

## Triple Crown 2024 - Let's begin

January 24, 2024 by Jean Derench

## U.S. RACING TRIPLE CROWN 2024

I am back again! Many thanks to Vlad for offering me this space again to keep you all up to speed on what's happening as we head down the road to the Triple Crown races. Several things have happened already – the Derby purse has been upped to 5 million dollars, the Belmont will be run at Saratoga this year, Baffert is still out of the Derby and a possible contender has died.

There have been a few three year old stake races run already this year and since it is that time, these become possible Derby trail horses. So, let's start off with the January 6th Jerome Stakes which was run at Aqueduct. Two things about this race cause me not to be overly excited about the winner. The first, when Easy Goer set the track record for a mile at Aqueduct back in 1989, he did it in 1:32:40. Time for this year's renewal was 1:41:91. Big difference. The Jerome Stakes used to be on the fall calendar back in the 2000s (winners then included Fusaichi Pegasus, Discreet Cat & it was run at Belmont Park) then it was moved to April and now it's settled in to January's program. Winner last year was Lugan Knight and it was the last time he ever won a race and he was through with racing by year's end. This year the renewal was won by the favored DRUM ROLL PLEASE. The second thing about this race (remember, I said there were two things that caused me not to be overly excited about the winner) was that if you read the charts for the other four that contested the race, it sounds like you are reading about a smash-up car rally. The comments were "chased, faltered", "tired", "stumbled, tired" and "stumbled, ran on".

The winner broke last and raced 4 wide after being bumped at the start, took command mid way thru the stretch and pulled away to win by 3 ¾ lengths with Javier Castellano in the saddle. He is trained by Brad Cox and was winning his second of 5 races in his young career. He broke his maiden at Aqueduct in his third start in October when he won at a mile and then he was entered in the Remsen Stakes and he finished second to Dornoch. The Withers Stakes at 9 furlongs is on the first Saturday in February and we may see if this colt is one to watch if he stays in New York for the winter possibly aiming for the Wood Memorial. Pedigree – his sire is Hard Spun.

Hard Spun was defeated by Street Sense in the Kentucky Derby after leading most of the way in 2007 but before the end of the year, he would turn the tables on that one by winning the Kentucky Cup Classic at Turfway on an all-weather track. Hard Spun was tenacious enough to run in all three of the Triple Crown events that year, finishing 3rd in the Preakness and 4th in the Belmont. As a sire, he has had major winners all around the world including Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, South Africa, UAE, Venezuela, Denmark and in the US has sired at least 9 millionaires. You might remember Two Phil's from last year's Kentucky Derby who appeared to be the winner (much like his sire) but ended up a hard fought second. He then went on to win the 9 furlong Ohio Derby in what would be his last start as he was injured during the race and promptly retired. Another son of Hard Spun did well in the Derby when he was 4th after winning the 9 furlong Wood Memorial and that would be Wicked Strong. If you question his ability to get distance runners, keep in mind Silver State won the 9 furlong Oaklawn Handicap; Hard Aces won the 10 furlong Gold Cup at Santa Anita and two 12 furlong Grade 3 events; Hard Not To Like (Can) won at 9 furlongs (preferring turf) and A Thread of Blue won at 9.5f furlongs (also preferred turf). He also sired Breeders Cup Sprint winner Aloha West and Breeders Cup Mile winner Spun To Run. The pedigree is there on the sire's side.

The dam of Drum Roll Please is Imply who was not too shabby as a racehorse, winning \$772,728 in 30 starts. Most of her 7 stake race wins were in state-bred company (she is a Pennsylvania-bred, as is Drum Roll Please and Hard Spun). She won at distances from 6-8.5 furlongs. Her sire is E Dubai who was a G2SW who won stakes at distances of 8.5f to 10 furlongs. E Dubai is the sire of Breeders Cup Classic winner Fort Larned.

The Grade 2 San Vicente Stakes was run on January 6th as well and the winner was the highly regarded Bob Baffert trained and awfully-named MUTH. He did as a favorite should taking command at the head of the stretch and winning by 2 ¾ lengths, being ridden out at the wire. He was ridden by Juan Hernandez and defeated another Baffert runner, Pilot Commander which finished ahead of Slider.

