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CHURCHILL DOWNS Saturday 05/04/2024



THE WIZARD'S CRYSTAL BALL

#7 Who Dey (Race 8)

After reeling off 4 straight sharp and steadily improving wins at 4 different tracks, including Churchill Downs in his 2 year old finale, Who Day finished 2nd April 5 at Keeneland returning from a 4 1/2 month layoff. He actually ran very well, racing wide and trying to close in on a very sharp front running winner. He was also stepping up in class into a \$320K stake, which was by far his stiffest test to date. With that race under his belt, Who Dey is expected to make another forward move stretching back out to 1 mile, the distance of his Churchill win. He gets an upgrade in riders to strong finisher Brian Hernandez. Shows 2 solid works at Churchill for this. At 10-1 on the morning-line, I feel Who Day is worthy of Best Bet status.

#5 Legend of Time (GB) (Race 9)

What makes Charles Appleby one of the best horseman in the world is how he develops his well bred turf runners, his placement of them in various parts of the globe and knowing which graded stakes he can pick off in the US with his second tier runners. Legend of Time fit's this profile to a tee. He's won 4 of his 5 starts, but even his most recent success in Meydan, was in a race that featured, by overseas standards, at best was a Group 3 event. Appleby decided to ship him to Churchill for this Gr. 2 stake, where he fit's it like a glove. He's aware that this is a Gr. 3 caliber field, masquerading as a Gr. 2. Owned by Godolphin, this 3 year old is well suited to 1 1/16 miles, loves some 'give' to the turf course and is very tactical. Drops 3 Lbs. for this race and adds Frankie Dettori. Post 5 a perfect slot for his running style.

#11 Naval Power (GB) (Race 11)

World class horseman Charles Appleby had 2 horses entered in the Gr. 1 Makers Mark Mile at Keeneland on April 12, both owned and bred by Godolphin. The prohibitive favorite was the eventual winner and heavy favorite Master of the Seas. Naval Power, his barn-mate, was 3rd choice at 5-1. It was evident that this 4 year old was clearly being 'prepped' for this Gr. 1 stake stretching out to 1 1/8 miles. One of the tell-tale signs of this master plan by Appleby was his choice of riders for Naval Power that day and the switch in jocks today. Gaffalione rode Naval Power in the Makers Mark with Frankie Dettori jumping aboard Integration. Today the rider carousel places Dettori on Naval Power with Gaffalione getting on Integration. This was by design. Naval Power is a cut below the best turf horses in the Appleby barn, but he has shown steady progress since returning as a new gelding this year off a layoff. There's no question he will prefer today's distance and some 'give' to the turf course. Drawing an outside post with a long run into the first turn is more beneficial to Naval Power than drawing inside.

#6 Banned for Life (Race 14)

Banned for Life was well bet in his debut but had to settle for 3rd after chasing solid fractions from a tough inside post over a sealed sloppy track at the Fair Grounds. The final time of the race was very fast. He was beaten a head for the place money by a colt who returned to win by 8 1/4 lengths. 48 days later, he was stretched out to 2 turns at Keeneland in another strong maiden race. Banned for Life finished 4th that day, beaten 2 1/4 lengths, but he would have been much closer at the finish if not for a very tough trip he encountered. A hole closed up in deep stretch forcing his rider to steady and alter course outside. At that point he had lost all his momentum, but regained it nearing the wire and then galloped out very strong past the wire. Today he cuts back to a 1-turn mile, which I feel is a perfect distance for him. Blinkers go on and he also gets an upgrade in riders to Luis Saez. Draws a perfect post in the middle of this 12 horse field to close out Derby day.

(In Order of Preference)

RACE 1

#6 House United

His 4th place finish in debut at the Fair Grounds was 'better than it looks'. He was moving well entering the stretch but was bumped off stride while racing between rivals. He recovered to finish evenly, while racing 'greenly' in the lane. I made a notation that blinkers could benefit him greatly next time out. Trainer Al Stall Jr. echoed my sentiments, by adding the hood for today's race and an upgrade in riders to Leparoux. House United should appreciate the extra half-furlong today.

