



BELMONT STAKES BETTING GUIDE

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BELMONT WEEKEND STAKES SCHEDULE

Race	Grade	Purse	Restrictions	Surface	Distance
THURSDAY, JUN 07					
Astoria		\$150,000	F2YO	Dirt	5 1/2
Intercontinental	III	\$200,000	F&M 4&UP	Turf	7 Furlongs
Wonder Again	III	\$200,000	F3YO	Turf	1 1/8
FRIDAY, JUN 08					
Bed O' Roses Invitational	III	\$250,000	F&M 4&UP	Dirt	7 Furlongs
Belmont Gold Cup Invitational	II	\$400,000	4&UP	Turf	2 Miles
New York	II	\$600,000	F&M 4&UP	Turf	1 1/4
Tremont		\$150,000	2YO	Dirt	5 1/2
True North	II	\$250,000	4&UP	Dirt	6 1/2 Furlongs
SATURDAY, JUN 09					
Acorn	I	\$700,000	F3YO	Dirt	1 Mile
Belmont Stakes	I	\$1,500,000	3YO	Dirt	1 1/2
Brooklyn Invitational	II	\$400,000	4&UP	Dirt	1 1/2
Easy Goer		\$150,000	3YO	Dirt	1 1/16
Jaipur Invitational	II	\$400,000	4&UP	Turf	6 Furlongs
Longines Just a Game	I	\$700,000	F&M 4&UP	Turf	1 Mile
Ogden Phipps	I	\$750,000	F&M 4&UP	Dirt	1 1/16
Runhappy Metropolitan Handicap	I	\$1,200,000	3&UP	Dirt	1 Mile
Woodford Reserve Manhattan	I	\$1,000,000	4&UP	Turf	1 1/4
Woody Stephens Presented by Mohegan Sun	II	\$400,000	3YO	Dirt	7 Furlongs

AT A GLANCE

A look at the current Belmont Park meet: April 27, 2018 through May 27, 2018

AVG. WINNING ODDS: 4.53 - 1

FAVORITE WIN%: 38% **FAVORITE ITM%:** 74%

EXOTICS	PAYOFF
Quinella	35.90
Exacta	70.79
Daily Double	73.03
Trifecta	450.36
Pick 3	440.04
Superfecta	2,736.39
Pick 6	16,446.50
Pick 4	4,641.52
Pick 5	15,550.75
Grand Slam	136.78



TRACK BIAS MEET (04/27 - 05/27)

Distance	# Race	% Wire	Best Style	Best Posts
6.0fDirt	33	15%	E/P	Outside
7.0fDirt	12	42%	P	Inside
1 MileDirt	26	23%	E	Mid/Out
1 1/16mDirt	16	38%	E	Rail
InTf Sprint	14	29%	E/P	Mid/Out
Turf Sprint	17	35%	E	Rail/Ins
InTf Routes	22	23%	E/P	Rail
Turf Routes	22	18%	E/P	Inside

TRACK BIAS WEEK (05/21 - 05/27)

Distance	# Race	% Wire	Best Style	Best Posts
6.0fDirt	3	33%	E	Inside
7.0fDirt	4	0%	E/P	Rail/Ins
1 MileDirt	7	57%	E	Middle
1 1/16mDirt	2	50%	E	Rail/Ins
InTf Sprint	5	40%	E	Middle
Turf Sprint	4	25%	E/P	Ins/Mid
InTf Routes	3	67%	E	Rail/Ins
Turf Routes	6	50%	E	Ins/Mid

WHO'S HOT, WHO'S NOT

HOT TRAINERS	Starts	Wins	Place	Show	Avg. Odds	Winning Favorites	'16-'17 Win %
Ward Wesley A.	11	6	1	1	1.93	5	23%
Brown Chad C.	16	6	4	0	2.83	2	27%
Pletcher Todd A.	15	5	1	0	5.13	5	25%
Cox Brad H.	6	4	0	0	2.45	3	27%
Albertrani Thomas	4	2	0	0	11.53	1	9%
McGaughey III Claude R.	5	2	0	1	7.24	1	17%
Terranova, II John P.	5	2	0	1	11.15	1	17%
Handal Raymond	6	2	1	0	3.61	1	16%

COLD JOCKEYS	Starts	Wins	Place	Show	Avg. Odds	Beaten Favorites	'17-'18 Win %
Ortiz Jose L.	17	6	3	2	5.42	1	19%
Saez Luis	20	6	2	6	6.48	4	18%

COLD JOCKEYS	Starts	Wins	Place	Show	Avg. Odds	Beaten Favorites	'17-'18 Win %
Donk David G.	10	0	1	1	11.09	1	11%

2018 BELMONT STAKES BRIS SPEED RATING REPORT

by James Scully

Known as the "Test of the Champion," the Belmont Stakes serves as the third jewel in the American Triple Crown and Justify will try to complete the sweep at its demanding 1 ½-mile distance. The well-built chestnut colt is unbeaten from five starts.

The Bob Baffert-trainee registered the highest BRIS Speed rating in the six-year history of the Kentucky Derby points' qualifying system when posting a 114 for an easy win in the Santa Anita Derby (G1) and his numbers tower over the Belmont competition. However, Justify's Speed ratings declined in the Kentucky Derby and Preakness and he failed to earn a triple-digit number for the first time in the latter.

