MEET THE KENTUCKY DERBY CONTENDERS

PRESENTED BY

twinspires®
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Pedigree profiles by Keeler Johnson.
Quality is essential for any horse hoping to win the Kentucky Derby (G1), and Essential Quality clearly has it in abundance. The Godolphin homebred has been a standout on the Road to the Kentucky Derby, posting eye-catching victories in the Breeders' Futurity (G1), Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1), Southwest (G3), and Blue Grass (G2) over distances from 1 1/16 miles to 1 1/8 miles. These three impressive efforts hint classic distances will be well within reach for the classy gray colt.

True, there's a big difference between racing 1 1/8 miles on the Derby trail and tackling 1 1/4 miles on the first Saturday in May. But from a pedigree perspective, there's no reason to believe Essential Quality will be troubled by the unfamiliar distance awaiting at Churchill Downs.

The top half of Essential Quality's pedigree is strongly geared toward success racing 1 1/4 miles or farther. He's a son of 2004 Wood Memorial (G1) winner and Kentucky Derby starter Tapit, whose top progeny have primarily excelled racing two turns on dirt. Chief among them have been 1 1/2-mile Belmont Stakes (G1) winners Tonalist, Creator, and Tapwrit.

You can almost argue that Tapit's breeding is too stout for the Kentucky Derby. Prevailing in the Run for the Roses requires a perfect blend of both stamina and speed, plus an early-maturing profile sufficient to deliver a winning effort on the first Saturday in May.

Tapit's classic types have tended to mature a bit later while leaning heavy on stamina compared to speed, as evidenced by the fact his progeny have won three Belmonts while going 0-for-11 in the Kentucky Derby. This is where the bottom half of Essential Quality's pedigree might come to the rescue, introducing some high-class miler speed into the equation.

Essential Quality was produced by the Elusive Quality mare Delightful Quality, a half-sister to 2005 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies (G1) winner and Kentucky Derby runner-up Ice Box among his best foals. Pulpit, in turn, was a son of 1992 Belmont Stakes winner and renowned stamina influence A.P. Indy, himself a son of 1977 Triple Crown winner Seattle Slew. For good measure, Tapit’s pedigree includes 1990 Kentucky Derby winner Unbridled, immortal 1973 Triple Crown winner Secretariat, and a couple doses of the breed-shaping classics sire Mr. Prospector.

Delightful Quality's speed is surely inherited from her sire, Elusive Quality, a classy sprinter/miler who won the 1998 Poker (G3) while running a mile in 1:31.63—a world record at the time. Elusive Quality has been an international success at stud, siring a bevy of top-level winners in North America, Europe, and Australia. Speed is a recurring strong suit among his descendants, though the best of them have carried their speed over 1 1/4 miles, including 2004 Kentucky Derby winner Smarty Jones and 2008 Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) winner Raven's Pass.

Elusive Quality arguably passes on even more speed as a broodmare sire, with his daughters producing 2017-18 Breeders' Cup Sprint (G1) winner Roy H, 2018 Breeders’ Cup Filly & Mare Sprint (G1) winner Shamrock Rose, and 2014 Breeders’ Cup Turf Sprint (G1) runner-up No Nay Never.

Normally a speed-centric dam sire would be a red flag in the pedigree of a potential Kentucky Derby contender. But in the case of Essential Quality, Elusive Quality’s speed might be exactly what’s needed to balance the stamina of Tapit and create a perfect classic pedigree.

**PRO** Unbeaten champion should benefit from stiff test in fast final prep; horse to beat.

**CON** Prohibitive favorite didn’t appear invincible narrowly winning BC Juv and Blue Grass.
Second in the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile (G1)... third in the Robert B. Lewis (G3) and, finally, first in the Louisiana Derby (G2). Hot Rod Charlie has repeatedly held his own against tough competition on the Road to the Kentucky Derby, but will his strong form in the qualifiers translate to success on the first Saturday in May?

That’s a tough question. When it comes to stamina, Hot Rod Charlie’s pedigree is a mixed bag of good news and bad news, leaving the 1 1/4-mile distance of the Kentucky Derby as something of a question mark.

The good news is, Hot Rod Charlie seems to be taking after his sire, the stoutly bred Oxbow. A son of Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) winner and stamina influence Awesome Again, Oxbow is a full brother to 1 1/8-mile Alydar S. winner Awesome Patriot. In addition, their dam, the Cee’s Tizzy mare Tizamazing, is a full sister to two-time Breeders’ Cup Classic winner Tiznow plus five-time graded stakes winner (and Breeders’ Cup Classic runner-up) Budroyale.

Much like Hot Rod Charlie, Oxbow flashed early promise against tough competition on the 2012-13 Road to the Kentucky Derby, foreshadowing an impressive run in the spring classics. A sixth-place effort over a sloppy track in the Kentucky Derby preceded a gate-to-wire Preakness (G1) victory and a gutsy runner-up effort in the Belmont (G1), performances that showcased Oxbow’s effective blend of speed and stamina.

Although Oxbow hasn’t set the world on fire at stud, he has sired a handful of stakes winners, the majority at their best running one mile or farther. In addition to Hot Rod Charlie, Oxbow is responsible for Gulfstream Park Oaks (G2) winner Coach Rocks, Tempted (G3) heroine Oxy Lady, and Sapling S. winner Waist Deep.

But if Oxbow can be considered a source of stamina, then the bottom half of Hot Rod Charlie’s pedigree must be viewed as strictly speed-oriented. His dam, Indian Miss, was unremarkable as a racehorse, finishing third and fifth in her only starts. But she’s been a rousing success as a broodmare, most notably foaling the blazingly fast four-time Grade 1 winner and champion sprinter Mitole.