#2 Pure Force

It would be folly to ignore any well bred Brad Cox 1st time starter on a big day, especially one owned and bred by Juddmonte. His half sister Arrobatoc won 1st time out at 6f. Shows several works at Churchill which have all been solid. Gets the barn's main go-to rider Geroux.

#7 Culprit

Returns from a 10 month layoff for trainer Wesley Ward who comes off a stellar Keeneland meet and has continued his hot streak at Churchill. Even though this colt has yet to try dirt in 2 starts, he's bred for it and Ward is winning with these types of surface switches. Gets his main man Velazquez aboard, who is riding in career best form. Has good early speed as well.

#1 Evan On Earth

Finished a well beaten 4th in the slop last time out, but he had to chase Just a Touch, who is a contender in this year's Kentucky Derby. 2 starts back he finished 2nd to Doncho, who returned to win impressively. Gets a huge upgrade in riders to Gaffalione.

RACE 2

#6 Scylla

She's one of the mostly lightly raced horses in this field with just 4 starts, but she's already proven to have the most quality and upside than any of her 10 rivals. Gets lasix back on a short 15 day turnaround, which is cause for slight concern. Following 2 impressive wins to begin her career last year, including a score over this course and distance, Scylla was put on the shelf until resurfacing 9 month later. She was defeated by a neck at this same 1 turn mile at Gulfstream. Last time out Scylla finished 3rd, stepping up in class into a Gr. 3 stake at Keeneland, racing without lasix in her 2 turn debut. Cuts back to 1 mile today, gets lasix back and draws a good outside post. A deserving clear cut favorite.

#8 Coppa Girl

Ships in from New York for the always dangerous Brad Cox, following a well beaten 4th as the favorite. She was clearly compromised by a very slow start. Reeled off several sharp efforts in her prior 4 outings. Gets reunited with Geroux, who will have Coppa Girl in perfect striking position from the start.

#10 Secret Statement

Makes her 1st start as a 4 year old at Churchill, the scene of both her career wins. Turns back to 1-mile, a distance she's a perfect 1-1 at, which came 2 starts back in a career best race. Gets reunited with Leparoux, who was aboard in her maiden win. Tactical speed from a good outside post.

#2 Zawish

Returns from a 6 month layoff stretching back out to 1 mile which I feel is her best distance. Runs well fresh evidenced by a good 3rd one year ago over this course and distance at 37-1 returning from an even longer 10 month hiatus. Zawish broke her maiden over this track.

RACE 3

#1 Cartucho

Beautifully bred \$1.2 million dollar yearling purchase was an impressive debut winner going 7f at Tampa for top trainer Chad Brown. His speed figure when stacked up with the likely odds on favorite Mindframe is not even close to that rival who ran a triple digit Beyer number 1st time out. It was the manner in which Cartucho won that makes me believe he can pose a huge threat to the favorite. It's interesting to note that the breeder of this colt bought in on the horse, clearly as a stallion prospect. The dam was a Gr.1 winner around 2 turns. When Cartucho sprouted his wings in the stretch, I was so impressed by the length and fluidity of his stride and the manner in which he pulled up powerfully past the wire. Both lead me to believe that he will improve leaps and bounds stretching out to 2 turns today. Breaks from the rail which only helps.

#11 Mindframe

There's no doubt that Mindframe will be bet with both hands because of the huge speed figure he got for his 13 3/4 length maiden win. He's the most likely winner at odds on, but there's reasons I stated on my write up on Cartucho, that its worth taking a shot against a horse who will be way over-bet. This colt tracked a quick pace and then easily blew by a weak field going 7f. He must stretch out today to 2 turns and overcome an outside post, which he could easily accomplish. Nevertheless, my top pick is a good risk-reward play against Mindframe.

#2 Cornishman

Has the advantage of having 2 starts at this distance, including a game maiden win last time out. After closing from well back his first 2 starts, in his victory, Cornishman showed much improved speed for top trainer Brad Cox. The 3rd and 4th place finishers both came back to score. Draws an inside post which only helps.

