

OVERVIEW:

This year's Belmont Stakes shapes up as one of the best American horse races of the last 20 years. You have a legitimate star seeking to be the first horse in 38 years to win the Triple Crown. In most years, American Pharoah would be a cinch to pull it off. But this year's crop of three year olds is especially good. The fourth, sixth, seventh and eighth place horses from the Kentucky Derby all skipped the Preakness and are fresher for this race. I picked Pharoah (yes, that's how his name is misspelled) to win the Derby and Preakness and wrote in my Derby preview that if he won in Kentucky he would sweep the Crown. Now, I'm not so sure. Anyway, I'm going for my own triple crown in this race—trying to see if I can pick the winner in all three races.

The Belmont is an anomaly at the now rare marathon distance of 1 1/2 miles. Most horses aren't bred to have the stamina to do it. Longshots routinely win this race and it has been the scene of some of my biggest scores in betting. Horses going for the crown are ludicrously overbet. Twelve in row have won the Preakness and Derby only to lose the Belmont. Despite this, American Pharaoh will be about 4-5. You do the math.

Traditionally, races like this are won by horses that run close to the lead and are able to just keep grinding along. I'll profile each horse, in post-position order.

THE FIELD:

#1 MUBTAAHIJ: The winner of the UAE Derby in Dubai just wasn't good enough to win the Kentucky Derby. But he ran a respectable eighth and was moving okay at the end. The extra distance of the Belmont will help him. He is a grinding type with at least some tactical speed—the exact kind of horse that thrives in this race. His South African-based trainer is arguably the best in the world. Rather than take the horse back overseas after the Derby loss, he kept this horse here to take a shot in the Belmont. He has had six workouts since the Derby, a number much higher than American trainers, who tend to pussyfoot with horses, would try. If American Pharoah and Materiality hook up early in a duel, Mubtaahij could be in position to run them down late. This is a possible upset winner and is a must-use in the trifecta and superfecta.

#2 TALE OF VERVE: I predicted he would clunk up and finish in the money in the Preakness (nobody else liked him at all) but even I was surprised he finished as high as second. In truth, every other horse other than American Pharaoh was exhausted and Tale of Verve merely plodded by. I expect him to regress here.

#3 MADEFROMLUCKY: This one skipped the Derby and Preakness but won the Peter Pan over the Belmont track four weeks ago. That race is often a key predictor of success in the Belmont Stakes. Trainer Todd Pletcher is red hot at Belmont now but this horse would need sizable improvement to win.

#4 FRAMMENTO: He's never run remotely fast enough to win this race and would be an automatic toss out were it not for the often wacky results of this race. He might plod up to catch a piece of the purse. Anything better would be a big surprise.

#5 AMERICAN PHAROAH: A legitimately great horse. He has excellent tactical speed and might go straight to the lead as he did in the Preakness. He is also a very game horse who refuses to stop fighting. He reminds me a lot of Bob Baffert's near miss Triple Crown horse of 1997, Silver Charm. But the Preakness was run over a very tiring track that received a huge rainstorm right before the race. This horse might have been knocked backwards by that effort. Over the years some mediocre horses in weak years won the first two legs of the Crown. They couldn't close the deal because they weren't good enough. This one is good enough. But he's fighting history and at least three very good horses that didn't run in the Preakness.

#6 FROSTED: He finished a very good fourth in the Derby and did it by coming from the back of the field in a race that was dominated by frontrunners. Trainer Kiaran McLaughlin immediately pointed for the Belmont. The horse is based at this track and gallops over it every day. New York based horses dominate this race. Frosted's workout last Friday was one of the best I have ever seen. I rate it a 100 on the 100-point scale. My concern is that he will be too far back but his rider must certainly know that is not the way to win the Belmont Stakes. He has won only two of his eight races but appears to be sitting on a big one. Major contender.

#7 KEEN ICE: He ran seventh in the Derby and has trained well since. He is bred to run forever and therefore merits some consideration. But he's only won one of his eight career starts and has been out of the money five times. I see him as more of a threat to fill out the bottom of the trifecta or superfecta than win.

#8 MATERIALITY: I picked him second in the Derby but he lost all chance when he broke slowly and was banged around in the early stages. It was only his fourth career start and most horses would spit it out and quit. But Materiality kept fighting and finished a very fine sixth. He has excellent tactical speed and rider John Velazquez might go after Pharoah right from the start by gunning this horse to the lead. My concern is that he may get used up too much in the early running. But this horse's win in the Florida Derby was incredible and, like Pharoah, this one is a dogged fighter and won't give up. I felt going into the Derby that Materiality and Pharoah were equal in ability but I gave the edge to the other horse because of more experience. Now, the tables are turned and Materiality's freshness may give him the advantage.

PREDICTION:

HORSE #	HORSE	PROGRAM ODDS
6	FROSTED	5-1
8	MATERIALITY	6-1
1	MUBTAAHIJ	10-1
5	AMERICAN PHAROAH	3-5
3	MADEFROMLUCKY	12-1
7	KEEN ICE	20-1
4	FRAMMENTO	30-1
2	TALE OF VERVE	15-1

ANALYSIS:

I'm torn between Frosted and Materiality and give them virtually equal chances to win. Mubtaahij is the possible upsetter. The way the race is run will be key. If Materiality fights AP for the lead, it could compromise both horses. This sets it up for Frosted or Mubtaahij. If the pace isn't that fast, Materiality or even Pharoah can win. You can bet with your heart and pick AP to win the Triple Crown or you can go with your head and history and take the juicier odds and try to make some real money. You can see my choice. I will use 1, 6 and 8 in all of my daily doubles, pick threes and pick fours. That said, Pharoah is good enough to win and will go down in history if can pull it off.

SOME WAGERS:

\$1 trifecta 6-8 with 1-6-8 with 1-3-5-6-7-8 (\$16)

\$1 trifecta 6-8 with 6-8 with all (\$12)

\$1 superfecta 1-6-8 with 1-6-8 with 1-3-5-6-8 with all (\$90)

10-cent superfecta exactly as above (\$9)

\$1 trifecta 1-6-8 with 1-6-8 with 1-3-5-6-7-8 (\$24)

\$20 exacta 6-8 with 1-6-8 (\$80)

\$10 exacta 1-6-8 with 6-8 (\$40)

\$10 to win place and show on 6 and 8 (\$60)

OTHER RACES:

Belmont Park has an incredible day of racing with ten stakes races in addition to the Belmont Stakes. My favorite plays of the day are: Race 2: #2 Wisecracker, Race 3 Woody Stephens Stakes: #3 Competitive Edge, Race 4 Jaipur Stakes: #4 Ageless, Race 6 Brooklyn Handicap: #8 V.E. Day, Race 8 Just A Game Handicap: #10 Photo Call.

TV AND WAGERING

You can bet at Potawatomi, Oneida or Ho-Chunk casinos in their off-track betting parlors. You can bet all the Belmont races and watch live racing at Arlington Park, 80 miles from Milwaukee, or head to the off track parlors in northern Illinois. Several account wagering companies accept legal bets from Wisconsin. NBC Sports Network coverage starts at 1:30 central with race 6 from Belmont. Coverage switches to the main NBC network (Channel 4 in Milwaukee) at 3:30. The Belmont Stakes itself is scheduled for 5:50 central time.