Mitole’s brilliance as a sprinter is easy to understand when you examine Indian Miss’ pedigree. Her sire, Indian Charlie, was sufficiently long-winded to win the Santa Anita Derby (G1) and place third in the Kentucky Derby, but at stud he’s been largely responsible for sprinters and milers, including juvenile champions Indian Blessing and Uncle Mo. Furthermore, Indian Miss was produced by the 5 1/2-furlong Astoria S. winner Glacken’s Gal, a daughter of champion sprinter Smoke Glacken.

Hot Rod Charlie’s speedy female family is certainly cause for pause when analyzing his chances of handling the Kentucky Derby distance. But on the other hand, mixing all this speed with Oxbow’s stout bloodlines might actually be a recipe for success.

Hot Rod Charlie has already proven his mettle over 1 3/16 miles, winning the Louisiana Derby in the track-record time of 1:55.06. Perhaps Hot Rod Charlie has come to possess the same blend of speed and stamina that made his sire so effective in the 2013 classics, in which case running another sixteen of a mile farther on Derby Day should be right in his wheelhouse.

**PRO** Showed improved speed capturing final prep; O’Neill a two-time Derby winner.

**CON** Must replace jockey, won’t receive same cushy trip as Louisiana Derby.
Perseverance has paid off for Super Stock. After picking up checks without winning in a trio of Road to the Kentucky Derby prep races, the bay colt chose an opportune time to secure a signature victory, rallying boldly to win the $1 million Arkansas Derby (G1) and earn a place in the Kentucky Derby starting gate.

Qualifying for the Kentucky Derby runs in Super Stock’s immediate family. Although he can’t boast the most commercially elite pedigree, Super Stock hails from a lineage of capable racehorses—indeed, both his sire and damsire are alumni from the “Run for the Roses.”

To expound, Super Stock is a son of the stretch-running Dialed In, winner of the 2011 Florida Derby (G1) and eighth as the favorite in the Kentucky Derby. A troubled start and a slow pace made it impossible for Dialed In to challenge at Churchill Downs, but on his best day, his class was undeniable. In the Florida Derby, Dialed In rallied furiously to defeat future Grade 1 winners Shackleford, To Honor and Serve and Stay Thirsty.

At stud, Dialed In has compiled a respectable resume. While his progeny win at an average distance of just 6.5 furlongs, several have displayed the stamina to succeed running long against top company. In addition to Super Stock, Dialed In is the sire of 1 1/16-mile American Pharoah (G1) winner Get Her Number (who ran fourth behind Super Stock in the Arkansas Derby) and 1 1/4-mile Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) runner-up Gunnevera.

The bottom half of Super Stock’s pedigree is similar. He’s the fifth named foal produced by Super Girlie, a Closing Argument mare who won seven races over distances ranging from six furlongs to one mile. Her other foals have generally followed her example as sprinter/milers, with Del Mar Debutante (G1) third-place finisher Boujie Girl the best of the lot.

But Closing Argument introduces at least a little stamina into the equation. Stout enough to win the 1 1/8-mile Holy Bull (G3) and place second in the Kentucky Derby at odds of 71-1, Closing Argument hasn’t set the world on fire as a stallion, though he’s sired a large handful of capable runners through the years. Two longer-winded examples include 1 1/8-mile Prairie Meadows Cornhusker Handicap (G3) winner Smack Smack and 1 1/8-mile PTHA President’s Cup S. hero Cage Fighter.

However, Closing Argument’s progeny have generally performed best over shorter trips, with horses like Pat O’Brien (G2) winner Capital Account and Centaur (G2) winner Little Gerda contributing to an average winning distance of just 6.3 furlongs. This trend is also evident in Closing Argument’s record as a broodmare sire; prior to the emergence of Super Stock, Closing Argument’s best representative through his daughters was Inthemidstofbiz, winner of the Thoroughbred Club of America (G2) sprinting six furlongs.

Taking all of these factors together, Super Stock’s pedigree is arguably geared toward success over distances from one mile to 1 1/8 miles more so than the 1 1/4-mile distance of the Kentucky Derby. But considering he sold for just $70,000 as a yearling, Super Stock has already exceeded expectations to become a Grade 1 winner, and perhaps he can follow in the footsteps of Closing Argument with a surprisingly strong showing on the first Saturday in May.

**PRO** Enters on upswing for Asmussen after convincing win in Arkansas Derby.

**CON** Regression a concern after receiving perfect set up in short field.
At first glance, it might seem as though Like the King is cut out for success racing on dirt. He qualified for the Kentucky Derby (G1) with a victory in the Jeff Ruby Steaks (G3) over the synthetic Tapeta track at Turfway Park, but as a son of Belmont (G1) winner Palace Malice, out of a mare by Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile victor Corinthian, isn’t Like the King destined to thrive over the Churchill Downs main track?

It might seem that way, but dig deeper into the nuances of Like the King’s pedigree, and he seems just as likely to thrive over turf and synthetic as dirt, which stamps him a tough horse to analyze for the Kentucky Derby.

At the heart of the debate is Like the King’s sire, Palace Malice. A son of Preakness (G1) winner and two-time Horse of the Year Curlin, Palace Malice campaigned exclusively on dirt and showcased a combination of speed and stamina with wins in the the 1 1/2-mile Belmont and the one-mile Metropolitan H. (G1).

Like the King may have received a dose of turf breeding from his female family, as well. His dam, Like a Queen, scored her two victories over the lawn and also placed second in the Our Dear Peggy S. on turf.

