

2025 USA TRIPLE CROWN

(4/28/2025) By Jean Derench

Curlin is the sire of two of this year's Kentucky Derby entrants: the probably favorite, Journalism and Grande. Champion three year old in 2007 as well as 2 time Horse of the Year & Champion Older Horse in both the US and UAE as a four year old, he's gone on to be a superior stallion and currently has a \$225,000 stud fee. Curlin was 3rd in his Kentucky Derby (won by Street Sense) and then won the Preakness and was 2nd in the Belmont Stakes. At year's end, he also won the Breeder's Cup Classic. Add to that the Dubai World Cup, two editions of the Jockey Club Gold Cup, The Stephen Fost Hdcp, the Woodward, Arkansas Derby and Rebel Stakes. He is the epitome of a classic distance horse to lends that two both his sons in this year's Derby. He is the sire of Horse of the Year Cody's Wish (a miler), Champion Vino Rosso (Breeders Cup winner), Champion Idiomatic (BC Distaff), Champion Malathaat (also BC Distaff winner) and so many more outstanding horses. His son, Exaggerator won the Preakness and another son, Palace Malice, won the Belmont. No Derby winner and wouldn't that be the frosting on the cake for his "page"?

Journalism has all the right stuff. He's won 4 of his 5 starts and over \$625,000. Mike McCarthy is the trainer and Umberto Rispoli is set to ride. He's coming up to the race in spectacular fashion, having won the LA Futurity at two and then the San Felipe and Santa Anita Derby in his last two starts. In the San Felipe, he raced 4th in a field of 6 for most of the way, then took command at the head of the stretch from the well-regarding (and expensive Barnes) and won by a length and $\frac{3}{4}$. Third was Rodriguez. In the Santa Anita Derby, the added distance didn't prove to be a problem as he overcame bumping and coming from last to best Baeza by $\frac{3}{4}$ length. Citizen Bull was 4th and last was the aforementioned Barnes. (a five horse field in what has become the norm for all California stakes it seems). The dam is a daughter of Uncle Mo, the Grade 2 winner Mopotism. Journalism is her second foal, her first to race. Her first foal was a 1.5 million dollar sale colt who has not started. The pedigree is there for Journalism, the past performances are stellar, the connections are the best and I am salivating over this horse. Just wish he wasn't going to be favorite!

Grande made all three of his lifetime starts this year and has a 2 for three record, his last race being the Wood Memorial in which he was second. Todd Pletcher trains and Johnnie Velazquez is booked to ride. Repole Stable owns and they are hellbent on have a Derby starter every year. Grande's first start was back in January in a Maiden event at Gulfstream Park at a mile. He raced forwardly throughout and won by 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ lengths. At the end of February, he was entered in a conditioned optional allowance, this at a mile and an eighth. I'm sure that effort is what prompted the connections to enter the Wood Memorial (also 9 furlongs) in which he was bumped at the start, raced in mid-pack while the front running Rodriguez galloped out to a 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ length win. The dam, Journey Home, was a Grade 2 stakes placed winner, best on turf.

Into Mischief is the sire of two Derby starters (would have been three but son Tappan Street suffered an injury a few days ago, regretfully). Stud fee for Into Mischief is \$250,000 so he's in the same neighborhood as Curlin. He does have a Derby winner in his portfolio, that being Mandaloun (2021), tho it was at the expense of the disqualification of Medina Spirit (ridden that day by Johnie V) due to a positive drug test (and subsequent barring of Bob Baffert from the track for a couple of years). He is the sire of Champions Life Is Good, Pretty Mischievous, Gamine, Wonder Wheel, Covfefe, Conquest Enforcer, Miss Mischief, Dubai World Cup winner Laurel River and so many more.

Citizen Bull was last year's two year old champion in a three for 4 campaign, topped off by winning the BC Juvenile. He made his first appearance as a three year old in the Robert Lewis Stakes at Santa Anita in February (8 furlongs) besting four others (three trained by Baffert). He won by 3 ¾ lengths and it appeared the champion was back as good as ever. But, what followed had to be a bitter pill. He was the favorite in the Santa Anita Derby. He had gained the lead and it looked like game over when he yielded uncharacteristically and ended up 4th in that short field to Journalism with Baeza second. Matin Garcia is expected to ride again for the Baffert barn but with post position one, he's not getting things his way. His dam is unraced No Joke, a daughter of Distorted Humor. Her other two foals have not won. Distorted Humor, of course, was the sire of 2003 Kentucky Derby/Preakness winner Funny Cide and 2010 Belmont winner Drosselmeyer. Baffert had several impressive winter racing three year old colts that unfortunately didn't qualify but he also has Rodriguez who I'll get to in a few minutes. He did have a impressive workout on Monday.

