forecast for most of the day Friday with a resumption of showers Saturday morning, the prospect of the first Derby run on an off track since 2013 when Orb splashed home in front looms large. McCraken never has raced on an off track.

“You can’t worry about things you can’t control,” Wilkes said of the colt who will break from post position 15 under Brian Hernandez Jr. “He is ready and I hope all goes well and he gets a good trip.”

-more-
McCraken will be coming from off the pace and figures to get some mud kicked in his face for the first time in a race.

“Some horses don't like that and they lose their concentration,” Wilkes said. “Other horses thrive on the challenge and my horse likes a challenge.”

The Wilkes barn will be busy the next two days with five horses entered on the Oaks Day card, including Bird Song in the $400,000 Alysheba (Grade II), and five entered Derby Day, including stakes runners Sweetgrass in the $300,000 Humana Distaff (GI) and Linda in the $300,000 Churchill Distaff Turf Mile (GI).

PRACTICAL JOKE – Klaravich Stables and William H. Lawrence’s Practical Joke jogged one mile under regular exercise rider Edgar Rodriguez during the early Oaks and Derby training session.

As the Derby approaches, trainer Chad Brown has been focusing attention on race strategy, although he concedes that in this race the best-laid plans can get blown up in an instant.

“Young is as good as mine eventually where he'll land going into that first turn,” Brown said. “How close we'll be or how far back we'll be I just don't know. It's hard to gauge. I just hope to save some ground on both turns. I don’t want too wide of a trip.

“There’s so much guesswork. If it were a wet track, depending on how much the track deteriorates, that could affect how much the riders want a forwardly placed position. The first time I was here for the Derby with Normandy Invasion that was a very wet track and Palace Malice ran out on the front and it was one of the faster paces you'll ever see in the Derby. That year everyone had a plan until the gates opened.

“I usually come up with a Plan A and a Plan B and if those don't work Plan C is always in the jockey’s hands.

“One of my favorite sports quotes I now live by came from Mike Tyson, of all people: ‘Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.’”

SONNETEER – Calumet Farm’s maiden Sonneteer waited until the last possible moment to train Friday morning, heading to the track at 7:15. He galloped a bit more than a mile under exercise rider Maurillo Garcia just before the track closed at 7:30.

“All systems are go,” assistant trainer Julie Clark said.

Should Sonneteer, whose biggest race to date was a second at Oaklawn Race Course in the Rebel Stakes (GII) March 18, win the Kentucky Derby, he’d only be the fourth maiden to accomplish the feat and first since Brokers Tip in 1933. Sir Barton, who won the Derby as a maiden in 1919, went on to become the first Triple Crown winner.

THUNDER SNOW – Godolphin Racing’s homebred UAE Derby (Group II) winner Thunder Snow cantered 1 1/4 miles during the early Oaks and Derby training session under Godolphin exercise rider Daragh O'Donoghue.

“He was fantastic,” trainer Saeed bin Suroor said. “The horse is doing good. Tomorrow we'll do a little easy exercise early. The horse is in good form and we’re happy with him. He’s never run on this (slippery Churchill Downs track) before but it seems he handled it well. This is a good experience for him to see it before the race.”

Regarding where Thunder Snow will be positioned in the race by jockey Christophe Soumillon, the trainer said: “He’ll have to be handy. I’d like to see him somewhere close in the race. Not too far back.”

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.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT …

DERBYGIVES.COM 50/50 RAFFLE – The Churchill Downs Incorporated Foundation will host a nationwide online 50/50 charitable raffle drawing on 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.

-more-
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=7CRLTnw0WmY

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

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

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

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

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

Friday, April 28, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRX3vhcIk6k

Thursday, April 27, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFEIUxokK1s

Wednesday, April 26, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xwv6FhLHe4

Tuesday, April 25, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MUlqy6_yM0

Monday, April 24, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uE3Fs4JUYkM&ct=1s

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

Saturday, April 22, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97zKxR_qb0U

-more-
PAST PERFORMANCES COURTESY OF BRISNET.COM

Kentucky Derby:

Kentucky Oaks:

Both Derby & Oaks:

TWINSPIRES.COM “TURF TALK” WITH GARY YOUNG

Thursday, May 4, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXoDSpYUemY

Wednesday, May 3, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqtJlz2XDng

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

Monday, May 1, 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yS0cKMHPlfg

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

-END-