

## 2016 TRIPLE CROWN TRAIL

by Jean Derench

In 1996, GRINDSTONE won the Louisiana Derby. He defeated Zarb's Magic which won the Arkansas Derby and then went on to defeat Baffert's Cavonnier in the Run for the Roses. Grindstone won half of his six lifetime races and the Kentucky Derby was his last career start. He eventually as the sire of Belmont Stakes winner Birdstone, which upset favored Smarty Jones in that event. Grindstone was by Derby winner Unbridled. Prior to 1996, you have to go back to Black Gold's victory in 1924 to find a Louisiana Derby winner that went on to glory in Kentucky. However, in 2003, Funny Cide ran second and future classic winners Risen Star, Creme Fraiche & Drosselmeyer placed in the event.

That being said, do we have a Kentucky Derby winner in the field of 11 that are projected to face the starter at the Fair Grounds this Saturday (March 26, 2016). I don't think so. But it does shape up to be a good betting race. I've covered several of the horses in my previous columns. Let me begin by introducing you to a few of the others.

UNCLE WALTER is trained by Michael Maker who has won the last two editions of the Louisiana Derby (the recently deceased Vicar's In Trouble in 2014 and last year with International Star). Vicar's in Trouble would be last to California Chrome (who races in Dubai this weekend) and International Star was injured and didn't make it to Kentucky. Maker's entry this year is a son of Uncle Mo out of the Unbridled's Song mare Look For Good. In four career starts, he was one win, a second and a third and comes into the race with an 11<sup>th</sup> place finish in the Risen Star and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the LeComte Stakes. Mo Tom won the LeComte and probably favorite Gun Runner won the Risen Star. Look For Good won her initial start in 2002 at Churchill Downs in a claiming sprint and was winless in the rest of her 10 career starts, ended up in Canada at Assiniboia Downs, in her first and only start outside of Kentucky. But she was last of 10 in a sprint. Robbie Albarado will be aboard Uncle Walter this Saturday and I don't expect to see him in the winner's circle.

A colt whose breeding I adore is TOM'S READY, a Pennsylvania-bred son of More Than Ready is trained by Dallas Stewart, who saddled the winner of the 1999 LA Derby in Kimberlite Pipe, which was 6<sup>th</sup> in Charismatic's Kentucky Derby. Tom's Ready has raced 8 times and has a single win. I thought he was on track when he started 2016 by placing in the Le Comte but then he was dismal in the Risen Star, finishing 7<sup>th</sup> with no excuse. John Valazquez rode him in that race but has chosen to stay with Greenpointcrusader in Saturday's race. More Than Ready was basically a sprinter who hung on to be 2<sup>cd</sup> in the 2000 Louisiana Derby (to Mighty) and was second to High Yield in the Blue Grass Stakes. He was more effective in Australia as a sire but did get Wood Memorial winner Verrazano here in the States. The dam is non-winner Goodbye Stranger who is by Broad Brush which had no problem at 9 and ten furlongs in graded stakes company. Consulado, a stakes placed horse, was a full brother which ended up dying young. She's also the dam of two other winners to date, nothing that suggests Ky Derby but I might put a small wager on TOMS READY for part of the purse this Saturday.

BATTERY (Can), which is trained by Todd Pletcher, comes into the LA Derby with a record of 4-2-1-0. His last start was in a mile and 1/8<sup>th</sup> optional claiming win at Gulfstream Park under Javier Castellano who will be aboard this weekend. Prior to that, he was second by 6 lengths to Cherry Wine in another optional claimer also at Gulfstream and that race was at 1 1/16<sup>th</sup> miles. Cherry Wine was 4<sup>th</sup> in his last start (the Rebel Stakes). The pedigree of Battery (Can) is Bernardini x Flawless Diamond, by Saint Ballado (Can). I have spoken about Champion Bernardini before. The dam was a winner of two of her 3 career starts before injury forced her retirement. She was trained by Todd Pletcher. All three of her starts were 6 furlong sprints but she is the dam of restricted stakes winner Blue Heart (Can) which likes the middle distances and also of Lone Star Derby placed Henshin Hero.

ZAPPERINI, a longshot, is by Ghostzapper out of Bobby's Babe by Smart Strike (Can). He's won a mile and sixteenth maiden even at Fair Grounds in his first start of the year, which was his second lifetime start. He was favored in that event and won by a half length despite being bumped during the race. The jockey that day was Francisco Torres who will not be riding him Saturday. Torres has chosen the more successful Candy My Boy. Bobby's Babe won one race in a career that included 11 races that was in her first start which was at 6 furlongs. After that, she contested allowance races for the remainder of her career, with the exception of a 7<sup>th</sup> place finish in the Audobon Oaks. The majority of these races were on grass (2 on AWT) and she did race most of the time over a mile. Smart Strike (Can), a Grade 1 SW over a mile, is the sire of turf loving English Channel, Champion Looking at Lucky, and others...and, oh yeah, Curlin. Trainer is Gregory Foley and the rider will be Eclipse award winning jockey Julien Leoparoux.

DAZZLING GEM brings a two for two record into the Louisiana Derby. He'll be ridden by Shaun Bridgmohan and he is trained by Brad Cox, who is having a good winter. He's saddled 68 horses to date (March 24 2016) and 68 have finished in the money with 39 wins. He's due for a big one. Sire Misremembered won at 9 & 10 furlongs in graded stakes company (including the SA Handicap) and dam is minor winner Dazzler, who is by G1SW & champion, the deceased Vindication. Dazzler's only victory was at 7.5 furlongs and she contested claiming races in her career. She is also the dam of the I Use Tohave Money, a Midwest sprinter. Both of Dazzling Gem's wins were this year and both at Oaklawn Park. Despite the lack of seasoning, I like this bay colt.