The other Into Mischief son in the Derby is the much admired **Sovereignty** who would be owner Godolphin's first Kentucky Derby winner IF all goes well on Saturday. He comes into the Derby with a 2-2-0 record in 5 starts and has won over \$570,000. In his one victory as a two year old, he took the Street Sense Stakes at Churchill Downs in October, coming from last to first and scoring by 5 lengths as the favorite. Tiztastic was second and Sandman third. In March, he made his first three year old start and won the G2 8.5 furlong Fountain of Youth Stakes at Gulfstream Park. He bested River Thames and Neoequos and then returned in the Florida Derby as the choice and, ridden by Manny Franco, was gaining at the end but ended up second to Tappan Street by a length and a quarter. Unfortunately, Tappan Street is on the sidelines. Sovereignty is scheduled to be ridden by Junior Alvarado and is trained by Bill Mott (trainer of Cigar, Drosselmeyer, Elite Power, Tacitus and many others...oh, and Kentucky Derby winner Country House). His dam is unraced Crowned, who sold as a yearling for 1.2 million dollars. She is the dam of two other foals to race, one winner. She is by Preakness winner Bernardini.

Triple Crown winner American Pharoah will be represented by two sons in the Derby, Publisher and Luxon Café. His stud fee now is a bargain at \$45,000. He's the sire of Japanese champion

Café Pharoah, Canadian champion Skygaze, Australian G1 stakes winner Riff Rocket, US G1 stakes winners As Time Goes By, Harvey's Lil Gail and others.

Publisher comes into the Derby as a maiden, having won the qualifying points in placing in the Arkansas Derby. Seven starts, 2 seconds and 3 thirds with over \$400,000 in earning. Trainer is Steve Asmussen, who also trained Curlin, Gun Runner, Midnight Bisou, Untapable, Clairiere, Mitole, Epicenter, Echo Zulu, Rachel Alexandra and on and on. He is also trainer of Tiztastic who is in this year's Derby. More later. Publisher had four starts as a two year old. He's experience in mud and is a mid-pack runner. One of the best juvenile races I watched last year was his last start as a two year old and it was in a Maiden event at 8.5 furlongs at Oaklawn Park. He and D Wayne Lucas' American Promise hooked up in the race and "Promise" eventually won by a length and a half. It was almost 20 lengths back to the third placed horse. Fun race. In his second start, at a mile, he had finished second to another Asmussen-trained horse, Extradition, who I thought we'd hear more from but not to be. He's no longer in Steve's barn and not a classic contender. Dam of Publisher is G2 stakes placed Indian Pride who had won 3 of her other lifetime 4 starts. She's a daughter of Indian Charlie (sire of Uncle Mo) and had a lot of early speed. This year, Publisher was sixth to Speed King, Sandman and Tiztastic in the 8.5 furlong Southwest Stakes at Oaklawn Park and then he was fourth in the Rebel Stakes to Coal Battle and in the Arkansas Derby, took advantage of a suicidal front running duel between Speed King and Baffert-trained Cornucopian (who both were unplaced). Sandman was the ultimate winner in his best start to date while Coal Battle was fourth. He's had three published workouts at Churchill Downs in April. Irad Ortiz is scheduled to ride, taking over from Flavien Prat who rode in the Arkansas Derby but has to choose in the Kentucky Derby between Neoequos or also eligible Baeza.

Luxor Café is a Kentucky-bred but Japanese raced son of American Pharoah and comes into the Derby after a win in the 9 furlong Fukuryu Stakes. He'll be ridden by Brazilian Joao Moreira, who is riding in his first Kentucky Derby, and is trained by Noriyuki Hori. His record is 6 starts, 4 wins and a second. He also won the one mile Hyacinth Stakes. Dam G2 stakes winner Mary's Follies is by More Than Ready who was better on turf than dirt. He appears to be the better of the two Japan representatives. But...I still am waiting for the JRA to invite a US-raced horse to their Derby.

