

RAINY MORNING ON DERBY EVE GREET'S HOPEFULS FOR 150TH RUN FOR THE ROSES

LOUISVILLE, KY (May 3, 2024) – The rains came Friday morning at Churchill Downs as contenders for the 150th running of the Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (GI) put in their exercise over a sloppy track or confined their activity to walking the shedrow.

Scratch time for the Derby was 9 a.m. (all times Eastern) and there were no defections. That meant **Mugatu** would not be in the starting gate for the \$5 million classic test Saturday at 6:57 p.m.

CATALYTIC – With overnight rain that was heavy at times, trainer **Saffie Joseph Jr.** decided to have **Tami Bobo, Julie Davies** and **George Isaacs' Catalytic** walk the shedrow Friday morning.

The lightly raced Florida Derby (GI) runner-up drew post 5 with **Jose Ortiz** to ride. In the Derby advance wagering after three days, Catalytic is 37-1.

CATCHING FREEDOM/JUST A TOUCH – **Catching Freedom** and **Just a Touch** both had their final Derby training sessions, galloping 1 ½ miles at 7:45 a.m. Friday over the sloppy surface.

"We're ready to go. Let's do this," trainer **Brad Cox** said.

DOMESTIC PRODUCT/SIERRA LEONE – Trainer **Chad Brown's** Kentucky Derby duo of **Sierra Leone** and **Domestic Product** hit the track just before 6 a.m. and galloped twice around beneath the rain drops.

Sierra Leone, winner of the Blue Grass Stakes (GI) in his most recent start, signaled his quality during his seasonal bow in the Risen Star Stakes (GII) when he was able to rally from ninth over a sealed, sloppy track after they went a half-mile of :49.67. If you are the company you keep, that race has continued to flatter the son of Gun Runner as the top five finishers in the Risen Star are all set to be in the Kentucky Derby starting gate.

"I knew I wanted to run there because of the long stretch and the timing of the race," Brown said of the Risen Star. "You know it came up a super tough race and the weather was really challenging. But the horse ran against everything and still won ... especially on a track that not many horses were closing on that day. This horse was able to overcome a lot and get there. And he's really moved forward from there."

Sierra Leone is the 3-to-1 second choice on the morning line.

DORNOCH/SOCIETY MAN – Fountain of Youth Stakes winner (GII) **Dornoch** had a scheduled walk day while his stablemate **Society Man** hit the track early under the watch of

trainer **Danny Gargan** for a jog over the sloppy conditions, but was feeling good enough to break into a gallop coming off the track.

ENDLESSLY – The multiple-stakes winning colt bred and owned by **Joan** and **Jerry Amerman** took advantage of the special 7:45-8 a.m. training period Friday for Derby or Oaks runners.

The Oscar Performance offspring had regular exercise rider **Walter Davilia** at the controls as they did a one-mile tour of a sloppy racing strip. On hand to observe the exercise were trainer **Michael McCarthy** and his right-hand assistant **Justin Curran**.

"He was loving the track this morning," McCarthy said. "It was good to see him going so well."

The trainer was asked how he felt about his horse and his situation on the eve of Derby 150.

"I'm feeling good about where we are," he said.

He was further asked if he was feeling "real good" about it all.

"I try to not get too high, or too low," was the reply. "But I'm feeling good."

EPIC RIDE -- **Welch Racing's Epic Ride** jogged in the mile chute shortly before 8 o'clock with **Sophie Doyle** aboard for trainer John Ennis.

Epic Ride will exit post 20 under **Adam Beschizza**.

"I just want him to run his race," Ennis said of his hopes for Saturday. "And I just want the rain to stop. I want a fast track."

Epic Ride will not go to the track in the morning.

FIERCENESS – The Kentucky Derby morning line favorite (5-2) took his final bit of exercise Friday at Churchill Downs during the 7:45-8 a.m. training session limited to Oaks and Derby runners.

Trainer **Todd Pletcher** was trackside overseeing the exercise by the **Repole Stable** homebred who had regular exercise rider **Danny Wright** aboard. The two went in at the 5 ½-furlong gap, then quickly broke off at the five-furlong pole for a solid one-mile navigation of the oval.