Here are the BRIS Speed ratings of the current Belmont Stakes probables (Bandua & Gronkowski don't have numbers from Europe):

HORSE	RACE	BRIS SPEED
BLENDED CITIZEN	Peter Pan	98
	Blue Grass	93
	Jeff Ruby	100
BRAVAZO	Preakness	97
	Kentucky Derby	93
	Louisiana Derby	76
FREE DROP BILLY	Kentucky Derby	58
	Blue Grass	94
	Gotham	96
HOFBURG	Kentucky Derby	93
	Florida Derby	104
	Maiden	96
JUSTIFY	Preakness	98
	Kentucky Derby	102
	Santa Anita Derby	114
NOBLE INDY	Kentucky Derby	57
	Louisiana Derby	100
	Risen Star	96
RESTORING HOPE	Pat Day Mile	59
	Wood Memorial	96
	Maiden	92
TENFOLD	Preakness	97
	Arkansas Derby	94
	Allowance	93
VINO ROSSO	Kentucky Derby	91
	Wood Memorial	102
	Tampa Bay Derby	91

ANALYSIS

Blended Citizen posted consecutive triple-digit Speed ratings earlier this year (third & fourth starts back) and he's remarkably the lone Belmont Stakes prospect with a start over the track, closing strongly to capture the May 12 Peter Pan (G2) going away by 1 ½ lengths. It was a strange track last time (downgraded to good prior beforehand after on-and-off-again rain all day) and I liked the tactical speed Blended Citizen displayed, racing within two lengths of the lead at the early points of call before offering another visually impressive late kick. He possesses a formidable turn foot, registering BRIS Late Pace ratings as high as 108 while passing rivals and closing ground through the stretch of his last six starts, and brings improving form into the Belmont Stakes for Doug O'Neill.

Bravazo took a step forward upon recent efforts in the Preakness, closing boldly in deep stretch to miss by only a half-length in second, but it is a little disconcerting to see the dark bay colt fail to earn a Speed rating better than 98 from 10 career starts. He does appear on the upswing for D. Wayne Lukas, who has orchestrated notable turnarounds in form from 3-year-olds Charismatic, Oxbow and Will Take Charge in recent decades, and Bravazo remains a candidate to step forward with a career-best performance in the Belmont Stakes.

Free Drop Billy doesn't appear fast enough to challenge.

Hofburg ran the fastest race among Justify's rivals, netting a 104 Speed rating for his runner-up effort to subsequent Kentucky Derby third-placer Audible in the Florida Derby (G1). Conditioned by Hall of Famer Bill Mott, Hofburg was making his stakes bow in the Florida Derby and appeared arguably a race short when stepping up with a troubled seventh in the Kentucky Derby. The chestnut colt has had five weeks to regroup and may be ready for a much-improved effort in the Belmont Stakes. And he's by Tapit, who hasn't had much luck in the Kentucky Derby but always seems to have one of his offspring ready for a peak performance in the Belmont Stakes, siring three of the last four winners.

Justify brings dangerous speed to the Belmont Stakes and his last two starts have come on wet tracks, conditions which make me leery to make any definitive declarations upon his lower Speed ratings. He ran great earlier this year under fast conditions, including the Santa Anita Derby which he dominated on the lead through moderate fractions, and Justify must be viewed as a serious threat to run the competition off their feet similar to American Pharoah, who made an easy lead and saved plenty for the final furlongs. Declining Speed numbers can still be classified as a legitimate concern especially with an odds-on choice trying a new track surface for the first time. And betting against prohibitive favorites with a Triple Crown on the line has been the way to play the Belmont Stakes, with an 11-for-12 success rate (92%) over the past 40 years.

Noble Indy is one of five horses with a triple-digit Speed rating from the last three starts, netting a 100 for a game tally in the TwinSpires.com Louisiana Derby (G2), and he had little chance from post 19 in the Kentucky Derby. The Todd Pletcher pupil has the speed to be a pace factor but tough to envision him being involved in the latter stages.

Restoring Hope never fired on a sloppy track in the Pat Day Mile (G3) and the maiden winner has never run fast from five career outings.

Tenfold didn't make his career debut until February and after an after an even performance in his stakes debut, he bounced back with a fine third in the Preakness. The Curlin colt grinded his way into contention late and came up only three-quarters of a length short, registering a career-best 97 Speed rating. He still has plenty of potential upside for Steve Asmussen and Tenfold can't be dismissed from consideration with another step forward in the Belmont Stakes.

Vino Rosso posted comfortable wins over maiden and allowance foes in his first two starts but couldn't deliver upon his promise when facing stakes rivals in the Sam F. Davis (G3) and Tampa Bay Derby (G2). He rebounded from those setbacks in the Wood Memorial (G2), earning a 102 Speed figure for the three-length decision, and the emphasis seemed to be on the Belmont Stakes in the aftermath. The chestnut made up some ground late to be ninth in the Kentucky Derby and we can count on Pletcher tightening the screws for the Belmont Stakes. Two of his three wins have come in New York and Vino Rosso could be poised for a big effort.

Here are the BRIS Speed ratings for the last 15 Belmont Stakes winners:

HORSE	RACE	BRIS SPEED
TAPWRIT	Kentucky Derby	89
	Blue Grass	87
	Tampa Bay Derby	101
CREATOR	Kentucky Derby	84
	Arkansas Derby	100
	Rebel	95
AMERICAN PHAROAH	Preakness	100
	Kentucky Derby	100
	Arkansas Derby	102
TONALIST	Peter Pan	107
	Allowance	93
	Maiden	93
PALACE MALICE	Kentucky Derby	93
	Blue Grass	96
	Louisiana Derby	97
UNION RAGS	Kentucky Derby	100
	Florida Derby	102
	Fountain of Youth	103
RULER ON ICE	Federico Tesio	93
	Sunland Derby	93
	Allowance	93
DROSSELMEYER	Dwyer	94
	Louisiana Derby	96
	Risen Star	95
SUMMER BIRD	Kentucky Derby	96
	Arkansas Derby	98
	Maiden	92
DA' TARA	Barbaro	99
	Derby Trial	96
	Allowance	91
RAGS TO RICHES	Kentucky Oaks	109
	Santa Anita Oaks	98
	Las Virgenese	98
JAZIL	Kentucky Derby	99
	Wood Memorial	101
	Fountain of Youth	94
AFLEET ALEX	Preakness	112
	Kentucky Derby	99
	Arkansas Derby	107
BIRDSTONE	Kentucky Derby	90
	Spiral	87
	Allowance	97
EMPIRE MAKER	Kentucky Derby	106
	Wood Memorial	111
	Florida Derby	106

Seven of the last 15 Belmont Stakes winners earned a declining Speed rating in the previous start. Two of those, Palace Malice (97-96-93) and Union Rags (103-102-100), had declining numbers in the last two outings like Justify (114-102-98).