Triple Crown winner Justify is represented by his son **American Promise** in the Kentucky Derby this year and is trained by The Coach, D Wayne Lucas who won last year's Preakness with Seize the Grey and has also won the Kentucky Derby with Winning Colors (1988), Thunder Gulch (1995), Grindstone (1996) and almost had a Triple Crown himself in 1999 with Charismatic who broke down in the Belmont Stakes. The jockey will be Nik Juarez who has ridden a few graded stakes winners but no Grade Ones, and this is his first Kentucky Derby mount. American

Promise made six starts as a two year old, his first win coming in his last race at two, that being at Oaklawn the end of December. The race was a 8.5 furlong maiden event in which he defeated Publisher. He got the experience of a muddy track that day. In his first start as a sophomore, he was entered in the Southwest Stakes at Oaklawn and was disqualified from sixth to seventh in that event, having come in on Publisher. Tyler Bacon rode that day; in fact, this colt hasn't had a regular rider in what appears to be musical chairs (musical saddles?). In this next start, he went to Fair Grounds for the G2 Risen Star Stakes and appeared to be in a good place to win but faltered, ending up 5th to Magnitude, Chunk of Gold and Built. Derby starters Render Judgment and East Avenue finished in back of him. Colonial Downs re-scheduled it's Virginia Derby and it became a Derby-pointed race for the March 15th running and this time American Promise had it altogether. Nik Juarez rode him and the chart indicated he "coasted home", winning by 7 ¼ lengths. Favored had been Baffert's Getaway Car who set the pace before giving way to American Promise. Render Judgment ended up second. In winning this race, he also set a new track record, winning the 9 furlong event in 1:46:41 which is pretty much the fastest 9 furlongs in a Derby prep this season. (Wood Memorial was 1:48:15; SA Derby was 1:49:56; Florida Derby was 1:49:27; Arkansas Derby was 1:50:08 and the Blue Grass Stakes was 1:51:33). Dam of American Promise is the Tapit daughter, Tapella who is also dam of millionaire filly Hoosier Philly and one other foal. Tapella won two of her 8 starts, both at a mile. She had a price tag as a yearling of \$750,000. By the way, American Promise celebrates his actual three year old birthday two days before the Kentucky Derby. (he was foaled May 1st). He also has more starts to his record (9) than the other entrants.

The only gelding in the field is **Burnham Square** and he is by Liam's Map, who won the BC Mile (new track record and his last start) as well as the Woodward Stakes (9 furlongs). The best son of Liam's Map was Colonel Liam, which won the Tropical Park Derby and two editions of the Pegasus World Cup Turf. He cost 1.2 million as a yearling and his best daughter to date is the millionaire G2SW, Crazy Beautiful. Others sired by him are the Virginia Derby winner Deterministic; G2SW Roses for Debra (who sold for 2.4 millions dollars); G1SW Juju's Map and others. He's not Tapit, Curlin or Into Mischief but he seems to have carved out a niche for himself and a Derby winner would be awesome on his stud page. As for Burnham Square, he has won half of his six career starts. His maiden win came last year in his last of three starts. He won a 8.5 maiden event as the favorite, showing speed and pulling away to win by nine lengths. Ian Wilkes trained that day and will saddle him in the Derby on Saturday with the rider expected to be Brian Hernandez Jr (Edgard Zayas rode him in his maiden win). Brian won last year's Kentucky Derby on Mystik Dan). This year, he's started 3 times and came from behind to win his first start of the year, this at Gulfstream Park, winning the Holy Bull Stakes (8.5 furlongs) with Tappan Street Second. Ferocious was in the beaten field and for a while, he was a Derby contender. In his next start, he was made favorite in the Fountain of Youth Stakes but showed

little in finishing 4th of six in a race won by Sovereignty. This was where the jockey change was made and he was sent to Kentucky to contest the Blue Grass Stakes (9 furlongs). He broke last and increased his advantage throughout the race and rallied to gain a nose win in that event over East Avenue after some bumping. Derby starters Render Judgment and Owen Almighty were in the beaten field and the one time hot Derby prospect, Chancer McPatrick, was last – well, he finished in a dead heat for 6th, but nevertheless, they were both last. The dam is Linda, a Grade Two stakes winner and who, like a few other mares mentioned in this column, did much better on turf. She was void of early speed. The broodmare sire was Scat Daddy (d. 2015), who was the sire of Justify as well as many other stakes winners (Daddy Long Legs, Caravaggio, Daddy Nose Best, Handsome Mike, Lady of Shamrock, Flameaway, Lady Aurelia, Frac Daddy etc).