This isn’t surprising, since Corinthian — while not a resounding success at stud — has been known to pass grass proficiency to his descendants. Daughter Mariel N Kathy won the Chelsea Flower S. on turf, while grandson Fenwick Station (produced by Corinthian’s three-time turf-winning daughter Wickapecko) handled the European-style grass course at Kentucky Downs well enough to finish second in the Juvenile S.

This isn’t to say Like the King is unquestionably destined to go through his career as a turf or synthetic specialist. He placed in a couple maiden special weights races on dirt last year, and there are other ways to interpret the stud records of his sire and dam sire.

Palace Malice is responsible for Risen Star (G2) victor Mr. Monomoy and Charles Town Oaks (G3) winner Fly On Angel, two accomplished dirt horses. And Corinthian’s most successful runner, Prince Lucky, won five stakes on dirt.

But, given the obvious affinity Like the King has shown for the Turfway Park Tapeta, we must also consider the possibility dirt racing isn’t his strong suit, so the Kentucky Derby could be a very stiff test of his talents.

**PRO** Jeff Ruby Steaks winner came on for Ward over the winter.

**CON** Worst races came on dirt last year; facing serious class test in Derby.
It’s safe to say Known Agenda loves running long. The improving Todd Pletcher trainee will enter the Kentucky Derby (G1) with three victories at 1 1/8 miles, including a decisive score in the Florida Derby (G1).

From a breeding perspective, there is no doubt where Known Agenda’s stamina comes from.

Some pedigrees require horseplayers to analyze multiple generations of bloodlines to understand all the nuance in play. But this isn’t necessary with Known Agenda. He takes after his sire and dam. Nothing more, nothing less.

Known Agenda’s sire is the two-time Horse of the Year and Hall of Fame inductee Curlin, whose prowess over classic distances on dirt carried him to $10.5 million in earnings. A winner of the Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1), Dubai World Cup (G1), and two editions of the Jockey Club Gold Cup (G1), all at 1 1/4 miles, Curlin wasn’t fully developed during the spring of his sophomore season. Nevertheless, raw talent allowed the stoutly bred son of Smart Strike to win the Preakness (G1), place second in the Belmont (G1), and finish third in the Kentucky Derby (G1).

As a stallion, Curlin has proven to be a clear source of classic stamina, as the vast majority of his progeny has excelled at 1 1/8 miles and farther on dirt. Exaggerator won the 2016 Preakness and placed second in the Kentucky Derby, Palace Malice won the 2013 Belmont, Good Magic finished second in the 2018 Kentucky Derby, Ride On Curlin grabbed the runner-up spot in the 2014 Preakness, Irish War Cry came in second in the 2017 Belmont, Keen Ice came home third in the 2015 Belmont, and Tenfold was beaten less than one length when he finished third in the 2018 Preakness.

For those keeping count, Curlin has sired seven horses who have finished third or better in a spring classic, which is a remarkable string of success. And this impressive résumé doesn’t highlight Curlin’s many other long-winded dirt stars, such as Breeders’ Cup Classic winner Vino Rosso, champion three-year-old filly Stellar Wind, multiple Grade 1 winner Curalina, and recent 1 1/4-mile Santa Anita H. (G1) victor Idol.

Now, let’s check out the résumé of Known Agenda’s dam, Byrama. One wouldn’t necessarily have expected Byrama to thrive running long. She is a daughter of the multiple Group 2-winning turf sprinter Byron, whose best runner — the extraordinarily durable, three-time Group 1 winner Gordon Lord Byron — was likewise best as a turf sprinter.

But although Byrama paid respects to her heritage, with multiple stakes wins sprinting on grass, her signature victory came under very different circumstances. In the Vanity H. (G1), at 1 1/8 miles over the synthetic main track at Hollywood Park (a surface known for its resemblance to dirt), Byrama cruised to victory by 3 1/2 lengths against a quality field.

Known Agenda has already replicated his sire and dam by winning a Grade 1 race over 1 1/8 miles. And, considering both Curlin and Byrama peaked at the age of four, there is still plenty of room for improvement from Known Agenda, who should only grow stronger and faster with maturity.

**PRO** Florida Derby hero has thrived since adding blinkers two back; leads Pletcher quartet.

**CON** Raced closer in last two starts; must avoid falling too far behind in big Derby field.
Turf or dirt, it doesn’t seem to matter to Rock Your World. The undefeated colt won his first two starts on grass before emerging as a Kentucky Derby (G1) contender with a resounding victory in the Santa Anita Derby (G1) on dirt.

Rock Your World’s multi-surface versatility isn’t surprising when you analyze his pedigree. Certainly there are many turf influences in the mix, but they are balanced by an equal number of dirt influences, and it’s not a stretch to believe Rock Your World might eventually wind up a Grade 1 winner on both surfaces.

The most obvious source of Rock Your World’s versatility is his sire, Candy Ride—himself a Grade 1 winner on both dirt and turf. Undefeated in six starts, Candy Ride was a sensation in his native Argentina, most notably dominating the Gran Premio Joaquin S. de Anchorena (G1) in the stunning time of 1:31.01 for the metric mile on turf. But against all odds, Candy Ride was equally spectacular on dirt in the U.S., winning Del Mar’s 1 1/4-mile Pacific Classic (G1) in the track-record time of 1:59.11. At stud, Candy Ride has sired a bevy of major winners across all surfaces. Horse of the Year 2020

Rock Your World's pedigree is the combination of speed and stamina laced within. Candy Ride is the definition of a brilliant miler who could carry his speed 1 1/4 miles, and his progeny have demonstrated similar abilities, with Gun Runner, Shared Belief, Misremembered, Ascend, and Desert Ride all winning major races over the Kentucky Derby distance.