Six Belmont Stakes winners came into the race off an improved number. Da' Tara (91-96-99) was the only one with increasing numbers in the last two starts.

American Pharoah and Ruler on Ice paired up in the last two starts.

Here are the BRIS Speed ratings for the last eight horses who came up short with a Triple Crown on the line:

HORSE	RACE	BRIS SPEED
CALIFORNIA CHROME (2014)	Preakness	104
	Kentucky Derby	103
	Santa Anita Derby	106
BIG BROWN (2008)	Preakness	101
	Kentucky Derby	111
	Florida Derby	110
SMARTY JONES (2004)	Preakness	113
	Kentucky Derby	106
	Arkansas Derby	105
FUNNY CIDE (2003)	Preakness	111
	Kentucky Derby	108
	Wood Memorial	111
WAR EMBLEM (2002)	Preakness	110
	Kentucky Derby	113
	Illinois Derby	109
CHARISMATIC (1999)	Preakness	104
	Kentucky Derby	105
	Lexington	104
REAL QUIET (1998)	Preakness	106
	Kentucky Derby	101
	Santa Anita Derby	107
SILVER CHARM (1997)	Preakness	112
	Kentucky Derby	107
	Santa Anita Derby	102

ANALYSIS

All registered triple-digit BRIS Speed ratings in the three previous starts, with five of eight improving from the Kentucky Derby to the Preakness.

Two of the three with declining Speed figures in the Preakness (War Emblem and Big Brown) were unplaced in the Belmont Stakes and Charismatic finished third.



RUN STYLES & THE BELMONT STAKES

by James Scully

The Belmont Stakes will be contested over a 1 ½-mile distance many participants will never see again. Stamina matters, but the extended distance leads to a false impression it benefits late runners.

Barring an early duel, Belmont Stakes horses with tactical foot can take advantage because the pace is moderate. The opening half-mile has been completed in less than 48-seconds only twice in the last decade and jockeys are looking to rate on or near the front end and save something left for the finish.

Creator (2016) and Summer Bird (2009) are the only confirmed closers to win the Belmont in the last decade.

Tapwrit raced up close to the pace en route to capturing the 2017 Belmont Stakes and six of the last 10 winners met the same criteria, including wire-to-wire winners American Pharoah (2015) and Da' Tara (2008).

Nine of the last 10 Belmont Stakes winners were within 5-lengths of the lead after the opening half-mile. Seven were in fourth or better at the half-way point (after 6-furlongs). Belmont Stakes fields don't tend to be strung out and racing toward the back of the pack has been disadvantageous.

Here is the positioning of the last 10 Belmont Stakes winners at the first three points of call:

Given the early projections for the 2018 Belmont Stakes, it's difficult to envision a legitimate pace.

Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner Justify will be forward barring a bad break, possibly showing the way on the front end if he draws an inside post. Three of his five wins have come wire-to-wire and we can expect him to be either first or second entering the first turn of the Belmont Stakes.

The possibility exists for an unexpected pace presence in the Belmont Stakes. Commendable upset the 2000 edition in front-running fashion after being easily classified as a stalker beforehand and Ruler on Ice surprised with similar tactics despite never being first or second at early points of call in previous starts.

Horses who take back and offer one run often find themselves up against it in the Belmont Stakes and 2018 may prove to be no exception. Rivals will probably need to race within striking range of the early pace to have any chance of defeating Justify, who has the perfect run style for the extreme 1 ½-mile test as he tries to complete the Triple Crown sweep.

HORSE	¼-MILE LENGTHS BEHIND (POSITION)	½-MILE	¾-MILE
Tapwrit	1 ½-lengths (3rd)	2-lgths (3rd)	2-lgths (4th)
Creator	9 ¾-lgths (11th)	8-lgths (10th)	3 ½-lgths (6th)
American Pharoah	1st	1st	1st
Tonalist	3-lgths (6th)	1-lgth (3rd)	1-lgth (3rd)
Palace Malice	2 ½-lgths (5th)	2-lgths (4th)	½-lgth (3rd)
Union Rags	4-lgths (5th)	4-lgths (5th)	3 ½-lgths (3rd)
Ruler on Ice	2-lgths (2nd)	1 ½-lgths (2nd)	1-lgth (2nd)
Drosselmeyer	5-lgths (6th)	4-lgths (5th)	2 ½-lgths (5th)
Summer Bird	4 ½-lgths (5th)	4 ½-lgths (6th)	6-lgths (9th)
Da' Tara	1st	1st	1st

EXPERT PICKS FOR BELMONT STAKES DAY

We've assembled an expert team of handicappers to give their top picks for stakes racing on Belmont Stakes Day.