Guaranteed to get a lot of attention on Derby day is the grey-coated **Sandman** who is a son of Tapit out of the mare Distorted Music by Distorted Humor. Tapit is, of course, the #1 active sire lifetime with progeny of over 200 million dollars. Himself a stakes winner (Wood Memorial, Laurel Futurity) he is the sire of Horse of the Year (and a lifetime), Flightline; Belmont Winner and Champion Essential Quality; Kentucky Oaks winner Untapable; Champion two year old filly Stardom Bound; champion two year old colt, Hansen (in his Derby year, 2012, his owner wanted to color his tail various pastel colors but it was nixed by Churchill Downs); Champion Unique Bella, Japan Grade 1 SW Testa Matta, G1SW Frosted; another Belmont winner in Tonalist and Tapit Trice, winner of the Blue Grass in 2023 and so, so many more!! Oh, and two other Belmont winners in Creator and Tapwrit.

Sandman has won 3 of his 8 career starts with 1 second and 2 thirds and just over 1.2 million dollars. Mark Casse trains and Jose Ortiz is scheduled to ride. One of the top riders in the United States, he has ridden in 9 Kentucky Derbies and his best finish was second in 2018 on Good Magic. I found that amazing! He had 5 two year old starts, winning two events while placing in the G3 Street Sense Stakes. This year, he continues to improve with each start. He had three races at Oaklawn Park and was second in the Southwest Stakes (to Speed King), third to Coal Battle in the Rebel Stakes and then won the Arkansas Derby (ridden by Jose) by 2 ½ lengths. It was impressive to me and apparently a lot of other people as he's now in the top choice category. The dam, Distorted Music who was a three-time winner who won at distances from 6 furlongs to 8.5 furlongs and showed early speed.) She is also the dam of G3SW She Can't Sing and last year sold for 1.1 million dollars. The broodmare sire, Distorted Humor, I mentioned previously. The pedigree is there to get the distance and he's one handsome SOB!

Bob Baffert will be a main story of the telecast for sure as it's his first year back since his three year suspension by Churchill Downs. I've commented in the past and won't do it here again. He has Citizen Bull who I have already commented on as well as **Rodriguez**. My favorite jockey, Mike Smith, is aboard. He is a veteran of 28 Kentucky Derbies and had two wins—one in 2005

(Giacomo) and then Justify. He had four seconds and a third as well. Rodriguez has started 5 times and has a 2-2-1 record with \$522,000 in earnings. In his only juvenile start, he was second in a Maiden event at Del Mar in November and then returned in February for the Robert B Lewis Stakes. Previously mentioned was that Baffert had three starters in this 5 horse race and finished 1-2-3 with Citizen Bull winning. Juan Hernandez rode that day. Flavien Prat had the mount in his next start, the San Felipe Stakes and was 3rd (5 entrants, Baffert finishing 2^{cd}, 3rd & 4th). And then Baffert decided to split his stable and take shots at a few Derby pointed races and chose to send Rodriguez to New York where he contested the Wood Memorial (this was a huge pre-Derby race in years past, but not so much any more sadly. Still, winners in the past dozen years include Frosted, Outwork, Vino Rosso, Mo Donegal, Tacitus...and in 2004, Tapit. The last horse to win the Wood and go on to win the Derby was Fusaichi Pegasus in 2000; Funny Cide was second in 2002). Ten entrants in the Wood this year must have amazed Rodriguez but Mike Smith broke on top and kept his mind on the job at hand and he scored by 3 ½ lengths with Grande second and Passon Rules third. By the way, he is the youngest horse in this year's Kentucky Derby, having been foaled on May 20th...so he's not yet a three year old by the calendar but rather by January 1st, considered the universal birthday of Thoroughbreds.