#9 Invigorated

Impressive winner of his debut closing from far back and overcoming a tough outside post racing wide throughout at today's distance. Irad Ortiz who was aboard for the win, obviously jumps back on Mindframe, with Luis Saez getting the mount today. Must once again rally from the back of the pack to make his presence felt late.

RACE 4

#7 Kupuna

Steps up in class here following a dominant win in a \$100K stake April 6 at Evangeline off a freshening. It's interesting to note that last year, high % winning trainer Brett Calhoun entered Kupuna in this same stake on Derby day, finishing a close 2nd despite a tough trip. You could also make the case that he was best to winner Zozos and well clear of Three Technique, both who came back to win next time out. He's been blanked in 6 starts at Churchill, but has hit the board 5 times. He's also 2-3 on a wet track and half his wins have come at a mile.

#9 U. S. Army

Gets a trainer change to Caramori, following a neck defeat setting the pace against a strong outside closers bias at Oaklawn. Gets an upgrade in riders today to Rosario, who is expected to take him back behind a hotly contested pace, similar to his decisive win Nov 25 at Remington. Any moisture to the track would not be an issue for this 4 year old. Bullet 4f work April 20 for this.

#6 Best Actor

Found 1 1/8 miles too far last time out when cooked chasing fast fractions against tougher rivals in a Gr. 2 stake at the Fair Grounds. Shows a series of solid efforts in his prior starts. Has a lot of gas, but so do others in this race. Smart tactics would be to take back a bit off the leaders and a fast pace and attack turning for home. On a couple of occasions this strategy worked successfully. Brad Cox and rider Flavian Prat are one dangerous dynamic duo.

#1 Strong Quality

There's plenty of pace in this field. There's also a chance that the other speeds take back a bit not to get into a suicidal speed duel, allowing Strong Quality to establish the front end. On big days at Churchill, the rail can help carry a horses speed, so I'm going to consider Strong Quality a player in here with his class and cutting back in distance. Reunited with Geroux, who has been aboard in several of his wins.

#2 Denington

If he's to win, it will have to be a pace melt-down, because this 1 run closer would be finishing well late. He's 2 for 3 at Churchill, has a win at the distance and he's making his 2nd start off a layoff. The question is his best races have come on lasix. No lasix today. His 3 works following his last start have all been solid.

RACE 5

#12 Arrest Me Red

In a very difficult race where I can see several of these horses winning and the course conditions playing a major roll on the outcome, I'm going to go with my gut for an upset from Arrest Me Red. Trainer Wesley Ward had an amazing Keeneland meet and he's carried this momentum over to Churchill. On his best day, this 6 year old classes up with these. I feel any moisture to the turf course only enhances his chances. He has very good tactical speed, gets an upgrade in riders to Jose Ortiz and returns to the turf following 2 starts on Polytrack off a layoff. 6 of his 7 wins have come on the grass. Shows 3 straight excellent works on the turf, including one over a yielding course.

#4 Motorious (GB)

Returns from a 6 month layoff following a tough trip 5th in the BC Turf Sprint. Would have been closer at the finish if not for racing in traffic and boxed in upper stretch. Has shown in the past that he runs well fresh. Stretches out a half furlong today which he should like. Very consistent 6 year old gets Prat back aboard, who has ridden Notorious to 3 of his 6 wins.

#8 Mischief Magic (IRE)

Flew home too late as the 2-1 favorite in the Gr. 2 Shakertown at Keeneland last time out. Saved ground before tipping out very wide into the stretch. He simply had too much ground to make up and too little time to do so to run down a perfect trip winner. Gets a rider change to Dettori for world class horseman Charles Appleby.

#10 Big Invasion

Late running 5 year old certainly has proven classy enough to win a race like this. Makes his 2nd start off a layoff and should benefit from the stretch out to 5 1/2 furlongs. He's won over yielding turf and should get enough pace to close into. Rosario has been aboard for most of his career.

#5 Mo Stash

Speed is his game, so if he does clear, Mo Stash could take this field a long way at huge odds. Exits a career best race last time out coming off a layoff and reuniting with Saez, who is back aboard today. Trainer Vicky Oliver wins a high % of races with her turf sprinters.