Meanwhile, Empire Maker and Giant’s Causeway are strong stamina influences. Empire Maker in particular warrants attention as the sire of his speed and stamina laced within. Candy Ride is the definition of a brilliant miler who could carry his speed 1 1/4 miles, and his progeny have demonstrated similar abilities, with Gun Runner, Shared Belief, Misremembered, Ascend, and Desert Ride all winning major races over the Kentucky Derby distance.

With all of these pedigree factors in play, it’s really not a stretch to conclude Rock Your World has the pedigree to thrive over almost any surface and two-turn distance. Racing 1 1/4 miles on the first Saturday in May might be made to order for the exciting dark bay colt.

**PRO** Unbeaten colt has done everything right so far; Santa Anita Derby win came back fast.

**CON** Had everything his own way on lead last time; probably employs different tactics at CD.
When Bourbonic produced a rally from out of the clouds to upset Aqueduct’s Wood Memorial (G2) and qualify for the Kentucky Derby (G1), racing fans were shocked. The unheralded Calumet Farm homebred was the longest shot on the board at 72-1, and few expected him to steal the show.

But perhaps Bourbonic’s last-to-first surge shouldn’t have been so surprising. After all, Bourbonic’s pedigree has always indicated he would improve with maturity and thrive running 1 1/8 miles or farther. Perhaps the slow, tiring track at Aqueduct played to Bourbonic’s strengths, allowing his stamina-infused bloodlines and improving profile to win the day.

Bourbonic’s sire, Bernardini, needs no introduction. The stoutly bred son of Belmont (G1) winner A.P. Indy was voted champion three-year-old male of 2006 after rattling off victories in the Preakness (G1), Travers (G1), and Jockey Club Gold Cup (G1), plus a runner-up effort in the Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1).

Bernardini was a late-maturing colt who relished classic distances, and while his foals have proven more versatile—with many excelling as juveniles and sprinters—the best have achieved their signature victories running 1 1/8 miles or farther. Travers winners Stay Thirsty and Alpha are two prime examples, along with Woodward (G1) winner To Honor and Serve.

The bottom half of Bourbonic’s pedigree is similarly stout. His dam, Dancing Afleet, won the 1 1/16-mile Delaware Oaks (G3) and previously foaled the multiple graded stakes-placed miler Avant Garde, who recently placed third in the Godolphin Mile (G2).

Dancing Afleet, in turn, is a daughter of 2005 champion three-year-old male Afleet Alex, best known for his heroic victory in the Preakness. Despite clipping heels badly at the top of the stretch, Afleet Alex re-rallied to dominate by 4 3/4 lengths, after which he crushed the Belmont in a seven-length romp.

Afleet Alex could run all day, and so can his foals. Five of Afleet Alex’s six Grade 1 winners have achieved their signature victories racing 1 1/16 miles or farther, led by Breeders’ Cup Juvenile (G1) winner Texas Red and Travers hero Afleet Express. Another runner of note, Afleet Again, reiterated the long-winded nature of Afleet Alex’s bloodlines when prevailing in the 1 3/4-mile Breeders’ Cup Marathon (G2).

While Afleet Alex hasn’t set the world on fire as a broodmare sire, there can be no denying he’s passing on stamina through his daughters. Indeed, Afleet Alex is the damsire of Belmont winner Sir Winston and Starlet (G1) winner Dream Tree, plus Arkansas Derby (G1) runner-up and Kentucky Derby fifth-place finisher Suddenbreakingnews.

Returning to Bourbonic, the only knock on his pedigree is the possibility it contains too much stamina. A dose of miler speed is usually advantageous for colts with Kentucky Derby aspirations, so Bourbonic—a pure late runner without any tactical speed—might find it difficult to excel on the first Saturday in May, even if the 1 1/4-mile distance itself isn’t an obstacle.

But if Bourbonic’s triumph in the Wood Memorial is any indication, he’s progressing in the right direction and knows how to pick up the pieces when his rivals are struggling. If a pace meltdown unfolds at Churchill Downs, we know Bourbonic has the stamina to take advantage in a big way.

**PRO** Brings late kick to Derby after closing from clouds to win Wood Memorial.

**CON** Former claimer may leave himself too much to do from tail of large field.
**MEET THE KENTUCKY DERBY CONTENDERS**

Medina Spirit doesn’t have the most commercially popular pedigree, which may explain why he sold for just $1,000 as a yearling and for $35,000 as a two-year-old.

But commercial viability isn’t everything. Medina Spirit might not be a blueblood, but he’s certainly bred to be an honest, durable, and long-winded racehorse. He’s already displayed these traits on the Road to the Kentucky Derby, announcing his arrival as a serious Kentucky Derby (G1) contender with a gritty front-running victory in the Robert B. Lewis (G3) at Santa Anita.

Medina Spirit’s sire, Protonico, exemplifies the notion of an admirable (but not quite elite) racehorse. Over the course of four seasons he earned nearly $1 million without ever winning a Grade 1 race. A stoutly bred son of three-time leading sire Giant’s Causeway, Protonico was produced by Alpha Spirit, a daughter of 1 1/2-mile Belmont (G1) winner and renowned stamina influence A.P. Indy.

Protonico has the breeding to run all day and delivered as expected on track. All four of his graded stakes wins came running one mile or farther on dirt, including a gutsy victory over Grade 1 winner Noble Bird in the 2011 Blue Grass (G1) racing 1 1/8 miles over the old Keeneland Polytrack course. But Brilliant Speed also proved sufficiently talented to place third in both the Belmont on dirt and the 1 1/2-mile Breeders’ Cup Turf (G1) on grass, accounting for two of his five placings at the Grade 1 level.