His sire is Authentic, a Horse of the Year son of Into Mischief who won the Kentucky Derby in 2020 as well as the BC Classic and Haskell. He was also 2^{cd} in the Preakness and Santa Anita Derby. This is his first crop of foals to race and thusfar, Roriguez is his best. Innovator, a stakes place colt, is also from this crop as is Saudi Arabia winner Alwajeeth. Preakness second and graded stakes winning sprinter Cherokee Run is the broodmare sire while the dam is Cayala who raced in both Germany and the US and won a single race, a 2010 turf sprint at Hollywood Park. She is the dam of G3SW One Liner, SW Provocateur & SPW Roderick.

Tiz the Law earned his Horse of the Year (2020) honors after winning the Holy Bull Stakes, the Florida Derby, the Belmont and the Travers. (neither the Preakness or the Belmont Stakes winners contested these races). This is his first crop of foals to race and Tiztastic is definitely his best. **Tiztastic** has a record of 8-3-1-2 and has won over 1.5 million dollars. Steve Asmussen trains and he will be ridden by Hall of Famer Joel Rosario who has ridden in 13 Derbies and won in 2013 with Orb (17th to first in a 20 horse field). The dam is unraced Keesha, who is by Tapit. She is the dam of Graded SW Interpolate and two other winners. As for Tiztastic, he raced 5 times last season, winning two including the Listed Kentucky Downs Juvenile Mile (on turf). He was second to Sovereignty in the Street Sense (over Sandman) and third in the Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes (to First Resort). This season, he was third in the Southwest (Speed King) and unplaced in the Rebel Stakes (to Coal Battle) and then shipped to Louisiana to run the that state's Derby, which he won by 2 ¼ lengths over Chunk of Gold.

OK—here's a quiz. Who is the only horse to defeat Zenyatta? In her final career race, against males, she was second to Blame who eventually was named Champion Older Horse. Blame won 9 of his 13 starts and over 4 million dollars and has been a fairly good stallion. His get include millionaire and CCA Oaks winner Wet Paint, G1SW Marley's Freedom, Arkansas Derby winner Nadal, Prix de Diane winner Senga as well as other graded winners like Fault, Abscond, March, Maraud, Mrs Sippy and more. He sires dirt and turf horses and he's the broodmare sire of Champion Forte. He is also the sire of one of this year's Kentucky Derby starters and that is **Render Judgment**. A \$310,000 yearling, he has one win in 7 career starts. His only win came last year in a maiden event at 8.5 furlongs at Churchill Downs (ridden by Brian Hernandez Jr) and on that day, he bested American Promise. In his final two year old start, he was 3rd of 5 in the Gun Runner Stakes, a listed 8.5 furlong event at Fair Grounds. At 3, in February, he was 8th in the Risen Star (won by Magnitude). His best result was a second place finish (by 7 ¾ lengths) in the Virginia Derby (9 furlongs to American Promise) and then 5th in the Blue Grass Stakes (to Burnham Square). I respect trainer Ken McPeck and jockey Julien Leparoux is an exceptional rider who moves his horses up...but....OK, if I owned a sound three year old and it had enough points to get a starting berth in the Kentucky Derby, I'd run as well. What can I say? Hey, remember Mine That Bird, Rich Strike, and last year's Mystik Dan. Who knew? Who even expected? Julien Leparoux has won just about everything...but a Kentucky Derby. 14 mounts and the best finish was a 4th in 2017 with Classic Empire. The dam is non-winner Barbara Gordon who is by Commissioner. Commissioner was second in the Belmont (2014 Tonalist) and then went on to win the Hawthorne Gold Cup (10 furlongs) and the Pimlico Special (9.5 furlongs).

Brad Cox is the trainer of **Final Gambit** who gets into the Kentucky Derby with a record of 4-2-1-1. He won the Jeff Ruby in his last start and in all 4 races, he has improved. Last year, in his only start, he was third in a maiden event at Churchill Downs (8 furlongs/turf) and then went over to Turfway Park this year where he was second in a maiden event (8 furlongs, synthetic track) and then he won a maiden event, this one at Turfway at a mile (synthetic). In the Jeff Ruby, he came from last at odds of 15-1 and won by 3 ½ lengths over Flying Mohawk. Luan Machado rode that day and has been the leading rider at Turfway for 5 meets, and will be on board on Saturday for his first Derby mount. Not This Time is the sire who has had 6 Grade 1 winners in 5 crops to race and stands for \$175,000 in Kentucky. He has sired the likes of Champion Epicenter (2cd in the Kentucky Derby, winner of the Travers), Grade One turf winner Up ToThe Mark, turf sprinter Cogburn, G1 winner in UAE Sibelius, G1SW Just One Time as well as Next, Princess Noor, Gigante, Simplification and so on. He's half brother to previously mentioned sire Liam's Map. Dam is the Tapit mare Pachinko, from whom he inherits his grey coat. Pachinko raced in France and the US, winning once in the US at a mile over grass. The owner and breeder of Final Gambit is Juddmonte, owners of Known Fact, Empire Maker, Banks Hill, Intercontinental,