SATURDAY, JUNE 9 Belmont Park



JAIPUR INVITATIONAL STAKES (G3)

5 Disco Partner	5 Disco Partner	5 Disco Partner	2 Pure Sensation	5 Dlsco Partner
7 Blind Ambition	8 Holding Gold	7 Blind Ambition	4 Conquest Tsunami	7 Blind Ambition
6 Frisky Magician	4 Conquest Tsunami	1 Stormy Liberal	5 Disco Partner	2 Pure Sensation

WOODY STEPHENS STAKES (G2)

11 World of Trouble	4 Givemeaminut	8 Kanthaka	3 Engage	4 Givemeaminut
12 Strike Power	11 World of Trouble	6 Still Having Fun	11 World of Trouble	8 Kanthaka
4 Givemeaminut	6 Still Having Fun	3 Engage	4 Givemeaminut	12 Strike Power

JUST A GAME (G1)

1 On Leave	3 Off Limits	4 Lull	7 A Raving Beauty	8 La Coronel
6 Cambodia	4 Lull	7 A Raving Beauty	1 On Leave	3 Off Limits
2 Dream Dancing	7 A Raving Beauty	8 On Leave	3 Off Limits	1 On Leave

ACORN (G1)

3 Monomoy Girl	5 Caledonia Road	5 Caledonia Road	5 Caledonia Road	3 Monomoy Girl
7 Talk Veuve To Me	3 Monomoy Girl	3 Monomoy Girl	3 Monomoy Girl	7 Talk Veuve to Me
4 Gio Game	7 Talk Veuve to Me	7 Talk Veuve to Me	7 Talk Veuve to Me	5 Caledonia Road

METROPOLITAN HANDICAP (G1)

10 Bee Jersey	5 Good Samaritan	10 Bee Jersey	10 Bee Jersey	10 Bee Jersey
11 Awesome Slew	10 Bee Jersey	11 Awesome Slew	1 Mind Your Biscuits	1 Mind Your Biscuits
4 McCracken	9 Warrior's Club	1 Mind Your Biscuits	4 McCracken	5 Good Samaritan

MANHATTAN (G1)

12 Multiplier	10 Beach Patrol	3 Hi Happy	10 Beach Patrol	13 Spring Quality
10 Beach Patrol	3 Hi Happy	10 Beach Patrol	4 Alexios Komnenos	8 Sadler's Joy
5 Catcho En Die	1 Robert Bruce	2 One Go All Go	1 Robert Bruce	1 Robert Bruce

BELMONT STAKES (G1)

10 Blended Citizen	1 Justify	8 Vino Rosso	1 Justify	7 Tenfold
7 Tenfold	8 Vino Rosso	1 Justify	8 Vino Rosso	1 Justify
3 Bravazo	7 Tenfold	7 Tenfold	4 Hofburg	10 Blended Citizen



TWINSPIRES TIPSHEET



150TH RUNNING OF THE BELMONT STAKES

The Belmont Stakes (Gr 1)

1 1/2-Miles

PURSE \$1,500,000

POST	HORSE	ML ODDS	TOP PICKS
1	Justify	4-5	8 Vino Rosso
2	Free Drop Billy	30-1	4 Hofburg
3	Bravazo	8-1	1 Justify
4	Hofburg	9-2	
5	Restoring Hope	30-1	\$20 Win
6	Gronkowski	12-1	8 (\$20)
7	Tenfold	12-1	
8	Vino Rosso	8-1	\$10 EXACTA BOX
9	Noble Indy	30-1	4-8 (\$20)
10	Blended Citizen	15-1	
			\$1 SUPERFECTA
			4,8 with 1,4,8 with 1,4,8 with All (\$28)

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The final leg of the Triple Crown has easily been the most unpredictable one in recent years. Since the turn of the century, the only winning favorites in the Belmont Stakes are Point Given (2001) and American Pharoah (2015). Both, maybe not coincidentally, were saddled by Bob Baffert.

Since 2002, we have seen winners going off at huge odds of 70-1, 38-1, 36-1, 24-1, et al's. I think we will see another favorite go down, with a healthy mutual awaiting us.

VINO ROSSO seems tailor-made for this race to me. Grade-2 victor looked the part in taking the Wood Memorial (G2) at nine furlongs in April and was last seen finishing ninth in the Kentucky Derby (G1). At Churchill Downs, son of Curlin was never close enough to mount a serious challenge but didn't run poorly, either.

The pace of the Belmont will surely be slower than the fractions of :22 1/5, :45 3/5 and 1:11 that we witnessed at Churchill. And that means Vino Rosso will be staying in touch with less work to do in the final quarter-mile.

The Pletcher/Velazquez tandem has enjoyed countless successes at Belmont Park. I think they have at least one more in them.

HOFBURG is a horse that I think has a huge future, and perhaps, present. Bill Mott trainee could have surely finished in the top-four with a clean voyage at Churchill Downs and has as much room for improvement as any with just four lifetime outings.

Tapit colt is outworked top handicap runner Good Samaritan last week and is bred to run all day. Late runner has a fine stride and will love both the wide turns and extended distance on Saturday.

Hofburg could surely win this race and he might be the second-most talented sophomore in this crop.

I am mostly out of words for JUSTIFY. Scat Daddy colt has passed every test with aplomb. I honestly was not especially fond of his chances in the Preakness, but he showed a lot of heart and class when facing a stern test for the first time in his career at Pimlico. Bob Baffert trainee has done things we have never seen before, and he seems capable of anything, perhaps.

But we may have seen a little chink in the armor three weeks ago when he failed to separate himself from the field late. From a betting and handicapping standpoint, I have to question his edge at 1 1/2 miles.

At miniscule odds against another excellent field in a fine crop of three-year-olds, I think he could be vulnerable late on Saturday.

JUSTIFY WOULD BE A FITTING TRIPLE CROWN WINNER

by James Scully

Grace under pressure. It's how Ernest Hemmingway defined courage and athletes must have the intestinal fortitude as well as talent to maintain their composure under the intense pressure of competition.

Justify embodies that quality in a Thoroughbred.