Pletcher was reminded that this is the 24th year that he will be running a horse in the world's most famous race. He was asked if it is getting "old hat" by now.

"No way," was the answer. "If anything, it just becomes more nerve racking."

After his Florida Derby winner came off the track following his leg stretching, the conditioner was asked how he assessed his situation heading into Kentucky Derby 150.

"All good," was the simple and direct reply.

FOREVER YOUNG (JPN) – Susumu Fujita’s Forever Young (JPN) came on the track at 5:20, spent 10 minutes in the mile chute warming up under jockey Ryusei Sakai and then galloped on a sloppy track before returning to the chute for another 10 minutes to cool down before returning to the Quarantine Barn in a driving rain.

Looking on from the viewing stand at the six-furlong gap was trainer **Yoshito Yahagi**.

Yahagi, trained **Loves Only You (JPN)** and **Marche Lorraine (JPN)** to Breeders’ Cup victories at Del Mar in 2021. Was asked what he would like to see from his undefeated runner to keep his record perfect.

“First of all, I want him to come back safe,” Yahagi said. “I don’t want him to get too much excited and after that it is up to the jockey.”

Forever Young is scheduled to go to the track Saturday morning at 5:15.

GRAND MO THE FIRST – Granpollo Stables’ Grand Mo the First walked the shedrow under tack as trainer **Victor Barboza Jr.** opted to pass on going to the track as heavy rain fell.

“He had a strong gallop yesterday and schooled in the paddock yesterday afternoon and did very well,” Barboza said.

Grand Mo the First will exit post 15 under **Emisael Jaramillo**, starting next to Derby favorite Fierceness who led all the way in the Florida Derby (GI) in which Grand Mo the First was third.

HONOR MARIE – Ribble Farms, Michael Eiserman, Earl Silver, Kenneth Fishbein and Dave Fishbein’s Honor Marie had a quiet morning during training hours but got a taste of the Oaks Day crowd, schooling in the paddock during the first race.

JUST STEEL – The D. Wayne Lukas-trained Just Steel hit the track early for an easy jog over the rain-soaked Churchill Downs surface. The son of Justify owned by **BC Stables** and **Henry Schmueckle** is coming into the Derby off a runner-up finish in the Arkansas Derby (GI) on March 30, his 11th career start.

MYSTIK DAN – Trainer Kenny McPeck sent **Lance Gasaway, 4 G Racing** and **Daniel Hamby III’s Mystik Dan** out Friday morning at the scheduled Derby/Oaks training time for a typical gallop.

With exercise rider **Martin Reyes** up, Mystik Dan went about a mile and three-eighths. The colt will start from post 3 with jockey **Brian Hernandez Jr.** aboard in the Derby.

After three days of advance waging, the winner of the Southwest Stakes (GIII) and third-place finisher in the Arkansas Derby (GI) – both at Oaklawn Park – was a 19-1 choice for the Kentucky Derby.

RESILIENCE – With trainer **Bill Mott** keeping watch from astride his pony, Wood Memorial Stakes (GII) winner **Resilience** came out during the 7:45 a.m. training period and galloped twice around.

STRONGHOLD – Trainer **Phil D’Amato** repeated his early go with his Derby colt **Stronghold** Friday morning, sending the Ghostzapper offspring trackside at 5:30 with exercise rider **Sherri Alexander** at the controls.

The two went right off out of the six-furlong chute on a sloppy strip as light rain fell and did a once-around tour of the big Churchill oval.

After she came off the strip, Alexander had a big smile. “He felt great,” she said.

Reports out of the D’Amato barn all week have been glowing concerning the Santa Anita Derby (GI) winner. The way the story goes, **Eric** and **Sharon Waller’s** homebred bundle of joy has just gotten better and better since the turn of the year.

He started 2024 with a trip to New Mexico and a tally in the Sunland Derby. He came out of that one feeling very good about himself. Then he followed that up with an extra game score over the top colt **Imagination** in Santa Anita’s biggest 3-year-old contest on April 6, coming out of that race with his chest pumped up and good vibes flowing strongly.