Enable, Zafonic, Special Duty, Noble Mission, Oasis Dream and the incomparable Frankel along with dozens and dozens more). They owned Mandaloun, a Kentucky Derby winner as well.

Coal Battle is the darling of the press right now, and deservedly so. He's from a small stable, trained by a long-time trainer (1991) and he's never had a stakes winner, until now. He's never had a Derby starter, until now. Lonnie Briley is the story behind this horse, not just the fact that he's by an unfashionable stallion who currently stands in Louisiana (Coal Battle was bred in Ky) but he's also 72 years of age. The sire of Coal Battle is Coal Front, who was a pretty good racehorse. He won 8 of 13 starts and almost 2 million dollars. He won 4 graded races including the Amsterdam Stakes, Gallant Bob Stakes, Mr Prospector Stakes, the Razorback, and Parx Mile as well as a stake race in UAE. Coal Battle is by far his best racing progeny. He is also the sire of Haulin Ice, a SW filly, G2SW sprinter Crazy Mason, SW Dixie Diva and others. In 2020, he took up stud duties in Kentucky but in 2024, he was sent to Red River Farms in Louisiana. And then came Coal Battle. I am always tickled when a stallion who has been cast aside by the big farms of Kentucky comes up with a good one! Dam is West Virginia-bred Wolfblade who placed in a WV stake but spent most of her 39 race career (9 wins) as spent in claiming events. She has no other raced foals. Damsire is BC Juvenile winner and good sire Midshipman. The rider for Coal Battle is his regular rider, Juan Vargas, who hails from Peru and is riding in his first Kentucky Derby.

Chunk of Gold has won once in 4 starts and has \$348,818 in winnings. He earned his Derby berth by finishing second in the Risen Star and Louisiana Derby. He is trained by Ethan West, who has been training for 7 years and this is his first Kentucky Derby starter. Chunk of Gold is best colt thusfartho he did win a stake race with Runaway Storm in 2023. The rider will be Jareth Loveberry who just missed winning the Kentucky Derby in 2023 with Two Phil's, which was his only Derby starter. Chunk of Gold won his first start in December of last year when he took a 6 furlong event at Turfway Park (synthetic). Also at Turfway, he started his three year old campaign by placing in the Leonatus Stakes (named for the 1883 Kentucky Derby winner), a one mile event. Then came the two races at the Fair Grounds and his qualifying for the Kentucky Derby. His sire is G1 stakes winning Preservationist who is also the sire of In A Jam, Band of Gold, G3SW Antiquarian and a few others. In 2025, he was sent to South Korea to continue his stud career. Dam is Play For Gold whose racing career ended with one start. She is also the dam of Band of Gold, a minor stakes winner and full brother to Chunk of Gold.

Owen Almighty won the Tampa Bay Derby which got him the points to be a Kentucky Derby starter. He's raced 7 times with 3 wins and 2 seconds. He was sold once for \$360,000 and then for \$350,000. He had two starts last year, winning his first two. At Churchill Downs, he broke his maiden in a 5.5 furlong event and then followed that up by winning the 7 furlong Ellis Park Juvenile. His last start as a juvenile was in the graded Iroquois Stakes and he lost by 2 ¾ lengths