Brilliant Speed’s long-winded and versatile nature is easy to understand when you review his pedigree. His sire, Dynaformer, was a stamina influence responsible for major winners on both dirt and turf, including Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro. Meanwhile, Brilliant Speed’s dam—the unraced Gone West mare Speed Succeeds—counts 1 1/8-mile Remsen (G2) runner-up Souper Speedy among her other foals.

Sadly, Brilliant Speed was killed by a lightning strike after siring just four crops of foals. The best of them unsurprisingly emulated Brilliant Speed with fine form racing one mile or farther on turf, including multiple stakes winner Americium and the Grade 3-placed Adonis Creed.

It remains to be seen how Brilliant Speed will fare from limited opportunities as a broodmare sire, though he’s off to a promising start. Medina Spirit is the first runner to represent Brilliant Speed as a broodmare sire, and you can’t ask for greater success than kicking off with a graded stakes-winning Kentucky Derby contender.

Digging into the specifics, Medina Spirit was produced by Brilliant Speed’s daughter Mongolian Changa, who broke her maiden racing one mile on Tapeta at Presque Isle Downs. She, in turn, is a daughter of the productive broodmare Bridled, whose three previous foals all won a minimum of five races.

Bridled’s pedigree is dotted with classic influences. Her sire, Unbridled, won the Kentucky Derby, while her dam sire—the brilliant Horse of the Year Holy Bull—counted Kentucky Derby winner Giacomo among his best foals.

Only time will tell if Medina Spirit can exceed the accomplishments of Protonico and Brilliant Speed, but at least we don’t have to worry about his breeding. Whether commercially viable or not, Medina Spirit’s pedigree is unquestionably geared toward success running 1 1/4 miles.

**PRO** Santa Anita Derby runner-up possesses good tactical speed; Baffert adds to appeal.

**CON** Lost ground in stretch of Santa Anita Derby; 1 1/4-mile distance may not be optimal.

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**SIRE** PROTONICO (GIANT’S CAUSEWAY) $5,000
**DAM** MONGOLIAN CHANGA (BRILLIANT SPEED)
**BREEDER** GAIL RICE (FL)
**TRAINER** BAFFERT BOB

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**MEDINA SPIRIT**

Dark Bay or Brown Colt
Foaled April 5, 2018

**BRIDLED**

Holy Niner

**PROTONICO**

Stoutly bred son of three-time leading sire Giant’s Causeway

**ALPHA SPIRIT**

Daughter of 1 1/2-mile Belmont (G1) winner and renowned stamina influence A.P. Indy

**MONGOLIAN CHANGA**

Daughter of Brilliant Speed, whose three previous foals all won a minimum of five races.
As the only horse to win the Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) twice, Tiznow was a pretty special racehorse. He was also a pretty special stallion, siring a bevy of Grade 1 winners prior to being pensioned from stud duty in 2020.

Tiznow’s first crop of foals was arguably his best, producing champion 2-year-old filly Folklore and Dubai World Cup (G1) winner Armed. But subsequent crops produced a steady stream of top-class runners on dirt, turf, and synthetic, including the long-winded Belmont Stakes (G1) winner Da’ Tara, the early-maturing Hopeful (G1) winners Strong Mandate and Sporting Chance, and the slow-developing Breeders’ Cup Mile (G1) winner Tourist.

About the only thing missing from Tiznow’s record is a Kentucky Derby (G1) winner, but perhaps Midnight Bourbon can remedy this situation. Already the bay colt has made his sire proud with admirable heroics on the Road to the 2021 Kentucky Derby, including a victory in the Lecomte (G3) at Fair Grounds. Maybe, just maybe, Midnight Bourbon can succeed where seven previous Tiznows faltered and prevail at Churchill Downs on the first Saturday in May.

Certainly Midnight Bourbon has the pedigree to handle the task. Historically, the one knock on Tiznow’s progeny—at least as far as the spring classics are concerned—is their tendency to reach peak form after the Kentucky Derby has been run. A perfect example is Tiznow’s son Mr. Hot Stuff, who won a Grade 1 steeplechase at the age of 11… eight years after finishing 15th in the Kentucky Derby.

This tendency isn’t surprising since Tiznow himself didn’t find his best stride until the second half of his 3-year-old season. In fact, he didn’t even debut until two weeks before the Derby. With a few exceptions, Tiznow’s best runners have followed suit.

But this is where the bottom half of Midnight Bourbon’s pedigree can come to the rescue. His dam, the unraced Malibu Moon mare Catch the Moon, has been nothing less than a 100% success as a broodmare. Her first four foals to race have all won graded stakes, including the early-maturing Iroquois (G3) winner Cocked and Loaded and Haskell (G1) winner Girvin. The latter came to hand early enough to win the Louisiana Derby (G2) and compete in the Kentucky Derby.

As a result, Midnight Bourbon is Catch the Moon’s third foal to achieve graded stakes success prior to the spring of his 3-year-old season, and these early-maturing bloodlines have the potential to balance the long-term durability offered by Tiznow. It’s also worth noting Malibu Moon is the sire of 2013 Kentucky Derby winner Orb, adding another dose of ideal classic genetics to Midnight Bourbon’s pedigree.