He proved special from the get-go, recording smashing wins in his first three starts, and registered a whopping 114 BRIS Speed rating when romping in the Santa Anita Derby, the top number in the six-year history of the Kentucky Derby qualifying points' system.

Massive in size and blessed with speed and power, Justify carried his spectacular form forward to Churchill Downs when posting a 2 ½-length victory in the 144th running of the Kentucky Derby.

The bright chestnut gained a new measure of esteem recording a courageous victory in the Preakness Stakes.

Rivals were gunning for the unbeaten star from the beginning, with Kentucky Derby runner-up Good Magic racing head-and-head with Justify through the first turn and down the backstretch, and tension continued to build as they battled through the fog on the far turn at Pimlico. Justify emerged with a short lead in upper stretch but Good Magic remained a pesky foe as he gamely trying to re-rally to his inside and Bravazo came surging into contention along his outside flank in the final sixteenth of a mile.

Facing an extreme challenge for the first time, Justify dug deep and displayed sheer determination to reach the wire first by a narrow margin.

Justify seeks to become Thoroughbred racing's 13th Triple Crown winner in the Belmont Stakes on June 9. It's a demanding task, with three major races over a five-week span culminating in the 1 ½-mile Belmont Stakes, and 11 horses came up short in the final leg after winning the Kentucky Derby and Preakness before American Pharoah snapped a 37-year Triple Crown drought in 2015.

There's no guarantee Justify will show up with his best. He's been on an accelerated schedule since making his career debut on February 19, with the next engagement representing his sixth start in less than four months, and will be asked to bounce back off a taxing performance in the Preakness.

It remains his race to lose. Justify has truly distinguished himself this season, becoming the first unraced 2-year-old to win the Kentucky Derby in 136 years and showing tremendous resiliency to prevail in the Preakness, and nothing seems to stop him.

Justify will stand tall among the hallowed ranks of Triple Crown winners if he can clear one more hurdle.



After dominating his first four starts, Justify turned back multiple challenges to record a gutsy win in the Preakness Stakes (Jim McCue/Maryland Jockey Club)

TRAINER BOB BAFFERT PLANS TO ENJOY JUSTIFY'S TRIPLE CROWN TRY

by Ed DeRosa

RACING HALL OF FAME TRAINER BOB BAFFERT HAS BEEN HERE BEFORE, BUT HE'S NEVER ENJOYED IT.

"Here" is days out from the Belmont Stakes with a Kentucky Derby-Preakness Stakes winner going for the Triple Crown. "It" is all the hoopla that surrounds trying to achieve one of the most difficult tasks in horse racing, if not all of sports.

Baffert, 65, saddled Silver Charm (1997), Real Quiet (1998), War Emblem (2002), and American Pharoah (2015) to Triple Crown tries with only American Pharoah landing the treble to become the 12th to do so and the first since Affirmed in 1978.

"Every time I've been in this situation before I've always wondered, 'Is this the one?' or 'Can this even be done?'" Baffert said the week Justify resumed on-track training at Churchill Downs. "Now we've done it. We had one of the ones and know it can be done, so now I feel like I can enjoy the ride more."

The aforementioned horses' classic wins make up 9 of Baffert's record-tying 14 wins in U.S. Triple Crown races. In addition to the previously mentioned quartet, Point Given and Justify are both dual classic winners, and Lookin at Lucky won the 2010 Preakness. Justify's Preakness win tied Baffert with D. Wayne Lukas at 14 Triple Crown wins apiece.

"Anytime a great athlete comes along, people always want to debate who's better," Baffert said. "In basketball it was [Michael] Jordan or [Kobe] Bryant then here comes Lebron [James] and some people think he's the best."

"Horse racing—especially the Triple Crown—is different though because you're only racing against your crop. The challenge is to beat the best of your generation, so I don't like to compare my horses just how my horses compare to their crop."

So far that comparison is favorable with Justify being undefeated in 5 starts, including 3 Grade 1 wins. A Belmont Stakes victory would make him just the second undefeated Triple Crown champion along with Seattle Slew (1977).

"This is a really strong crop," Baffert said of Justify's rivals. "[2017 champion two-year-old male and Breeders' Cup Juvenile winner] Good Magic is a really top horse. If we weren't in these races, there's a strong chance he'd probably be going for the Triple Crown."

Good Magic finished second to Justify in the Kentucky Derby before pressing his foe in the Preakness and fading to fourth late.

"When [Good Magic] took us on in the Preakness, as a fan I loved it because these were two top horses going toe to toe and neither was giving in. As trainer of Justify I didn't like it,

but fortunately I had the superior horse that day. [Justify] is fast but he's adaptable too. [Jockey] Mike [Smith] knew just when to use him throughout the race."

Baffert said nothing short of Justify's "A" game will be good enough on June 9 at Belmont Park.

"You can't bring your 'B' game to the Belmont Stakes," Baffert said. "Not every horse in there will bring his 'A' game, but the ones who do can beat us if we're not at our best. I don't think every horse brought his 'A' game [in the Kentucky Derby]."

Baffert has pushed all the right buttons to date with Justify, getting the son of Scat Daddy to bring his "A" game to all five starts, but there is one thing Baffert would change about the Belmont Stakes vis a vis the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes: the weather.

"I'd like to see a fast track in the Belmont Stakes," Baffert said. "I don't want it too deep or loose, and a wet track can be abrasive. We know he can run on anything, and I'd like to see it fast."

In a game sometimes built on rivalries, one storyline this Triple Crown season has been the relationship between Baffert and WinStar President (and former trainer) Elliott Walden, who saddled Victory Gallop to a 1998 Belmont Stakes victory by a nose over Real Quiet. WinStar is a co-owner of Justify.