to Jonathan's Way (Sandman was 5th). The Pasco Stakes at Tampa Bay Downs was his first start this year and he ended up fifth but crossed the finish line first. He was disqualified due to bumping. The listed Sam F Davis Stakes was next, at 8.5 furlongs, and he just missed by a half length to John Hancock and from there he headed into the Tampa Bay Derby as the third choice. He led all the way to win by 3 ½ lengths over Chancer McPatrick, a Grade One stakes winner. Owen Almighty's sire is Speightstown, a graded stakes winning sprinter and sire of many stakes horses including Charlatan, a \$750,000 yearling and winner of 4 of 5 starts, including the Arkansas Derby; Japan graded SW Matera Sky who won at sprint distances; G1 distance winner Olympiad; graded stakes winning sprinter Switzerland; BC Dirt Mile winner Tamarkuz and many others. Dam is G2 stakes placed winner Tempers Rising who is by BC Classic winner Bayern. This is the mare's only foal to race. Trainer is Brian Lynch with Javier Castellano in the saddle and it is he who will be the saving grace for this horse. Javier has 16 Derby mounts in the past and won the 2023 edition with Mage.

Neoequos should demand the race caller's attention to just get the pronunciation. He has a 7-2-2-2 race record and was purchased for the bargain basement price of \$22,000. Flavien Prat is scheduled to ride. It will be Flavien's 8th Derby ride and he won in 2019 on Country House. Trainer is Saffie Joseph Jr (of White Abarrio fame). Neoequos started out his racing career on an odd note as he dropped his jockey at the start of his first outing. Sloppy track, too. Could not have been pleasant for Drayden Van Dyke. Twenty days later, he was in the starting gate and had a very different outcome. He won. The five furlong maiden race saw him battle for the lead and then drew away to win by 2 ½ lengths. The Dr Fager edition of the Florida Stallion Series was his next start and he was a good second to heavy favorite Rated by Merit. Another Florida Stallion Stakes, the Affirmed on October 19th, saw him finish second again, losing again to Rated by Merit who won by 3 ¾ lengths. Rated By Merit, by the way, was four for four that year and regretfully was denied his own Derby prospect when he developed bone bruising and was sidelined. To date, he has not returned to even working out. So, Neoequos carried Florida's hope towards the Kentucky Derby. At the end of January, he won an 6 furlong allowance event, leading all the way as favorite to win by 3 ½ lengths. The 8.5 furlong graded Fountain of Youth Stakes was a big jump up in class and he started as the longest shot in the 6 horse field and wound up third, again setting the pace. Sovereignty won. The March 29th Florida Derby was his next start and he battled with Madaket Road for the lead and eventually ended up third (to Tappan Street). That was his last start in preparation for the Kentucky Derby. His sire is Neolithic who is a graded stakes placed winning son of Harlan's Holiday (sire of Into Mischief) who won 3 of his 12 lifetime starts. Dam is the Canadian-bred Bold Birdie who won 3 of 16 starts & was stakes placed. All her wins were done sprinting. She is the dam of three other winners. Broodmare sire is Belmont Stakes winner Birdstone who is the sire of Belmont winner Summer Bird, Kentucky Derby winner Mine That Bird, millionaire Noble Bird, Brooklyn winner

Birdrun and others. Birdstone's sire was Kentucky Derby winner Grindstone whose sire was Kentucky Derby winner Unbridled. So, it's in the genes!

Admire Daytona (Jpn) is by the United States Sprint Champion Of 2016, Defrong, a son of turf specialist Gio Ponti. Dam is US-bred Ice Pastel, a non winner, who is by Shackleford, winner of the Preakness. Admire Daytona (Jpn) was won twice in six starts and one of those wins was in the Kentucky Derby qualifying race, the UAE Derby. Prior to that, he broke his maiden in a February race in Tokyo. Trainer is Yukihiro Kato who won the International Cup in 2007 with Shadow Gate and a G1 event in 2018 as well. Jockey Christophe LeMaire has ridden in two Kentucky Derbies and his best finish was 6th on the highly regarded Japanese horse, Derma Sotogake. Lemaire has won the 2000 Guineas in Great Britain, the French Derby and the Melbourne Cup as well as many other notable races.