RACE 6

#10 Vahva

Returned from a 5 1/2 month layoff April 6 to finish a determined 2nd, a half length behind Alva Starr at Keeneland. Her rival had tactical position over her and got first run. She was all out to hold off Vahva in the shadow of the wire. With that race under her belt to wipe off any rust, I expect an improved performance today returning to Churchill where she's a perfect 2-2. In 5 starts at this 7f distance, Vahva has 3 wins and a pair of seconds. She's also 1-1 over a wet track, so any moisture will certainly not diminish her chances with

Irad Ortiz back in the irons. Runs best breaking from an outside post.

#7 Alva Starr

Alva Starr was my Pick of the Day when she ran April 6. I loved her chances as the dominant speed. Once she didn't establish an early lead, I thought she was up against it. I never thought she would run as well as she did rating and stretching out to 7f. Alva Starr proved me wrong, as she won 'fair and square' as the 2-1 favorite. Even after the wire, she continued on well. It's difficult to separate her and Vahva, who finished a half length behind. In the end, I feel that that rival can improve enough in her 2nd start off a layoff at a distance and track she excels at.

#1 Three Witches

Ships in from Santa Anita following a decisive win at this distance off a layoff in her first start for trainer Mike McCarthy following a private purchase. That win has accounted for 3 of her 4 wins at today's 7f distance. Has tactical speed and Prat back aboard who rode her out west.

#8 Sterling Silver

Gets a trainer change to Rutledge following 2 solid efforts off a layoff. Had to overcome a tough rail post her last 2 starts. Draws a better outside slot today. 4 of her 7 wins have come at 7 furlongs. She handles any type of track surface equally well.

RACE 7

#11 Coppice (GB)

Makes her US debut and first start for top trainer Chad Brown returning from a 7 month layoff. Despite returning from a quick 8 day turnaround, Coppice finished a respectable 4th, after steadying early and facing a stellar Group 1 field won by Inspiral, who returned next time out to win the Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Turf. The 2nd place finisher also came back to win a Group 1. Drops 10 Lbs off that effort and is reunited with Dettori, who was aboard in her last 2 wins. A mile is her game and she runs for a barn who has had a lot of success with these types of runners. Coppice has been working well, including company drills against some quality runners such as Gr. 3 winner Midnight Mile. Must overcome a tough outside post, but Dettori will take back and make 1 late run.

#12 Mission of Joy

Recently turned 4 year old had run several strong races at 3. When he returned Jan 27 facing older for the 1st time, Mission of Joy actually ran a 'better than it looks' 5th, beaten just 2 lengths, following a troubled start and a wide trip throughout. She breaks from another tough outside post today cutting back in distance, but her late kick is most effective racing outside of horses. In 2 starts at Churchill, she has a win and a 3rd. She's also 2-2 at 1-mile.

#6 Delahaye

With just 4 starts, he's the most lightly raced horses in the field, but could have the most upside. Only a neck defeat in his debut prevents Delahaye from being a perfect 4-4. Exits a 'key' race, where 3 horses have come back to win next time out. He's versatile, should enjoy the cut back to 1-mile and is trained by the always dangerous Chad Brown.

#3 Chili Flag (FR)

Has been a gem of consistency since arriving in the US in Feb 2023 following a private purchase and given over to Chad Brown to train. Benefit's today by drawing an inside post with Irad Ortiz back aboard. Handles turf with some 'give' to it quite well.

RACE 8

The Wizard's Crystal Ball Best Bet #7 Who Dey



Gaze into the "Wizard's Crystal Ball" (BEST BET) at the top of the sheet

#8 Top Conor

Turns back to a 1 turn mile after being overmatched in the Gr. 1 Blue Grass. It didn't help that he was cooked setting a fast pace before wilting in the stretch. Broke his maiden impressively at this distance sitting a stalk and pounce trip, tactics which are expected again today.

#12 Nash

Ships back to Churchill following a decisive win at a mile around 2 turns at Oaklawn in a \$200K stake. He's run once over this track and the result was a 10 length maiden win stretching out to a route last November. He's expected to sit a good stalk and pounce trip from his outside post.