"It was a fun rivalry because he always said traffic trouble cost him a Derby, but then we beat him pretty good in the Preakness," Baffert said of the 1998 Triple Crown season. "So then I would say he cost me a Triple Crown, but Elliott always says I cost him a Derby."

"I'm just glad he put me on the WinStar training squad," Baffert said. "I'm very fortunate to be a part of that team, and when a former trainer sends you a horse you know there's a respect there, so that's meant a lot. What WinStar has done is incredible with two Derby winners in nine years and a world class stallion roster."

Surrounded by good horses and good people, Baffert is in a better position than ever to enjoy the ride, and he hopes the fans do too.

"A good horse can bring more people together than anything else in this sport," Baffert said. "I know this is the time everyone's watching, and we hope to put on a good show. Everyone seeing how fun it is to have a good horse is good for racing."

JUSTIFY'S JOCKEY MIKE SMITH: HALL OF FAME RIDER TO THE ALL-TIME GREATS

by Kellie Reilly

Hall of Famer. All-time leading jockey in Breeders' Cup history. Two-time Eclipse Award champion and Kentucky Derby (G1) winner. Regular rider of Hall of Famers from Azeri to Zenyatta. "Big Money Mike."

As that rapid-fire summary suggests, jockey Mike Smith has reached the pinnacle of the sport. And now at the age of 52, he may achieve the ultimate in North American racing: a Triple Crown sweep aboard unbeaten Justify.

Smith has already completed a "personal" Triple Crown, having won each jewel twice himself. But teaming up with a Triple Crown winner would put him in an exclusive club, and put an exclamation point on a career marked by longevity at the top.

Like Justify's Hall of Fame trainer, Bob Baffert, Smith hails from the American Southwest. The Roswell, New Mexico, native grew up in a racing family. His father, George, was a sometime jockey. His maternal grandparents raised horses on a Dexter, New Mexico, farm, and his uncle was a trainer.

With a pedigree like that, Mike was a natural to get involved in the game. He learned how to strike up a trusting relationship with horses as a child on the farm, and as an 11-year-old, he was already riding match races at bush tracks. His career formally commenced when he got his jockey's license at 16. During that 1982 season, Smith won with 36 of 317 mounts and finished "in the money" (in the top three) at a 33 percent clip, according to Equibase statistics.

Smith's numbers escalated rapidly from there as he plied his trade in the Midwest. In 1983, he more than tripled his mounts, rode 141 winners, finished in-the-money 40 percent of the time, and increased his purse earnings tenfold to surpass the \$1 million mark in just his second year with a license. He rode in his first Kentucky Derby in 1984, guiding sixth-placer Pine Circle, and received the return call for his fifth in the Preakness (G1).

Shifting tack to New York in 1989 brought Smith to a new level, and he forged partnerships with some of racing's brightest stars of the 1990s. New York-bred Fourstars Allstar even put his up-and-coming rider on the world stage. They shipped to Ireland in 1991 to upset a classic mile race at the Curragh Racecourse, the Irish 2000 Guineas (G1), and Smith became the first U.S.-based jockey to win a European classic.

That could be seen as a harbinger of Smith's success in the Breeders' Cup World Championships, for his breakthrough came with another turf miler by the name of Lure. A future Hall of Famer himself, Lure became his first Breeders' Cup winner when wiring the 1992 Mile (G1) at Gulfstream Park. Lure successfully defended his Breeders' Cup title in 1993 at Santa Anita, crowning a sensational season for his rider.



Smith won his first Triple Crown race the same year, taking the 1993 Preakness aboard ill-fated Prairie Bayou. With a series of other high-profile winners, and as the regular pilot of future Hall of Famer Sky Beauty, he earned his first Eclipse Award, and an ESPY, as the nation's outstanding jockey.

Thanks to a stellar 1994 highlighted by Hall of Famer Holy Bull, and featuring fellow inductees Inside Information and Heavenly Prize, Smith repeated as the Eclipse Award-winning jockey. Unfortunately, Holy Bull's championship campaign was blighted by a subpar 12th as the 2-1 favorite in the Kentucky Derby. In a gnawing what-might-have-been, the steel gray colt showed his trademark speed – and heart – to capture the Travers (G1) over subsequent Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) hero Concern, and he also lorded it over older horses in such prestigious events as the Met Mile (G1) and Woodward (G1).

A decade later, Smith would finally snare that Derby trophy, fittingly enough with a son of Holy Bull – the 50-1 longshot Giacomo who stunned Churchill Downs in 2005. Giacomo was owned by Jerry and Ann Moss and trained by John Shirreffs, the team we'd later come to know much better with Zenyatta.

But that brilliant second half of Smith's career almost didn't happen. Twice injured in spills in 1998, his second and more serious accident came at Saratoga, where he was unseated, his mount rolled over him, and he broke two vertebrae. While he was fortunate not to suffer an even worse spinal cord injury, Smith was confined to a body cast for a time and ended up on the sidelines for several months.

Known for his rigorous workout regimen, Smith believes that his longtime training habits helped him to overcome it all. Getting back in action physically was one thing; resuming business connections after being away for that length of time was something else.

Smith's renaissance was sparked by a cross-country move to Southern California in 2000. He teamed up with future Hall of Fame distaffer Azeri, the 2002 Horse of the Year, and that season's unbeaten champion two-year-old colt Vindication. Thanks to that duo, Smith returned to the Breeders' Cup winner's circle for the first time since his 1997 Classic (G1) victory aboard Hall of Famer Skip Away.