East Avenue is trained by Brandon Walsh who finished ninth in the 2019 Kentucky Derby with Plus Que Parfait. This is his second Derby starter. Godolphin is the owner (they also own Sovereignty). Rider is scheduled to be Manny Franco who rides in his 6th Derby, having finished 2^{cd} in 2020 with Tiz the Law. East Avenue won his first two starts last year, the first being a maiden event at 6 furlongs at Ellis Park. Tyler Gaffalione was aboard him for his next start, the graded Breeder's Futurity at Keeneland in which he defeated highly regarded Ferocious by 5 ¼ lengths. He then was made favorite for the BC Juvenile but regrettably stumbled badly at the start and ended up 9th of 10, never recovering. Citizen Bull was the winner as previously mentioned. At three this year, he made his first start in the Risen Star Stakes and was favored in that event but despite racing forwardly early on, lacked any response and ended up 10th of 12 which much have been very disappointed to his connections. Sent North to Kentucky, he was in the starting gate for the Blue Grass Stakes and lead all the way to end up losing by a scant nose to Burnham Square. Luan Machado rode that day. Sire is Medaglia D'Oro, a multiple graded stakes winner in his day (including the Travers and Whitney and was also 2^{cd} in the Belmont). He has been an exceptional sire with progeny including Horse of the Year (and Preakness winner) Rachel Alexandra, Canadian HOTY Wonder Gadot, 2 & 3 year old champion Songbird, Australian Champion Vancouver, French Champion Passion for Gold as well as Talsmanic, Elate, Mshawish, Souper Escape and many more. Stamina is accounted for. The dam is Dance Music, an unraced daughter of Horse of the Year Ghostzapper. By the way, East Avenue is the oldest of the entrants, having been foaled on February 4, 2022.

Flying Mohawk is by Karakontie (Jpn) x Bonbons Fleur by Twirling Candy. Trained D Whitworth Beckham will have his first Derby starter with this horse and the colt will be ridden by Joe Ramos who is also in his first Kentucky Derby. Flying Mohawk won once in four starts last year, that being a 8.5 furlong maiden on grass at Churchill Downs. At three, his first start was on the grass at Fair Grounds, at 8.5 furlongs again, and he came from last to first to win by 2 lengths.

His only start on dirt was in his last start, the Jeff Ruby, in which he was second to Final Gambit in yet another come from behind effort. (the winner came from last to win as well). Sire Karakontie (Jpn) was a Grade One winner in France and upset the Breeders Cup Turf Mile in 2014. He is the sire of G1SW She Feels Pretty, G3SW Sugoi, G1SW Spendarella and others. The dam was a non-winner and this is her first foal. Broodmare sire is Twirling Candy, a G1SW and good sire (G1SW Concrete Rose), DelMar Futurity winner Pinehurst; Santa Anita Handicap winner Gift Box; Preakness winner Romabauer; G1SW Finleysluckycharm; Hollywood Derby winner Beyond Brilliant and others.

On the also eligible list is **Baeza** who is trained by John Shirreffs (of Zenyatta Farm) and has Flavien Prat named to ride (but he is also listed on Neoequos). This colt is named for a great jockey of the 1960s era named Braulio Baeza (who rode my beloved Carry Back a few times). His record is 4-1-2-0. He's a 1.2 million dollar sales yearling by McKinzie (a son of Ky Derby winner Street Sense) who won the Pennsylvania Derby, Malibu Stakes and other graded races and was also 2nd in the 2019 BC Classic to Vino Rosso. His best son to date has been Chancer McPatrick who I've mentioned in this column and he has also sired G1SW Scottish Lassie in this his first crop to race. Dam is Puca by Kentucky Derby winner Big Brown. Puca was an allowance level winner who took a small stakes at Suffolk Downs as well (she won 4 of 17) and she is the dam of Kentucky Derby winner Mage (by Good Magic) and Belmont winner Dornoch (also by Good Magic) as well as G3SPw Gunning. Baeza was 9th of 11 in his only start at two and then this year was second in a one mile maiden race at Santa Anita (to Rodriguez), won a mile maiden on Valentine's Day and was ¾ length in back of Journalism in the Santa Anita Derby, ahead of three others.

So that's it. Those are the starters in the 2015 Kentucky Derby. Who do you like?

DERBY HISTORY: *Fifty years ago, in 1975, the winner was two year old champion Foolish Pleasure defeated eventual Belmont winner Avatar with Diabolo third. Trainer was LeRoy Jolley and ridden by Jacinto Vasquez. His sire was the Florida stallion What A Pleasure, a son of Bold Ruler who pretty much ruled the sire lists of the 1960s (his sire line died out but on the broodmare side, he has son Secretariat holding down the fort). What a Pleasure also sired the 1975 two year old champion, Honest Pleasure who finished 2cd in the 1976 Kentucky Derby.*