#11 Vlahos

The original owner sold part of Vlahos following an impressive front running debut win at Santa Anita setting fast fractions and a very quick final time. Several horses have come out of that race to run well. He was transferred over to trainer Doug O'Neill, which is an upgrade from the previous conditioner. Figures to once again be the pacesetter, but must prove he can step up in class over a new surface and carry his speed a mile.

RACE 9

The Wizard's Crystal Ball Best Bet #5 Legend of Time (GB)



Gaze into the "Wizard's Crystal Ball" (BEST BET) at the top of the sheet

#8 Lord Bullingdon

There are several runners exiting the Gr. 3 Transylvania, including this colt who finished 4th, beaten just 1 1/2 lengths at 33-1. Despite his defeat, I felt he ran just as well as the 3 rivals who finished in front of him. He

was bumped early, and forced to race wide throughout. Since returning as a 3 year old, his last 2 starts have clearly indicated that he's improved. Set for another forward move making his 3rd start off a layoff with the hot riding John Velazquez back aboard.

#11 Cugino

Beaten a nose in the Gr. 3 Transylvania, a race in which you can make a case that he ran the best race. Breaking from post 12 and forced very wide into the first turn, jockey Castellano made a premature wide middle move. He latched on to the pacesetter entering the far turn and then battled 'tooth and nail' through the stretch, losing by a nose. That made it 3 second place finishes in a row showing a tendency of waiting on horses late. That's why his connections are adding blinkers today to help keep him focused late. Must overcome another tough outside post today.

#3 Lagynos

Finished a fast closing 3rd in the Transylvania at 31-1. Sat a perfect inside-out trip that day making his 1st start going long on the turf. Figures to sit a similar journey today breaking from post 3 with Torres back aboard.

#6 Neat

Looks to win his 3rd straight race following a nose victory in the Gr. 3 Transylvania. Made a couple moves racing up close throughout. Faces several rivals today who seek revenge from their close defeat at the heels of Neat.

RACE 10

#5 Here Mi Song

Interesting long shot at 20-1 on the morning-line switches back to dirt, his referred surface, after being prepped over Polytrack in his return from a 7 month layoff. He attempted this same Gr. 1 stake last year, finishing 4th after setting the pace. If you extrapolate out the great Cody's Wish 4 3/4 length win margin, Here Mi Song was only beaten 1 1/4 lengths racing against his preferred style. His best game is to sit a stalk and pounce trip, tactics expected again today. Gets a huge upgrade in riders to Gaffalione. This is clearly a good risk-reward play.

#4 Mr. Wireless

Exits a career best race winning easily in fast time March 14 at the Fair Grounds in his return from a 10 month layoff. He steps up in class today making his first start in a Gr. 1, but the dynamics of this race and the competition make Mr. Wireless a player at a price. His good tactical speed will place him in perfect striking position from the start. He has a win at Churchill and also has a pair of victories and a 2nd in 3 starts over a wet track.

#11 Hoist the Gold

He's the class off this field, but the big question is how he will rebound from shipping to Saudi Arabia and back where he was last of 14 eased to the wire back in February. Given several months to recover, he cuts back to 7f today which is not his best distance. Has the speed and draws a good post to be on or near the lead from the start. Expected to vie for favoritism with Zozos and could prove vulnerable.

#6 Zozos

Returns from a 6 month layoff after finishing a well beaten 5th in the BC Dirt Mile. Zozos reeled off 4 wins in his prior 5 starts showing very good speed going longer. He's yet to attempt 7f, as all his starts have come most at a mile or beyond. Has run 3 times at Churchill, winning 3 races. Draws a good post for the always dangerous Cox and Geroux tandem.

#7 Track Mate

Since returning from a 3 month layoff, cutting back to a sprint and adding blinkers, Track Mate has shown vast improvement. Exits a career best race and one in which he ran very fast. Even though his last 2 wins have been at 6f, the way he drew off late and galloped out past the wire, suggests he should handle the stretch out to 7f just fine.

