

OVERVIEW:

This year's Kentucky Derby is considered wide open as no horse has seemed especially dominant. In the 80s and 90s, the favorite never seemed to win but that trend has been totally reversed. The post-time wagering favorite has actually won the Derby each of the last four years. Still, the payouts have been solid as the 20-horse field and the desire of bettors to chase longshots spreads the money around. The favorite this year could be 4-1 or higher as there is no clear standout.

There's a strong chance of a wet track as the weather in Louisville is lousy through the weekend and I have factored that into my analysis. I'll assess each horse, in post-position order.

THE FIELD (in post position order):

#1 LOOKIN AT LEE - I really liked this horse as he had a very troubled trip last time when third in the Arkansas Derby and has been improving with each race. But it is almost impossible to win the Derby from this post position.

#2 THUNDER SNOW - This horse made the field by winning the UAE Derby in Dubai and that route still hasn't produced a Derby winner. But this one is by far the best horse to come via Dubai. He won a Grade 1 grass race in Europe as a two year old last year and has gotten better since being switched to the dirt. But the post position is awful and I am discounting him.

#3 FAST AND ACCURATE - He may be accurate but he's not fast.

#4 UNTRAPPED - His name notwithstanding, he's trapped with an unfavorable inside draw and has lost his ground at the end of each of his last three races.

#5 ALWAYS DREAMING - He romped in the Florida Derby and is prepared by super trainer Todd Pletcher (who is tired of hearing the media harp about his career 1-for-45 Derby record). But the horse hasn't been comfortable during his track appearances this week at Churchill Downs and the post position is too far inside for my liking.

#6 STATE OF HONOR - He's won only once in ten starts and always seems to run just okay. The jockey in his previous races jumped off to ride trainer Mark Casse's other, and better, horse, Classic Empire.

#7 GIRVIN - This is a very talented horse but he's been plagued by a foot problem the last two weeks and that's probably too much to overcome.

#8 HENCE - The Sunland Derby is not exactly the most prestigious of the Derby prep races but many horses that ran in it this spring came back to run well. Hence won that race and is rested by having not run since. He has both tactical speed and the ability to come from off the pacer. His trainer, Steve Asmussen, generally has his Derby horses well prepared and the rider, Florent Geroux, is one of the best five in America. Consider this horse.

#9 IRAP - Trainer Doug O'Neill has won this race two of the last five years so this horse can't be ignored. He won the Blue Grass Stakes decisively last out but that was first career win. Tough call but I'm leaning against and I might be wrong.

#10 GUNNEVERA - This horse comes from way off the pace and will be running late. He already has three graded stakes wins and his rider may be the best in America. Trainer Antonio Sano came to the US a few years ago after being kidnapped in Venezuela and not released until a large ransom was paid. If the horse wins, the media will tell that story non-stop for two weeks.

#11 BATTLE OF MIDWAY - He may be the frontrunner and has considerable talent but he never raced as a two year old and no horse has won the Derby without two year old racing experience since 1882 (not a misprint).

#12 SONNETEER - This horse has run ten times and still hasn't won a race. But his two decent finishes in the Arkansas prep races got him enough points to qualify. He's only a longshot chance to win but he is a major threat to come running late and land third or fourth and blow up the trifecta and superfecta payouts. Do not leave him out of these types of wagers. If the track favors deep closers, he might be the horse to shock the world.

#13 J BOYS ECHO - He was very impressive in winning the Gotham Stakes before clunking at Keeneland last out. There's a real chance he will rebound and win the Derby. His running style will have him about six lengths off the pace and that may be perfect here. His workouts this month at Churchill Downs have been very good and his jockey was dominant over the winter at Gulfstream Park. Solid trainer whose career goal has been to win the Derby. Contender.

#14 CLASSIC EMPIRE - Many think he will be the betting favorite. He was the champion American two-year old last year and has won five of his seven career starts. He looked good in winning the Arkansas Derby last out but was sidelined for a few weeks by an injury prior to that and his preparation has been rushed. I think this is a horse to take a stand against.