Zenyatta would single-handedly give him two more Breeders' Cup trophies. The popular racemare who wowed fans with her pre-race "dances," her dramatic come-from-behind style, and her 19-race unbeaten streak, Zenyatta triumphed over her own division in the 2008 Breeders' Cup Ladies' Classic (G1). Instead of merely going for a repeat in 2009, she took on males and became the first (and so far only) female to capture the Breeders' Cup Classic. Her lone loss came in her career finale in the 2010 Classic, just failing to get past champion colt Blame at the wire. Although Smith took the loss hard, and blamed himself mercilessly, the rider was not responsible for Zenyatta's own willful display of dropping excessively far back early.

Zenyatta's heyday coincided with Smith's stint on "Jockeys." The sports reality show, which ran for two seasons on Animal Planet, gave a glimpse of a rider's life behind the scenes.

Smith has found life after Zenyatta. He's won the Breeders' Cup Classic twice more, with Drosselmeyer (2011) and Arrogate (2016), the latter for Justify's trainer Baffert. Drosselmeyer also handed him his first Belmont S. (G1) score in 2010, while Arrogate was the son of another Breeders' Cup star for Smith, Unbridled's Song, whom he rode in the 1995 Juvenile (G1). Although Arrogate's peak lasted only a brief span, Smith steered him home in the world's richest races, the \$12 million Pegasus World Cup (G1) and the \$10 million Dubai World Cup (G1) in 2017.

Smith's top mounts in recent years also include the ultra-talented but star-crossed Shared Belief; Palace Malice, his second winner of the Belmont (2013); Royal Delta, Mizdirection, Songbird, and current champions Abel Tasman, West Coast, Unique Bella, and Caledonia Road, who extended Smith's grip on the Breeders' Cup record-book in last November's Juvenile Fillies (G1).

The leading Breeders' Cup jockey by both wins (26) and money won (\$35,874,605), Smith dominates the table in both categories. Fellow Hall of Famer John Velazquez is a distant second with \$25.5 million in Breeders' Cup purse earnings and a joint second at 15 wins (tied with the retired Jerry Bailey).

Smith is second to Velazquez on the all-time North American earnings list, his mounts taking home nearly \$312 million over his 36-year career. And his 5,461 win total also ranks him among the greats of his profession.

Now in the twilight of his career, Smith is helping his longevity by limiting his number of races, choosing to concentrate on the best horses rather than the usual bread-and-butter of an entire card. So in one sense he's coming full circle, his number of starts the fewest since he was just starting out in New Mexico. But take a look at his earnings per start – an eye-popping \$74,694 in 2017 – and you can see the quality of those mounts.

Winning races and piling up money are not the only reasons that Smith qualifies as a success. His list of honors transcends the business side of the industry, reflecting how well he's respected. The winner of the George Woolf, Mike Venezia, and Laffit Pincay Jr. Awards, all in recognition of his character, Smith was enshrined in the Hall of Fame in 2003.

If the big chestnut Justify can add the June 9 Belmont to his Derby and Preakness trophies, he'll join his jockey and trainer in the Hall one day. You can bet that Smith will give him every chance to get there.

COMPARING THE TRIPLE CROWN TRAILS OF JUSTIFY AND AMERICAN PHAROAH

by Vance Hanson

When Justify crossed the wire first in the Preakness (G1), setting up an opportunity for a Triple Crown in the Belmont Stakes (G1), it was inevitable that comparisons would be drawn between he and American Pharoah, who gloriously ended a 37-year drought when claiming the Crown in 2015.

The tie that binds both colts is trainer Bob Baffert, who will be taking a fifth shot at a Triple Crown sweep. After missing his first three times with Silver Charm (1997), Real Quiet (1998), and War Emblem (2002), Baffert will attempt to win a second, emulating "Sunny" Jim Fitzsimmons, who conditioned the father-son duo of Gallant Fox and Omaha to Triple Crowns in 1930 and 1935, respectively.

However, aside from the trainer, their frequent presence in the winner's circle, and general front-running style, similarities between the two colts are few.

For starters, American Pharoah and Justify took vastly different paths to the classics. Precocious enough to debut in August of his two-year-old year, American Pharoah wound up as the champion juvenile colt after back-to-back romps in the Del Mar Futurity (G1) and FrontRunner (G1). Overpowering his rivals in the Rebel (G2) and Arkansas Derby (G1) the following spring, American Pharoah became only the second two-year-old champion since 1978-79 to come back and win the Kentucky Derby (G1).

Justify, in contrast, has always had to play catch-up. It's a testament to his innate talent that he debuted as late as February 18 and, 11 weeks later, was in the Kentucky Derby winner's circle, becoming the first horse since Apollo in 1882 to win the Run for the Roses without having raced at two.

In addition to his relative inexperience, Justify arguably had a more difficult path en route to Churchill Downs, needing to win the Santa Anita Derby (G1) over a quality rival in Bolt d'Oro, generally considered the second best two-year-old in the country last year.

BRIS Speed ratings are also an interesting point of comparison. American Pharoah's were generally consistent from the Del Mar Futurity through the Preakness: 103-99-99-102-100-100. Justify's rose rapidly from his debut through the Santa Anita Derby (100-104-114) before dipping to 102-98 in the Derby and Preakness. It's this regression that has some wondering whether Justify peaked too soon and is vulnerable to further decline going 1 1/2 miles.

It must be said, though, that Justify's figures these past several weeks have been a function of how he's won, forcing a fast pace in the Derby and getting hooked into an early duel in the Preakness with a high-quality opponent in Good Magic, last year's juvenile champion. American Pharoah's experiences were different.

Taking a lead no one else seemed to want, American Pharoah set a relaxing pace, quickened slightly through interior fractions, and rolled to a 5 1/2-length win in the Belmont in one of the quicker times (2:26 3/5) in race history.

Justify might not have it so easy with Louisiana Derby (G2) winner Noble Indy also in possession of early foot, though both are owned in partnership by WinStar Farm and the expectation is Noble Indy isn't there to make things difficult for the marquee attraction.