GREENPOINTCRUSADER – have written about him before – and I am just going to cut and past what I've said before:  
For this time around, the last one I'll chat about is GREENPOINTCRUSADER. He is appearing on several handicappers lists in their top three. Of the horses I have spoken about today, he is the most accomplished having won \$435,700 to date. I mentioned the Champagne Stakes, which he won. Aside from his maiden win at Saratoga, that's been his only win but since it's a Grade One event, it made folks notice him. Bernardini, the Preakness winner & champion 3 year old of 2006, is proving to be an outstanding sire with progeny like Stay Thirsty, Imperative, Alpha, To Honor and Serve, Rachel's Alexandra, and others and he would provide the stamina. Dam is graded stakes placed Ava Knowsthecode, by Belmont Stakes placed G1SW Cryptoclearance. The subject colt is a full brother to a buzz horse from a few years back, the GSW Algorithms. Unbeaten in 3 starts, his race career was over after the Holy Bull Stakes (G3) in January. Greenpointcrusader was 2cd in that same race this year to this year's buzz horse, Mohaymen.

You really have to love this pedigree for the Derby Distance. The next start for Greenpointcrusader is expected to be the Louisiana Derby (March 26th) and he'll not have Mohaymen to deal with there. Trainer is Dominic Schettino and rider is Kent Desourmeaux (remember Big Brown?)

BUT there is an update in that the rider will be John Velazquez which moves him up considerably in my estimation and this makes him my choice. He has been breezing at Palm Meadows & appears fit.

GUN RUNNER got a cover of the Blood Horse when he won the Risen Star in his first start of the year. He was bumped during the race and came from a stalking position to win over Forevamo, Mo Tom and Candy My Boy—all which will be in the LA Derby. That win brought his career winnings to \$306,920 and a record of 3 wins in 4 starts. His sire, Candy Ride (Arg) has always been a stallion I have admired. As a racehorse, he was 3 for 3 in his native land and then came to the US to go 3 for 3 before an injury ended his career. He was a G1SW here. His progeny have been eye catching and impressive with the likes of ill fated Champion Shared Belief; G2SW Clubhouse Ride; Robert Lewis SW Candy Boy; the aforementioned Misremembered; Santa Anita Derby winner

Sidney's Candy; G1SW Twirling Candy as well as Kettle Corn, Capt Candyman Can and even a Russian Derby winner in Candivo. The dam is Quiet Giant who cost Besilu Stables 3 million dollars in 2011. She was a G2SW and is by Giant's Causeway, a G1SW & Champion. Definitely the best bred runner in the field based on performances of the sire and dam and definitely a contender since he's got the most seasoning. Steve Asmussen trains and Florent Geroux is the rider.

FOREVAMO is a Florida-bred which has one win in 6 starts. He won the Jean Lafitte Stakes in 2015 and this year was 2<sup>cd</sup> in the Risen Star. The trainer is Al Stall Jr and Cornelio Hernandez will be in the saddle. Prior to the Risen Star, he was second in an allowance event to Candy My Boy. The sire is Champion Uncle Mo and the dam is Candlelightdinner, a winner of 1 of 7 starts, that being at a mile. Broodmare sire is successful sire and G3SW miler Slew City Slew. The sparkling jewel in the production career of Candlelightdinner is that she is also the dam of Champion Musical Romance (By Concorde's Tune). She did win a stake at a mile but her specialty was sprinting. She is also the dam of Puerto Rican Champion Vuelve Ruben M which won at distances. Sadly, he was euthanized in 2015 after suffering a fractured leg.

CONQUEST WINDYCITY sold for \$800,000 as a two year old in training & was won half of his 4 starts to date & just under \$100,000. He's raced only once this year, that being a winning effort at Oaklawn Park a month ago. Joe Rocco who rode him then will be aboard again and the trainer is Mark Casse who you can never omit from consideration. Last year, in his last start of the year, he won his maiden race at Keeneland over 1 1/16<sup>th</sup> miles. Sire is Horse of the Year Tiznow which relished distance racing and dam is Lasting Appeal by A P Indy. The dam had one start and won it (6 furlongs) and this colt has been her most successful offspring thusfar.

MO TOM has won a bit over \$250,000 and half of his 6 starts to date. In his last start, he was 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Risen Star after winning the Le Comte, defeating ultimate Tampa Bay Derby winner, the most-impressive Destin. In 2015, MoTom won the Street Sense Stakes at Churchill Downs in which he defeated Tom's Ready. His record also includes 2 3<sup>rd</sup> place finishes – in the Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes (to Aeroforce & Mor Spirit) & in a Keeneland allowance race at six furlongs. As his name suggests, he is sired by Uncle Mo. He dam is non winner, the New York bred Caroni by Rubiano. Tom Amoss is the trainer and Corie Lanerie the rider and he's my choice for second this weekend.

CANDY MY BOY rounds out the field. Trainer Ralph Brueggemann was made a national name with his success with The Pizza Man, a fan-popular gelding. Candy My Boy is another by Candy Ride (Arg) out of Runway Rosie by Include. Runway Rosie was a SW at 8f, 8.5f & 9f. Candy My Boy has raced 7 times with 2 wins and 2 seconds. He won his first race in his 5<sup>th</sup> start last year which was at 8.32f in which he lead all the way to win by 2 ¼ lengths & that was at Fair Grounds. He won his first start of 2016, also at Fair Grounds, leading all the way to win over Forevamo. He was the pacesetter in the Risen Star Stakes, ending up 4<sup>th</sup>. The rider that day and this Saturday was Francisco Torres.

OK, so there you have it—profiles of the Louisiana Derby entrants. Who is your pick? As I said, I'll go with Greenpointcrusader to win with Mo Tom second and Dazzling Gem 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Derby dreams...