#15 MCCRAKEN - He won his first four races before a mediocre third last time in the Blue Grass. But that race was clearly just a prep for the Derby and McCracken's workouts at Churchill Downs since that race have been outstanding. The horse will relish the 1 ¼ mile distance. Trainer Ian Wilkes was the right-hand man to the trainer of two prior Derby winners and is outstanding at pointing a horse for one big race. The jockey is underrated and very experienced at Churchill. The running style is ideal for this race and the post position is excellent. If he doesn't lose too much ground heading into the first turn and can navigate traffic around the final turn, he may be wearing roses.

#16 TAPWRIT - Like McCracken, this horse clunked in the Blue Grass but he has also come back to work very well over the Churchill surface. He is as well-bred as any horse in the race and trainer Pletcher and rider Jose Ortiz are outstanding. He's another one who will come from about six lengths back. Contender.

#17 IRISH WAR CRY - Trainer Graham Motion, who trains many of the horses I co-own, has won the Derby and knows how to prepare a horse for this race. There's a lot to like. He has tactical speed but also considerable stamina. He's won four of his five races and had a tremendous workout Sunday at the Fair Hills training center in Maryland. It is unusual he hasn't had a formal workout at Churchill but has looked very good galloping over the track the last few days. A lot of people are picking this horse.

#18 GORMLEY - He's the best of the California horses and the last few Derbys have been dominated by California horses. He was visually outstanding in coming from just off a very fast pace to win the Santa Anita Derby. Trainer John Shirreffs is a master at handling talented horses. Like Irish War Cry, this one did not have a full workout over the Churchill track but the private clocker I use is raving about the horse's last workout at Santa Anita. The time of his Santa Anita Derby win was very slow but I attribute that to track conditions. This is a horse with tactical speed that can lay just off the leaders and pounce. Jockey Victor Espinoza has won the Derby an amazing three times and this year might be the fourth.

#19 PRACTICAL JOKE - He's never been worse than third in six career starts and was ahead of both Tapwrit and McCracken in finishing a close second in the Blue Grass. But the post position is awfully wide and he may be one race away from his best.

#20 PATCH - It helps that this horse is widest of all since he is blind in one eye. That certainly can't help in a race with a huge field and heavy traffic like the Derby. He seems overmatched.

PREDICTION:

HORSE #	HORSE	PROGRAM ODDS
15	MCCRACKEN	5-1
18	GORMLEY	15-1
17	IRISH WAR CRY	6-1
13	J BOYS ECHO	20-1
8	HENCE	15-1
12	SONNETEER	50-1

ANALYSIS:

Unless the track is biased toward speed, the best place to be will be in the middle of the pack. McCracken relishes the Churchill Downs surface and should move way up in this race. Gormley and Irish War Cry will be close to the pace and have major shots if they are good enough. J Boys Echo and Hence are the others I give good chances to win. Sonneteer could hit the board at a huge price.

SOME WAGERS

If you'd like, you can try some of these, listed in order of preference.

A win, place and show bet on #15

A smaller win, place and show bet on #18

\$2 exacta: 15-18 with 5-8-9-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19 (\$40)

\$1 exacta 5-8-9-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19 with 15-18 (\$20)

\$1 trifecta 15-18 with 8-12-13-15-16-17-18 with 5-8-9-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19 (\$108)

\$2 exacta box 8-13-15-17-18 (\$40)

OTHER PLAYS:

Some other races I like on the Churchill Downs Derby Day card:

Race 7, the Distaff Turf Mile: #6 Roca Rojo.

Race 8, the Pat Day Mile: #1 Local Hero.

Race 14: #11 Wicked Macho

KENTUCKY OAKS:

#4 Paradise Woods will be the heavy favorite in Friday's race and I can't go against her. Also Friday, I like #4 Paid Up Subscriber in Race 5, the La Troienne. And in Friday's 8th race, the Eight Belles, I like #11 Let It Ride Mom.

WAGERING AND TV:

There are many legal online services that take Wisconsin accounts. You can also bet at any of the tribal casinos in Wisconsin, including Potawatomi. The closest live racing is Arlington Park, about 85 miles from Milwaukee where you can bet on the Derby and the entire Churchill card in addition to the Arlington races. Coverage of the early races is from 11 AM to 1:30 PM on NBC Sports Network. Coverage switches to NBC (Channel 4 in Milwaukee) at 1:30. The Derby itself should go off around 5:35.