

OVERVIEW:

In my opinion, this may be the worst Preakness field of all time. Ten horses are entered, but only 3 of the 19 that ran in the Kentucky Derby are here. Given that it's a virtual requirement that the Derby winner himself show, the absence of most of the others is glaring. The problem is that modern horse trainers do not want to run horses back on only two weeks rest. The breed has gotten soft and frail, as it has gotten faster and more dynamic. These horses, almost all of which run on the diuretic Lasix, need more time to recover. Some of the Derby horses will be at the Belmont Stakes in three weeks while others are regrouping. The seven new faces are mostly uninspiring.

This is a big advantage for Derby winner California Chrome, who will be a huge betting favorite. Chrome's road to the Triple Crown will get its biggest test in the Belmont. This doesn't mean he's a cinch here. The racing world is buzzing over the unbelievably slow final time of the Derby on a day in which most of the other races were run in fast times. Does this mean CC isn't that good? Maybe. Or maybe other factors were at work. Raw time is sometimes misleading.

The horse with the best shot of beating Chrome didn't show up. That would be the filly Untapable, runaway winner of the Kentucky Oaks in fast time. But her trainer didn't want--you guessed it--to run her back on two weeks rest. Most of the attention will be given to challenger Social Inclusion, a lightly raced but brilliant horse that has been prepared for this race oddly. I'll assess the entire field in post position order.

THE FIELD:

#1 DYNAMIC IMPACT---This improving horse won the Illinois Derby at Hawthorne near Chicago four weeks ago and has a major chance of pulling off the upset here. The Preakness pace is likely to be very fast and that should aid the chances of this horse who will come from the middle to rear of the pack. He won a long stretch battle in his last race, showing real gameness. He has been given enough time to recover and may be sitting on another improved effort. His breeding is perfect for this distance. There is a major negative. Inside post positions have been awful the last two weeks at Pimlico and have been death in the Preakness for several years. Jockey Miguel Mena will have to figure out a way to get off the rail if this horse is to run to his potential.

#2 GENERAL A ROD---He finished eleventh in the Derby but had a troubled trip. The slightly shorter distance of the Preakness will help him. His jockey, Javier Castellano, has been the nation's leader so far this year. He needs to avoid being burned up by the hot pace and the post position is not ideal. I give him at least some shot.

#3 CALIFORNIA CHROME---He's 3-5 on the morning line for a reason. He won the Derby very easily and has five wins in a row. All have been romps. He showed in the Derby he can set just off the pace and pounce when asked. But the Preakness pace is likely to be hotter. He had a perfect trip in the Derby and racing luck like that isn't always repeated. He is obviously the best horse in the race but the odds will be miserably low. The biggest negative is that he has never run back on short rest. But the fact is that most Derby winners are in top form and are able to maintain it for at least one more race.

#4 RING WEEKEND---He was on track to run in the Derby but ran a poor race against a soft field in early April. They came up with some physical excuse for skipping the Derby. I see this horse sitting about three lengths off the pace. The trainer has won a lot of big races and often by pulling off big upsets.

#5 BAYERN---Here's a very talented horse that may be better suited to shorter distances. He should be part of the early pace but probably won't be right on the lead. He's my pick to win the Haskell, but that race is at Monmouth Park at the end of July and the Preakness is Saturday at Pimlico.

#6 RIA ANTONIA---Trainer Bob Baffert refused to run this horse so the owners quickly moved her to a new trainer. She's a filly but nowhere near as talented as Untapable, who might have been the favorite had she run here. This horse has never run remotely close to fast enough to win and appears to be here solely because of an owner's ego trip.

#7 KID CRUZ---The story here is interesting. Trainer Linda Rice is a native of Antigo and is seeking to be the first female trainer to win a Triple Crown race. The horse has run three decent races this year and has a unique running style. He may be as much as 20 lengths off the pace. But he has a remarkable closing kick. The faster they go early, the better it is for this horse. He has a very real chance of finishing in the top three but a win would be a surprise. He is a must-use in the bottom of trifecta and superfecta wagers.

#8 SOCIAL INCLUSION---He's run only three times and all have been spectacular. He crushed two fields at Gulfstream Park before running into a hot pace in the Wood Memorial from a bad post position. He still managed to finish third. But he's being asked to do a lot in only his fourth career start and his 85-year old trainer has had him on an odd workout pattern. He may be able to overcome his training and lack of experience because of sheer talent but I fear this is a very good horse who is being compromised by unwise connections.

#9 PABLO DEL MONTE---Look for him to gun to the lead and try to go wire-to-wire. That's exactly how Oxbow won the Preakness last year. But this horse will have to outduel a lot of other speedy types. The trainer has pulled some creative stuff in the past but this would be the ultimate.

#10 RIDE ON CURLIN---He finished seventh in the Kentucky Derby and actually made up a lot of ground in the stretch after a bad ride by Calvin Borel that saw him all over the track. Borel has been booted and replaced by the much better Joel Rosario. I'm torn on the horse. If he holds his Derby form and gets a cleaner trip, he can win. The fast pace helps. The biggest negative is that while he always seems to run well, he only has two wins in ten starts.

PREDICTION: (listed in order of likelihood to win)

HORSE #	HORSE	PROGRAM ODDS
1	DYNAMIC IMPACT	12-1
3	CALIFORNIA CHROME	3-5
10	RIDE ON CURLIN	10-1
8	SOCIAL INCLUSION	5-1
2	GENERAL A ROD	15-1
7	KID CRUZ	20-1
5	BAYERN	10-1
4	RING WEEKEND	20-1
9	PABLO DEL MONTE	20-1
6	RIA ANTONIA	30-1

ANALYSIS:

If Cal Chrome loses, I think Dynamic Impact has the best shot. He has the right running style, is coming off a career best effort and looks like a horse that is still improving. This doesn't seem like a great crop of three year olds and California Chrome might simply be way better than all of them. I rate my next three choices almost even with one another. The others would be a real surprise although I strongly believe Kid Cruz will be moving late and could get part of it.

WAGERS

\$1 trifecta 1-3 with 1-2-3-7-8-10 with 1-2-3-7-8-10 (\$40)
 \$1 trifecta 1-2-3-8-10 with 1-3 with 1-2-3-7-8-10 (\$32)

Bet #1 to win place and show (use the dollar figure you are comfortable with)

SOME OTHER RACES:

(These bets, as a whole, were profitable on my Kentucky Derby selection card, thanks to an 11-1 winner. Let's try again with my best value-adjusted plays on the Pimlico card.)

RACE #	HORSE #	HORSE	PROGRAM ODDS
4	11	SILVERTONGUED TOMMY	6-1
6	11	JEWEL OF A CAT	10-1
9	7	STRATNHAVER	3-1
11	8	UP WITH THE BIRDS	5-1

BETTING AND VIEWING:

TV coverage of the Pimlico undercard races starts at noon central time on NBC Sports Network (formerly called Versus). NBC coverage of the Preakness airs on Channel 4 starting at 3:30. The Preakness itself is scheduled to go off at 5:18.

The Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk and Oneida casinos all have large off-track betting operations and there are several other OTBs in northern Illinois. Arlington Park, 80 miles from downtown Milwaukee, has live racing and offers betting on the Preakness and all of the other Pimlico races.