

Title:

New Faces Across the Board

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Summary:

As the drama of Kentucky Derby 132 continues to unfold, one will find the stage filled with a refreshing cast of new characters seeking the glory that is the Run for the Roses.

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Article Body:

As the drama of Kentucky Derby 132 continues to unfold, one will find the stage filled with a refreshing cast of new characters seeking the glory that is the Run for the Roses. Jockey legends Jerry Bailey, Gary Stevens, and Pat Day, who, between them, own six Derby winning mounts, have left the scene to curtain calls; John Velasquez, an heir apparent to the void left by these giants of the sport, is sidelined with a broken shoulder. Rising stars such as Rafael Bejarano, Garret Gomez, and John McKee, and stalwarts such as Corey Nakatani and Alex Solis are poised to finally grab the brass ring. Perennial Derby trainers D. Wayne Lukas and Nick Zito have failed the audition, with no Derby mounts, replaced by upstart stand-ins Michael Matz, Dan Hendricks, and Michael Trombetta who bring their respective horses Barbaro, Brother Derek, and Sweetnorthernstaint, fresh and primed to tackle the mile and one quarter slugfest. However, the most intriguing of new faces on this Derby Day may well be the ones you won't see at Churchill Downs. Their impact may well determine the outcome of this wide-open affair. Their names are Benchmark, Sweetssouthernstaint, Point Given, Broken Vow, Aptitude, King Cugat, and Strategic Mission, sires whose progeny will be represented in the Kentucky Derby for the first time, and who stand to gain from earning the imprimatur of sire of a Kentucky Derby winner.

Benchmark, the sire of Dan Hendricks trained Brother Derek, is himself a son of the great classic runner Alydar, who won the hearts of racing fans with his memorable duels with Triple Crown winner Affirmed. Benchmark was both a graded stakes winner at 1 1/8 miles and graded stakes placed sprinter, and, in his first four crops to race has been a useful sire of California breds and a handful of stakes winners. Brother Derek is by far his most impressive son and

is certainly the top class of this year's West Coast contingent. As talented and seasoned as Brother Derek is, the Derby may be the place where his flaws are revealed. In his only race outside of California and in a field larger than eight horses, the Breeder's Cup Juvenile at Belmont, he finished a tired fourth. With a penchant for getting worked up in the post parade, jockey Alex Solis must help Brother Derek find a way to handle the large boisterous Churchill Downs crowd. Nevertheless, Brother Derek's meteoric rise to prominence is a hopeful sign that Alydar's courageous blood has gotten a much needed revival.

Sweetnorthernstaint, a gelding son of Florida stallion Sweetsouthernstaint, has become a wild card of sorts in the Derby mix. It appears the further the distance Sweetnorthernstaint runs, the better, and this should give anyone handicapping the Derby something to think about. His jockey, Kent Desormeaux, has practically declared the mile and a half Belmont Stakes his to lose. Considering the fact that the Belmont Stakes is more a jockey's race than a stamina test, he'd better be prepared to back up his bold words. Sweetsouthernstaint, with two crops to race, was a precocious two year old runner in Florida who never quite got on the Derby trail due to injuries. But, as a son of the prolific late Saint Ballado, the sire of reigning Horse of the Year, Saint Liam, as well as champion distaffer, Ashado, both of whom were grade 1 winners at a mile and quarter, and sporting a classic staying low dosage index of 1.22 himself, Sweetsouthernstaint's offspring seem capable of getting the distance. Sweetnorthernstaint's dosage of 1.33 suggests the fruit does not fall far from the tree, and, if the Michael Trombetta trained gelding gets a clean trip, the pickings might be good.