RACE 11

The Wizard's Crystal Ball Best Bet #11 Naval Power (GB)



Gaze into the "Wizard's Crystal Ball" (BEST BET) at the top of the sheet

#1 Integration

After reeling off 3 straight wins to start off his career, 2 in graded stakes, Integration finished a good 5th against a tough field at Gulfstream Jan 17 in his 1st start as a 4 year old. Last time out, he was cut back to 1 mile, which is nearly shorter than he wants to go. Nevertheless, he ran a credible 3rd after a wide trip throughout. Today he stretches back out to his best distance, gets reunited with Gaffalione and draws the rail which should ensure a ground saving trip.

#6 I'm Very Busy

Has put together 2 career best back-to-back efforts at today's distance returning as a 4 year old. Overcame post 13 to close from far back to win going away in a Gr. 2 stake at the Fair Grounds last time out over a 'good' turf course. Benefitted by getting lasix back, which he won't be able to run on today. Jockey Prat fit's his running style like a glove.

#5 Program Trading (GB)

Makes his 4 year old debut having won 4 races and a 2nd place finish in 5 career starts. What makes him dangerous and a quality and still developing horse from the Chad Brown barn is his versatility. He's proven equally effective setting the pace, stalking or rallying from further back. Suited well to this distance.

#2 Anglophile

He will have to run a career best race to contend in this field, but his last 3 starts have shown big improvement. I like the cut back in distance from a good inside post and I cannot dismiss his big odds not to use him underneath in my wagers. Trainer Brian Lynch is having a very strong year.

RACE 12

#4 Catching Freedom

Catching Freedom broke his maiden first time out at Churchill going a 1-turn mile, so distance racing was always in the cards for this \$575K yearling purchase. For this son of Constitution to win the Derby, similar to Sierra Leone, he will have to close from well back and avoid traffic problems. He will get first run on that rival and like that one has a strong stretch kick. What has impressed me most from watching Catching Freedom develop from 2 to 3 is his steady improvement in all 5 of his races, especially as he's stretched out in distance. Winning the Louisiana Derby was clearly his best race to date going 1 3/16 miles. Jockey Flavian Prat rode for the first time that afternoon, making a perfectly timed move, to win by 1 length over Honor Marie. I was impressed how he was able to sustain his stretch rally racing extremely wide. Despite the loss of ground, Catching Freedom dug in tenaciously and was never going to be passed in the late stages of the race. He seems perfectly suited to handle the 1 1/4 miles in the Derby.

In analyzing all the Kentucky Derby prep races, I felt that the path through Louisiana has produced the strongest fields, evidenced by several horses exiting the Risen Star and winning back. I also like the extra weeks rest that the Louisiana Derby has provided to those Derby horses exiting that affair. Catching Freedom has been working very well at Churchill since that effort. Trainer Brad Cox is a proven master at getting horses to bring their 'A' game to a prestigious race. Prat has ridden in the Derby 5 times and has never been off the board with any of his mounts. Because I won't pick a horse like Fierceness as the over-bet favorite as my top selection, and Sierra Leone as the 2nd choice, who doesn't have any real edges on Catching Freedom, he's the play at decent odds that I'm most comfortable taking a shot with.

#17 Fierceness

When Fierceness brings his 'A' game to the big dance, his brilliance shines above all others of his generation. He proved this with a decisive win in last year's BC Juvenile and again last time out in the Florida Derby. If he can replicate any one of those 2 efforts on Derby Day, the rest are likely running for second money. On the flip side, when Fierceness doesn't fire his best shot, it's open game for all those who are entered against him and a defeat at a short price looms. It's any one's guess what version of Fierceness shows up in the Derby, but at odds of 9-5 or less, I'm willing to take a crack against him for the win slot, but respect him enough to include him on all 4 of my suggested trifecta wagers which can be found on my Betting Window.