Juan Hernandez had ridden Pilot Commander when that one broke his maiden but opted to ride Muth in the San Vicente and it was a good choice apparently. (Muth is named for a friend of Bafferts, Aaron Muth.) By the way, it was the thirteenth time Baffert has won this particular race. Why is it that when these big money races, all the other trainers stay in the barn leaving the pot for the Baffert horses? Anyway, let's look at his pedigree – not Bafferts, but Muths.

He is Good Magic x Hoppa by Uncle Mo. Good Magic, a son of Curlin, won the Haskell Invitational as well as the Breeders Cup Juvenile and was second in the Kentucky Derby (to Justify). A lot was expected of him after he was bought for a million dollars at Keeneland and a lot has happened for him. After his racing career, he headed off to stud and in his first crop begot Kentucky

Derby winner Mage. Not too shabby. Other impressive winners for this young stallion are Blazing Sevens, a Grade 1 winner; How Did He Do That, which won both the Oklahoma and Iowa Derbies; Grade 3 winner Blazing Sevens, Los Alamitos Derby winner Reincarnate and previously mentioned Remsen winner Dornoch. Sire side of this pedigree – AOK!

The dam, Hoppa, had a 3-race career before she headed to a life of a broodmare. Her only win came at 6 furlongs and that was at Churchill Downs. Broodmare sire Uncle Mo was an incredibly gifted miler (he did win a stake at 8.5furlongs) and has been a sensation as a stallion as well. Some of his get include Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist, Belmont winner Mo Donegal, two time Breeders Cup Sprint winner Golden Pal, Pacific Classic winner Arabian Knight, Ohio Horse of the Year (winning at 10 furlongs) Mo Don't No; Hollywood Derby winner (turf) Mo Forza; Monmouth Oaks winner Unbridled Mo; G1SW at 9 furlongs Adare Manor; G2SW Laoban; Wood Memorial winner Outwork and last year's Derby hopeful, Kingsbarns, which won the Louisiana Derby. So what the dam lacked in stamina, perhaps it can be recouped by the broodmare sire. Muth is the first foal for Hoppa and he brought 2 million dollars when he was sold as a yearling to Donato Lanni.

Let me travel to Turfway Park for another three year old stake that was run on January 6th and that would be the Turfway Preview Stakes. William Morley saddled the winner, the favorite, VOTE NO which defeated 4 others by 5 ¼ lengths at 6.5 furlongs on an all weather course. Be interesting to see where they go with this one. Vote No is by Divisidero, a Kitten's Joy son, which did his best running on turf, winning several grades stakes at 9 furlongs. He has sired only 4 winners to date and Vote No is his only stakes winner. The dam is Sistas Ready (by More Than Ready) who won once in 14 starts (at a mile). She had 2 foals before she headed for the sales ring and in 2022 was sent to South Korea. The broodmare sire, More Than Ready, was a solid sprinter but who could get any kind when it came to his career as a stallion. More popular down under than in the States, he was the sire of Queensland Derby winner Eagle Way (Aus), Hong Kong stakes placed (at 12 furlongs) Renaissance Art; Prix De Guiche winner Dalwari; New Zealand Oaks winner More Than Sacred; Hollywood Turf Cup winner Say The Word; Travers winner Catholic Boy; Wood Memorial and Haskell winner Verrazano and so many more.

Vote No is a gelding and is trained by William Morey and for the Turfway Prevue, Gerardo Corrales was in the saddle.

This weekend there are three three-year-old stake races. They are the Riley Allison Derby at Sunland Park in which Steve Asmussen will saddle the favorite, Ohio-bred Crafted. On Saturday, it's the Le Comte at Fair Grounds and Steve has another favorite, that being Track Phantom who will duke it out with Brad Cox' Nash and then there was the restricted (New York bred) Rego Park Stakes at Aqueduct, but the day's program has been cancelled due to the weather-it's supposed to be zero degrees.

With Vlad's approval, I'd like to add sort of an addendum to this column and that is a “where are they now?” type of thing. Where are the horses that ran in last year's Kentucky Derby? Hope you enjoy this update....