Point Given, Broken Vow, Aptitude, Strategic Mission, and King Cugat are all stallions represented in the Kentucky Derby by members of their first crop, which undoubtedly pleases their breeding farms, but also adds an element of the unknown to the handicapping calculus. Point Determined is a Maryland bred son of Preakness and Belmont Stakes winner Point Given, and is owned by The Bob and Beverly Lewis Trust, which has won the Kentucky Derby twice before, with Silver Charm and Charismatic. Point Determined has knocked heads with the likes of Brother Derek, A.P. Warrior, and Bob and John all winter in California, and enters the Derby without a stakes win to his credit. However, his driving second place finish in the Santa Anita Derby, a series of bullet works since then, and with Rafael Bejarano in the irons, he is a dangerous horse. Point Given entered the Kentucky Derby as the prohibitive favorite, and had he not been subjected to the torrid pace of that race, the subsequent Horse of the Year would have been a Triple Crown winner, a racing superstar, and worth considerably more than his \$50,000 stud fee. Bob Baffert, who trained Point Given, as well as Point Determined, may be a bit more subdued these days, but, with three live shots in this year's Derby, along with Sinister Minister and Bob and John, he is in

Louisville loaded for bear. A Point Determined win would also be a poignant and fitting epitaph for the late Bob Lewis, one of racing's true gentlemen, who passed away this February.

Broken Vow, the sire of the Steven Asmussen trained Private Vow, is a son of the memorable 1990 Derby winner Unbridled, who also sired Kentucky Derby winner Grindstone, Preakness winner Red Bullet, and Belmont Stakes winner Empire Maker. Although Private Vow has run only twice this year, beaten by Lawyer Ron both times at Oaklawn Park, he remains a seasoned horse with a graded stakes win on the Churchill Downs strip and a recent bullet work there, to boot. Broken Vow was a late developing graded stakes winner with an impressive female family. His dam and grand dam, sired by Nijinsky II and Blushing Groom, respectively, were both stakes producers. When you add Private Vow's dam sire, leading broodmare sire, Deputy Minister, you have a horse that, on paper, has a classic winning pedigree.

The sire of the late closing Steppenwolfer, Aptitude, finished second in both the Kentucky Derby and the Belmont Stakes, and is, himself, a son of the Horse of the Year and a producer of classic runner A.P. Indy. Armed with a most intriguing of pedigrees, Aptitude delivers a variety of classic blood close up in his pedigree, including the aforementioned A.P. Indy, Derby winners Seattle Slew, Secretariat, and Northern Dancer, as well as inbreeding to Buckpasser. At four, Aptitude won two grade ones, the Jockey Club Gold Cup and the Hollywood Gold Cup, and a grade two, the Saratoga Breeder's Cup, at a mile and a quarter. More anecdotal than anything else, Steppenwolfer's great-great grand dam sire was the great Citation, a Triple Crown winner. Lawyer Ron may have had Steppenwolfer's [named after the rock band Steppenwolf] number all winter at Oaklawn Park, but, if the Derby pace is as contested as expected, he may be the one on the magic carpet ride to the winner's circle.

Sailing his way into the Derby is Seaside Retreat, a stakes winner in Canada who also placed in the Grade 2 Lane's End on Turfway Park's Polytrack surface. Seaside Retreat's sire, King Cugat, was a graded stakes winner on the grass going 9 and 11 furlongs, and graded stakes placed going 12 furlongs. A son of the impeccably bred Kingmambo, who sired Belmont Stakes winner Lemon Drop Kid, King Cugat's offspring seem much better suited to running long on the grass. However, Seaside Retreat's recent bullet work at Churchill Downs has convinced his Canadian based trainer, Mark Casse, and regular jockey, Patrick Husbands, to rendezvous at the Derby.

Showing Up, the lightly raced but gutsy winner of the Lexington Stakes, is a son of Strategic Mission, a New York stallion whose first crop consists of a mere 14 named foals. Barclay Tagg trains the undefeated Showing Up, the lesser half of

Roy and Gretchen Jackson's Lael Stables' two horse two trainer Derby delegation that includes another undefeated colt Barbaro, a possible morning line favorite who is trained by Michael Matz and will be ridden by the always dangerous Edgar Prado. Tagg, who caught lightning in a bottle with Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner Funny Cide, certainly has his work cut out for him. Not only does Showing Up have only three career starts, but his sire, Strategic Mission, a son of Mr. Prospector, was a turf miler and only an okay one at that. Named for the old Woody Allen line that "80 percent of success is showing up," Showing Up will need to do much more than that if he's the one taking the Jackson family to the winner's circle.

As difficult as the Derby trail is, just showing up is certainly an achievement. Getting to the finish line first, though, is the Holy Grail, and, in this year's edition, the fresh new faces may just be smiling in the winner's circle.

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