Going 1 1/4 miles the first Saturday in May facing 19 rivals is a far more daunting task than wiring the field against 8 rivals on a loose lead at Gulfstream in the Florida Derby. He will face far more pressure Saturday stretching out to 1 1/4 miles. Drawing post 17 is actually a very good draw for Fierceness, as he can track the pacesetters Track Phantom and Dornach and attack on the far turn. If his rider John Velazquez busts the race open turning for home, he could be awfully tough to run down. But if he encounters a battle at that point and is then joined by any attackers in stalking position, the big question is how he will respond when the closers come rolling down the long Churchill stretch. Another concern for me is that I've heard reports that he's had some foot issues. Obviously if the state vets clear him to run, all is good from that standpoint. But will the feet hold up on a souped up surface with some moisture to it going 1 1/4 miles? I greatly respect Fierceness, but as I said, he cannot be my top selection at a very short price.

#2 Sierra Leone

Only a nose defeat prevents Sierra Leone from being a perfect 5-5 coming into the Derby. Purchased for \$2.3 million and trained by world class horseman Chad Brown, the son of top stallion Gun Runner has very little early speed, but kicks in powerfully through the stretch. He's not the smoothest of movers, indicated by a paddling stride by both front legs, but his quality and his big heart compensates for it. He draws a tough inside post, because right from the outset, he will drop far back of the early leaders. His jockey Tyler Gaffalione will save valuable ground, but he will have to navigate Sierra Leone off the rail and through traffic on the far turn and hope that holes open up so he can have dead aim on the leaders turning for home. I envision a similar trip to the one he had in winning the Blue Grass in his final Derby prep. He clearly benefitted from the fast pace, but he figures to get a good pace set up in the Derby.

Sierra Leone certainly can win, but everything must set up just perfectly for him. Gaffalione is a terrific rider who will give him every chance to fire his best shot, but there's obstacles that both rider and horse must overcome. With the uncertainty of the condition of the course by post time, if there's still moisture to the track, it will not hurt Sierra Leone. He was beaten a nose in last year's Remson in the mud and he won the Risen Star this year over a sealed sloppy track.

#7 Honor Marie

Honor Marie has clearly exceeded all expectations when he was purchased for only \$40K as a yearling. The connections were hoping for a useful Allowance horse, but never in their wildest dreams would they ever expect that he had a legitimate chance to win the Kentucky Derby. He's not the smoothest of movers, has a trainer Whitworth Beckman, who did work as an assistant to Chad Brown, but is somewhat of an unknown commodity by many racing fans and especially by the casual viewer. His rider is even less known. Ben Curtis plied his trade in Ireland, England and recently in Saudi Arabia and at Meydan. Only this year did he decide to take a leap of faith and venture to the US and to the Fair Grounds to see if he could make some 'Hay' state-side. And look what he gets for taking a chance? A mount on a legit Derby runner!

Honor Marie sprinted his first 2 starts, which included a maiden win first time out at Churchill. In his third start, he ran a very good race winning a Gr. 2 stake at Churchill in his first start around 2 turns. This was a great way to end his 2 year old campaign and point for the Derby. Racing over a sealed sloppy track in his return in the Risen Star at the Fair Grounds Feb 17, he ran a non threatening 5th. It was likely the layoff and the wet track that did him in. Back on a dry track and stretching out a 1/16th off a mile in the Louisiana Derby, Honor Marie rebounded with a career best race, finishing 2nd, beaten 1 length, by Catching Freedom. That effort clearly proved that Honor Marie is a contender to win the Derby if he can take another move forward. Like Sierra Leon and Catching Freedom, Ben Curtis will have to navigate his way through traffic and hope he can keep pace with the closers in the stretch. He's been training great at Churchill, is a happy and healthy horse and has proven he loves this course with 2 wins and a 2nd in 3 starts here. Honor Marie will offer much bigger odds than Sierra Leone and Catching Freedom and would not be a big surprise if he were to get his picture taken.

#8 Just a Touch

Of all the horses in this Derby field, Just a Touch has a chance to be the best of them all as his 3 year old season progresses. I'm just not sure, if Saturday will be the day that puts him at the top of the class. He's only run 3 times and his first start was in late January. Just a Touch is also a late foal, born in May of 2021, so he entered the Derby just turning 3 years of age.