Now he has looked strong all week in Kentucky and appears to be peaking just right as Derby looms.

D’Amato was asked about the possibility of putting his charge on the racetrack Saturday morning ahead of the race.

“I go about 50-50 with that,” the conditioner offered. “Some horses I put on the track (on race mornings); some not. We’ll play it by ear tomorrow.”

T O PASSWORD (JPN) – Tomoya Ozasa’s T O Password (JPN) came on the track at 5:20, spent 10 minutes in the mile chute warming up under jockey **Kazushi Kimura** and then galloped on a sloppy track before returning to the chute for another 10 minutes to cool down before heading to the Quarantine Barn in a driving rain.

Watching the morning activity from the viewing stand at the six-furlong gap was trainer **Daisuke Takayanagi**. T O Password will represent the first Derby starter for Takayanagi.

“I want him to come back to the stable safe,” Takayanagi said. “Winning is most important. I am not concerned with his position. It is about how he feels and is comfortable (in the race).”

T O Password is not scheduled to go to the track in the morning.

TRACK PHANTOM – Trainer **Steve Asmussen’s** father, **Keith**, was on hand Friday morning to watch training including seeing Kentucky Derby contender **Track Phantom** who jogged with **Roberto Howell** in the irons.

Asked who Keith would be rooting for – his grandson’s mount **Just Steel** or his son’s trainee **Track Phantom** – he simply said, “a dead heat.”

WEST SARATOGA – Harry Veruchi’s West Saratoga jogged a mile and galloped a mile under **Donte Lowery** at 7 o’clock as morning showers began to lessen in intensity.

Trainer **Larry Demeritte** said West Saratoga would not go to the track Saturday morning.

“I don’t take my horses to the track on race day,” Demeritte said, “except one time I had this filly from England who didn’t run well unless I would take her out.”

Jesus Castanon has the mount on West Saratoga, who represents the first Derby starter for Demeritte and Veruchi.

“I would like to see him get to the first turn clear,” Demeritte said of West Saratoga, who will exit post 12. “Then on the backstretch lead the second flight and have the lead at the top of the stretch. The ideal trip.”

ALSO-ELIGIBLE – Average Joe Racing Stables and Dan Wells’ Mugatu (No. 21) walked the shedrow as trainer **Jeff Engler** waited to hear word if there would be any defections from the main body of the Derby field that would get Mugatu into the starting gate.

“Looks like we are going to New York,” said Engler, who plans to work Mugatu on Sunday and then ship to Aqueduct for next Saturday’s \$200,000 Peter Pan (GIII).

THE KENTUCKY DERBY FIELD – Here is the field for the 150th running of the \$5 million Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (Grade I) in order of post positions (with rider and morning line odds): **Dornoch** (Luis Saez, 20-1), **Sierra Leone** (Tyler Gaffalione, 3-1), **Mystik Dan** (Brian Hernandez Jr., 20-1), **Catching Freedom** (Flavien Prat, 8-1), **Catalytic** (Jose Ortiz, 30-1), **Just Steel** (Keith Asmussen, 20-1), **Honor Marie** (Ben Curtis, 20-1), **Just a Touch** (Florent Geroux, 10-1), ~~**Encino** (Axel Concepcion, 20-1)~~, **T O Password (JPN)** (Kazuski Kimura, 30-1), **Forever Young (JPN)** (Ryusei Sakai, 10-1), **Track Phantom** (Joel Rosario, 20-1), **West Saratoga** (Jesus Castanon, 30-1), **Endlessly** (Umberto Rispoli, 30-1), **Domestic Product** (Irak Ortiz Jr., 30-1), **Grand Mo the First** (Emisael Jaramillo, 50-1), **Fierceness** (John Velasquez, 5-2), **Stronghold** (Antonio Fresu, 20-1), **Resilience** (Junior Alvarado, 20-1), **Society Man** (Frankie Dettori, 50-1); **Epic Ride** (Adam Beschizza, 50-1). Also Eligible: ~~**Mugatu** (Joe Talamo, 50-1)~~. All starters will carry 126 pounds.

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