Only time will tell if Midnight Bourbon’s pedigrees have mixed and matched in the precise combination necessary for success under the Twin Spires. But the potential definitely exists, and it would be fitting to see Midnight Bourbon win the roses during Tiznow’s first year living the life of a pensioner at WinStar Farm.
Winning the Kentucky Derby (G1) requires a combination of speed and stamina; if you lack one or the other, you’re unlikely to reach the winner’s circle.

Fortunately for the connections of Mandaloun, their talented colt appears to have inherited a perfect blend of both traits. The Juddmonte Farms homebred emerged as a major Road to the Kentucky Derby player with a victory in the 1 1/8-mile Risen Star (G2) at Fair Grounds, where he demonstrated enough speed to track the pace and enough stamina to outlast his rivals down the homestretch.

The source of Mandaloun’s speed is obvious. He’s a son of two-time leading sire Into Mischief, a talented sprinter/miler who tends to pass brilliance on to his progeny. Champion female sprinters Gamine and Covfefe are obvious examples, along with two-time Breeders’ Cup Dirt Mile (G1) winner Goldencents.

But Into Mischief is also a half-brother to four-time Eclipse Award-winning mare Beholder and Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Turf (G1) winner Mendelssohn, so there’s a bit more stamina in Into Mischief’s genetic makeup than first meets the eye. This became evident last year when Into Mischief’s son Authentic nabbed the Kentucky Derby, Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1), and Haskell (G1) during a Horse of the Year campaign.

Even if you view Authentic as an exception and generally consider Into Mischief to be a source of speed, there’s still no reason to worry about Mandaloun’s distance capabilities. After all, the bottom half of his pedigree is stacked with classic stamina.

For starters, Mandaloun was produced by Brooch, a two-time group winner in Ireland over distances ranging from one mile to 1 3/16 miles. Brooch, in turn, is a daughter of Belmont (G1) winner Empire Maker, a source of stamina best known as the sire of two-time Breeders’ Cup Ladies Classic (G1) winner Royal Delta plus Kentucky Derby runners-up Pioneerof the Nile and Bodemeister. The latter two have further enhanced Empire Maker’s legacy through their own stud records; Pioneerof the Nile is the sire of Triple Crown winner American Pharoah, while Bodemeister is responsible for Kentucky Derby winner Always Dreaming.

But Empire Maker isn’t the only source of stamina in Brooch’s breeding. She was produced by the Dansil mare Daring Diva, whose previous foals include Caponata, winner of the 1 3/16-mile Victor McCalmont Memorial S. and runner-up in the 1 1/4-mile Blandford (G2).

With the speed of Into Mischief and the stamina of Brooch coursing through his veins, there’s no reason to think Mandaloun can’t handle racing 1 1/4 miles on the first Saturday in May.

PRO Louisiana Derby flop too bad to be true; impressive Risen Star winners seeks rebound.

CON Derby winners seldom bounce back from poor showing; not sure he’ll relish distance.
We know Caddo River has an abundance of speed—he first emerged as a serious Kentucky Derby (G1) contender when posting a powerful gate-to-wire romp in the Smarty Jones Stakes at Oaklawn Park. But does Caddo River have the stamina to negotiate 1 1/4 miles on the first Saturday in May? That’s a tougher question.

Caddo River is a son of Hard Spun, a fast front-runner who used his speed to win the King’s Bishop (G1) sprinting 7 furlongs. Hard Spun was probably a miler at heart, but raw talent allowed him to place second in the Kentucky Derby, third in the Preakness (G1), and second in the Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) over classic distances.

Surprisingly, there haven’t been many pure sprinters among Hard Spun’s best foals. In defiance of his own speedy nature, Hard Spun has generally passed on stamina to his progeny. Alabama (G1) winner Questing, Gold Cup at Santa Anita (G1) winner Hard Aces, and Arlington Million (G1) winner Hardest Core all achieved their signature victories over 1 1/4 miles, while Wood Memorial (G1) winner Wicked Strong was narrowly beaten in the 1 1/4-mile Travers (G1).

All told, Hard Spun’s foals win at a solid average distance of 7.4 furlongs, suggesting he’s capable of siring classic types. But whether Caddo River specifically will thrive over 1 1/4 miles is unclear. Hard Spun is only half of the equation, and the dam side of Caddo River’s pedigree gives off mixed signals.

It all begins with Caddo River’s dam, Pangburn. Winner of the Maryland Racing Media S. racing 1 1/16 miles, Pangburn was a capable two-turn router, placing in a trio of graded stakes during her productive career. But 1 1/16 miles seemed to mark the upper limits of Pangburn’s stamina, and the same can be said of her first foal, Babybel. A low-level claimer, Babybel has done her best running over a flat mile on turf.

This tendency toward middle-distance success is stacked all throughout Pangburn’s pedigree. Her sire, Congrats, secured his signature victory in the 1 1/16-mile San Pasqual H. (G2). Her dam, It’s True Love, won the Winter Melody S. racing 1 1/16 miles. Her half-sister, Eres Tu, won the mile and 70-yard Carl Hanford Memorial S. Her half-brother, Ain’t Got Time, won the 1 1/8-mile Carl Hanford Memorial S. He half-sister, Eres Tu, won the 1 1/8-mile Allaire DuPont (G3).

Getting back to Congrats, he was sufficiently long-winded to place second in the 1 1/4-mile Santa Anita H. (G1), but his progeny have definitely favored speed over stamina. All four of Congrats’ Grade 1 winners (through 2020) have achieved their defining victories over 1 1/16 miles or less, including three top-level sprint winners. The average winning distance of Congrats’ foals (6.8 furlongs) is also a little light as far as classic pedigrees go.