He easily broke his maiden sprinting in the slop at the Fair Grounds. Brad Cox needed to work fast to get Just a Touch Derby points, so he shipped him to Aqueduct into the Gr. 3 Gotham at a mile where he finished 2nd. 35 days later, Just a Touch was shipped to Keeneland where he finishing 2nd once again in the Blue Grass. It was a career best race effort as he did a lot of the dirty work to help set up the late close from the winner Sierra Leon by stalking very fast fractions. Even when he was passed in deep stretch by that rival, Just a Touch continued to fight on.

This is a very talented horse in expert hands. Just a Touch will be forwardly placed right from the start and will attack on the far turn. How he responds to tackling Fierceness and how much energy it was taken to fend the favorite off and then withstand the late charge of the closers, will determine his fate late. Maybe he's just this good and can win the Derby, but it's a big ask at this stage of his career.

#15 Domestic Product

I don't know if Domestic Product can improve enough to win the Derby following 2 good efforts in Florida, including a win in the Tampa Bay Derby, but I do expect a career best effort on Saturday. He's been victimized by slow paces in both those starts. With much quicker fractions to close into, Domestic Product has an outside shot to be a danger late in the Derby. The obstacles he must overcome though are big ones. He's never raced beyond 1 1/16 miles and the competition he's met are a cut below what he will be facing off with in the Derby. Domestic Product has not raced in 2 months. Coming into this race off such a long break is usually a big negative, but in his case I feel it's actually beneficial. Trainer Chad Brown is a master at getting horses to run a peak race off this kind of layoff, and the time off has allowed Domestic Product to mature and blossom at just the right time for the first Saturday in May. He's been training very well at Payson Park and Churchill and I expect a good effort out of him.

RACE 13

#9 General Partner

Drops in class and cuts back to a sprint in his return from a 6 month layoff for top trainer Chad Brown. Overmatched last time at a distance which proved too far in the BC Juvenile won by this year's Kentucky Derby favorite Fierceness. 2 back he was a good 2nd to a quality winner in the slop going 1-mile. Ran a career best race breaking his maiden in his only start at today's distance of 7f. Will be on or near the lead from the start with new rider Gaffalione aboard. Draws a perfect post for his running style.

#2 Discreet Mischief

Ran a good 2nd in his debut against a strong maiden field going 6f in the slop at the Fair Grounds. Followed that up with an impressive 8 1/4 win stretching out to 7f over a dry surface April 6 at Keeneland. Showed improved speed that day, which will help breaking from a tricky inside post. From the always dangerous Brad Cox barn.

#7 Jefferson Street

Crushed 4 rivals April 11 at Keeneland catching a sealed sloppy track for the 1st time. He was easily handled by General Partner in his debut last year, but in 2 starts since, he's clearly improved. Another pace factor in this field who would clearly benefit from any moisture still left on the track.

RACE 14

The Wizard's Crystal Ball Best Bet

#6 Banned for Life



Gaze into the “Wizard’s Crystal Ball” (BEST BET) at the top of the sheet

#1 Dive Bomber

Returns from an 8 month layoff for trainer Brad Cox who wins a very high % of races with his returnees. Hurt by a troubled start in debut. Good 2nd adding blinkers and stretching out to 7f behind a quality winner to conclude his 2 year old campaign. Makes his 1st start on lasix today stretching out to 1-mile. Shows a series of solid workouts at Churchill for his return.

#3 Gun Party

Turns back in distance following a pair of good 2nd place finishes. Likes to sit back in mid pack and make 1 run. His issue in both races was his inability to changed leads in the stretch, which cost him closer finishes. Gets a huge upgrade in riders to Rosario, won wins a high % for races hooking up with trainer Asmussen.

#12 Timeout

Rallied for 2nd from far back in his debut going 7f at Keeneland. He was clearly compromised by a slow start and a wide trip throughout. Should appreciate today's stretch out to a 1-turn mile, drawing an outside post which is not a detriment at this distance.

#8 D'oro Unbridled

Finished just a half length back of Timeout after training that rival early and making up ground late. He's another colt who should appreciate today's stretch out ion distance.

Any questions or comments can be sent to: support@wizardraceandsports.com.

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