The talent and speed are there for Justify to replicate American Pharoah's achievement of three years ago.

How he's gotten to Belmont and how he'll potentially get around one lap of "Big Sandy" in first place has been and could continue to be a vastly different tale.



WHAT KIND OF HORSE STOPS A TRIPLE CROWN BID?

by Vance Hanson

We all know about the 12 colts that entered the Belmont Stakes (G1) with a chance at a Triple Crown sweep that succeeded. Will Justify be “Lucky 13” or will he join a list that currently numbers 20 of those that missed reaching the mountaintop?

A different way of answering that question is asking this: What kind of horse stops a Triple Crown bid? History shows they fall into three categories.

Of the 20 horses that halted a Triple Crown bid, nine were making their first Triple Crown appearance in the Belmont, seven had previously run in both the Kentucky Derby (G1) and Preakness (G1), and four others had competed in just one of the first two classics.

By far the most common upset winner is a “new shooter” to the Triple Crown series. This type is relatively fresh and obviously hasn’t had to deal with the rigors put on horses that competed in the first two legs. Quite often, these horses generally didn’t deal at all with the pressures of the Kentucky Derby prep season either.

Three of the last five Triple Crown spoilers (all since 2000) were making their first classic appearances in the Belmont, including the last two: Da’ Tara (2008) and Tonalist (2014). The other this century was Sarava (2002), the longest priced winner in Belmont history at \$142.50.

About one-third of Triple Crown spoilers have been horses that those seeking the sweep are quite familiar with having faced them at both Churchill Downs and Pimlico, if not also before.

Interestingly, the last four Kentucky Derby-Preakness losers that finally turned the tables in the Belmont had been runner-up in both of the previous two legs. They were Arts and Letters (1969), Bet Twice (1987), Easy Goer (1989), and Victory Gallop (1998). No horse fits that profile this year as Bravazo, sixth in the Derby and second in the Preakness, is likely to be the only horse other than Justify this year to run in all three races.

That brings us to the third category of horse. A change in training philosophies over the past two decades or so has seen far fewer horses compete in all three Triple Crown races with the exception of the horse or horses that happen to win one of the first two legs.

Since 1997, four Triple Crown spoilers have competed in just one other classic, generally the Kentucky Derby (Touch Gold in 1997 was the lone exception having run fourth in the Preakness). In addition to Bravazo, it’s likely many bettors will key on horses in this category as potential upset winners. Ones to watch from this group include Hofburg, Vino Rosso, and Tenfold.

There’s arguably a fourth category. For those that remember the not-so-great starts War Emblem, Big Brown, and California Chrome had in the Belmont, fans of Justify better hope he won’t be the kind that, in part, stops himself.



HOFBURG COULD 'TAP' INTO A BELMONT STAKES VICTORY OVER JUSTIFY

by Vance Hanson

CAN WOODY STEPHENS AND TAPIT PROVIDE CLUES ON HOFBURG AND JUSTIFY IN THE BELMONT STAKES?

As Woody Stephens was to trainers in the 1980s, so it appears Tapit is to stallions in the 2010s when it comes to being a dominating figure in the Belmont Stakes (G1).

In the last four editions of the Belmont, Tapit has sired winners Tonalist (2014), Creator (2016), and Tapwrit (2017). It took the sport's first Triple Crown winner in nearly four decades, American Pharoah, to prevent the streak from standing at four in a row as Frosted was a clear-cut second in 2015. (Tapit also sired 2016 third-place finisher Lani).

Tapit's current dominance echoes that of 16-time leading sire Lexington, "The Blind Hero of Woodburn," who in the five-year period from 1868 through 1872 was responsible for three Belmont winners and one third-place finisher.

On June 9, Tapit's son Hofburg will attempt to do what Tonalist did and Frosted didn't – halt a Triple Crown bid. Four Belmont Stakes wins in five years for Tapit is not out of the realm of possibility.

Tapit had a relatively short career in 2003-04 winning three of six starts, including the Wood Memorial (G1) and Laurel Futurity (G3). Though unplaced in the Kentucky Derby (G1), Florida Derby (G1), and Pennsylvania Derby (G2), Tapit's success at stud was instantaneous as he sired champion juvenile filly, Stardom Bound, in his first crop. He hasn't looked back.

While obviously gifted at siring winners of the country's longest Grade 1 dirt stakes, Tapit's present stud fee of \$300,000 is proof his offspring have done and can do pretty much

everything. Though the Kentucky Derby and Preakness (G1) have eluded him, Tapit has sired four U.S. champions and a plethora of Grade 1 winners going short and long, on turf as well as dirt.

Hofburg seeks to become the latest top-level winner for the super stallion. Like Tonalist, Hofburg will be making his fifth career start in the Belmont. Both raced once at two, finishing fourth in their debuts, then ran three more times prior to the "Test of the Champion."

After a maiden win, Tonalist ran second to eventual Florida Derby winner Constitution in an allowance and then took the Peter Pan (G2) in his stakes debut. Hofburg, on the other hand, finished a clear second to Audible in the Florida Derby in his stakes debut before finishing seventh in the Kentucky Derby after a rough trip in the slop.

Owner Juddmonte Farms is seeking its second Belmont with Hofburg after Empire Maker earned a Triple Crown-busting win against Funny Cide in 2003. Trainer Bill Mott, likewise, won his only Belmont with Drosselmeyer in 2010, and jockey Irad Ortiz Jr. was aboard for Creator's score two years ago.

It's also worth noting Hofburg's broodmare sire, Touch Gold, ended a Triple Crown bid himself in 1997, against the Bob Baffert-trained Silver Charm.

Justify will be tough to beat, for sure, but no horse is entering the race with more Belmont momentum than Tapit.



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