Congrats has yet to make a significant name for himself as a broodmare sire, though his daughter Starship Warpspeed (a low-level sprinter) did foal 1 1/8-mile Kentucky Oaks (G1) winner Shedaresthedevil, introducing the possibility that Congrats might pass on slightly stouter genetics through his daughters. Remember, Congrats is a son of Belmont Stakes (G1) winner and renowned stamina influence A.P. Indy, so anything’s possible.

So where does this leave Caddo River? With an abundance of miler speed, that much is certain. But the question of stamina is decidedly less clear, so handicappers planning to bet Caddo River on Derby Day will have to gamble that he’s inherited enough stamina—from Hard Spun, from A.P. Indy, or from elsewhere in his pedigree—to see out the testing 1 1/4-mile distance.

**PRO** Appears to be the speed of the speed; will look to steal it on front end.

**CON** Has weakened in last two starts past a mile; will be 1 1/4 miles be to his liking?
One year ago, many handicappers would have examined the pedigree of Highly Motivated and concluded he had little chance of carrying his speed-oriented bloodlines over the 1 1/4-mile distance of the Kentucky Derby (G1). But times change, opinions shift, and we can no longer be so quick to dismiss a horse of Highly Motivated’s lineage.

Highly Motivated is certainly worthy of respect from a performance standpoint. He arrives at Churchill Downs off a runner-up effort in the Blue Grass (G2) at Keeneland, where he was beaten just a neck by the undefeated Kentucky Derby favorite Essential Quality. And while his basic pedigree (by Into Mischief out of Strong Incentive, by Warrior’s Reward) initially screams SPEED!, there might be more stamina in the mix than first impressions suggest.

True, Into Mischief was primarily a sprinter/miler, with a victory in the 1 1/16-mile CashCall Futurity (G1) ranking as his greatest triumph. And granted, he’s sired an abundance of sprinters and milers during his phenomenally successful stud career, with two-time Breeders’ Cup Dirt Mile (G1) winner Goldencents and champion female sprinters Covfefe and Gamine among his best.

But in 2020, Into Mischief’s reputation as a pure speed influence was turned upside down by the emergence of his most accomplished son, Authentic. From top to bottom, Authentic was bred for speed; his dam secured her lone victory dashing seven furlongs, and dam sire Mr. Greeley was likewise a sprinter.

Yet Authentic could unequivocally carry his front-running speed 1 1/4 miles, as he demonstrated during the late summer and fall of 2020. Benefitting from the postponement of the Kentucky Derby due to COVID-19, Authentic posted a gate-to-wire upset under the Twin Spires, then proved it was no fluke by adding the 1 1/4-mile Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) to his resume.

So what does this mean for Highly Motivated? Well, it means we can’t count out Into Mischief as a sire of serious Kentucky Derby contenders—not even when he’s matched with mares who bring more speed than stamina to the table, as is the case with first impressions suggest.

That’s a lot of speed, but why worry? It’s essentially just Authentic’s pedigree all over again. And on the bright side, Warrior’s Reward is a stoutly bred son of Medaglia d’Oro out of a Seeking the Gold mare, so it’s not unrealistic to think Warrior’s Reward can pass stamina on to his descendants. He’s already proven capable of siring classy two-turn dirt runners, including Indiana Derby (G3) winner Axelrod and Prairie Meadows Cornhusker H. (G3) hero Night Ops.

Returning for a moment to Into Mischief, it’s worth remembering he’s a half-brother to four-time champion mare Beholder, a dominant winner of the 1 1/4-mile Pacific Classic (G1) against males. Another half-sibling, Mendelssohn, set a track record when dominating the 1 3/16-mile UAE Derby (G2) by 18 1/2 lengths.

We won’t try to claim Highly Motivated has a perfect pedigree for the Kentucky Derby. But speed is increasingly becoming the secret to success in the Run for the Roses, and following the success of Authentic, we can’t be quick in dismissing Highly Motivated’s chances. He might not win the Derby, but a top-five finish would come as no surprise.
MEET THE KENTUCKY DERBY CONTENDERS

**Helium**

**SIRE**
IRONICUS (DISTORTED HUMOR) $5,000

**DAM**
THUNDERING EMILIA (THUNDER GULCH)

**BREEDER**
TENERI FARM INC & BERNARDO ALVAREZ CALDERON (KY)

**TRAINER**
CASSE MARK E

| LIFE | 3 3 - 0 - 0 | $287,763 | 93 |
| 2021 | 1 1 - 0 - 0 | $210,000 | 93 |
| 2020 | 2 2 - 0 - 0 | $77,763 | 86 |
| CD | 0 0 - 0 - 0 | $0 | 0 |

Dirt or synthetic, it doesn’t matter to the lightly raced Helium, who handles both surfaces just fine. A romping winner of the Display S. on Tapeta last fall, Helium joined the Road to the Kentucky Derby with a gutsy victory in the Tampa Bay Derby (G2) on dirt. Helium’s affinity for synthetic and dirt is surprising when you consider how his immediate pedigree is slanted toward success on turf. Sire Ironicus, for example, was a tried-and-true turf miler who scored three graded wins on the lawn, in addition to multiple runner-up efforts against Grade 1 company.

Dam Thundering Emilia was likewise a stakes-winning turf router whose previous foals include the Grade 3-placed grass filly Mighty Scarlett.

But dig a little deeper, and the nuances of Helium’s breeding become more apparent. Ironicus is a son of leading sire Distorted Humor, whose most notable runners include 2003 Kentucky Derby (G1) winner Funny Cide and 2010 Belmont (G1) winner Drosselmeyer. Furthermore, Ironicus’ dam—Meghan’s Joy—is a daughter of A.P. Indy, the long-winded Belmont winner known as a strong influence for stamina on dirt.

Meghan’s Joy has been a sensation as a broodmare, producing half a dozen stakes winners. Four of them did their best work on turf, but the remaining two—Brooklyn (G2) winner Norumbega and Stuyvesant H. (G3) winner Hunting—were accomplished two-turn dirt stars.

There’s also more to Thundering Emilia than first meets the eye. Her sire, Thunder Gulch, was voted champion three-year-old male of 1995 after rattling off victories in the Kentucky Derby, Belmont, Travers (G1), and Florida Derby (G1). As a broodmare sire, his descendants have enjoyed plenty of success on dirt, with his daughters foaling Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) winner Bayern and Kentucky Oaks (G1) heroine Lovely Maria.

Thundering Emilia has already contributed two graded stakes winners to Thunder Gulch’s tally as a broodmare sire. In addition to Helium, Thundering Emilia is the dam of Emilia’s Moon, who won the Clasico Polla de Potrancas (G1) racing one mile on dirt.

Taking all of these factors together, it’s easy to understand why Helium has developed into a multi-surface threat. And while Ironicus was a miler, the remainder of Helium’s pedigree is packed with two-turn stamina, suggesting classic distances will be well within reach. Don’t let first glances fool you—from a pedigree perspective, racing 1 1/4 miles on the first Saturday in May shouldn’t be any issue for Helium.

**PRO** Overcame extremely wide trip to win Tampa Bay Derby; unbeaten from three starts.

**CON** Tampa race came back slow; tough to envision him challenging in second start of year.
What do you get when you cross the bloodlines of the two most successful U.S. stallions of the last decade? You get Soup and Sandwich, runner-up in the Florida Derby (G1) and an up-and-coming contender for the Kentucky Derby (G1).

Speed and stamina combine in the pedigree of Soup and Sandwich, which is typically a recipe for success on the first Saturday in May. The speed comes courtesy of Soup and Sandwich’s sire, Into Mischief, a Grade 1-winning sprinter/miler who counts Breeders’ Cup winners Beholder and Mendelssohn among his half-siblings.

Into Mischief has been a sensation at stud, siring a seemingly endless number of elite sprinters and milers. But that’s not to say the son of Harlan’s Holiday is incapable of siring long-winded types; his son Authentic won the 2020 Kentucky Derby and Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) racing 1 1/4 miles, earning Horse of the Year honors in the process.

Suffice to say, 2020 was a banner season for Into Mischief. For the second consecutive year, he ranked as North America’s leading sire by progeny earnings, with his foals combining to earn a record $22.5 million. Can you guess who held the previous record of $19.9 million? That would be none other than Tapit, the damsire of Soup and Sandwich.

Whereas Into Mischief is generally regarded as a source of speed, Tapit is all about stamina. His daughter Souper Scoop, the dam of Soup and Sandwich, is one such example. Her two career victories came running one mile or farther against maiden special weight and allowance company at Monmouth Park.

 Ranked as North America’s leading sire three times from 2014-2016, Tapit is best known for siring early-maturing juveniles and high-class three-year-olds, though it’s not uncommon to see Tapits excel as older runners as well. In any case, pure sprinters are rare among Tapit’s progeny; their average winning distance is a lofty 7.6 furlongs. Furthermore, 24 of Tapit’s 27 North American Grade 1 winners (through April 16) have secured their signature victories running one mile or farther, including 1 1/2-mile Belmont (G1) heroes Tonalist, Creator, and Tapwrit.

Tapit’s record as a damsire is also impressive, albeit still developing. Two-turn stamina is widely evident among the runners produced by Tapit’s daughters, including 2018 Preakness (G1) third-place finisher Tenfold and runaway Rebel (G2) winner Concert Tour. With just three starts under his belt, Soup and Sandwich heads to Churchill Downs as one of the most lightly-raced horses in the Kentucky Derby field. Can he join Big Brown (2008) and Justify (2018) as only the third horse in the last century to win the Derby off such a brief racing schedule? Only time will tell, but there’s no reason think Soup and Sandwich’s pedigree will stand in the way.

PRO Florida Derby runner-up enters on upswing, eligible to receive good trip with his speed.

CON Didn’t change leads in Florida Derby; inexperience may be too much to overcome.
One of the most expensive horses in the 2021 Kentucky Derby field is Dynamic One, the narrowly-beaten Wood Memorial (G2) runner-up who sold for $725,000 as a yearling.

Shelling out a large sum for an unraced thoroughbred always comes with a degree of risk, but the risk can be offset to some extent by a classy pedigree. And in the case of Dynamic One, it’s hard to knock his breeding.

Dynamic One is a son of Union Rags, who has achieved high-level success as a racehorse and stallion, albeit without reaching the absolute pinnacle as either. A Grade 1 winner at ages two and three, Union Rags was never named a champion, but he did secure a classic victory when battling to a narrow triumph in the 1 1/2-mile Belmont (G1) in 2012.

Union Rags’ class arguably played a bigger role than stamina in reaching the Belmont winner’s circle. As a son of Haskell (G1) winner Dixie Union out of a mare by Gone West, Union Rags is bred more like a miler than a classic router, and his progeny have largely followed this example. Three-time Grade 1 winner Paradise Woods, Breeders’ Futurity (G1) winner Free Drop Billy, Del Mar Debutante (G1) heroine Union Strike, and Alcibiades (G1) winner Dancing Rags rank as Union Rags’ most accomplished runners to date, but all achieved their signature victories between seven furlongs and 1 1/16 miles.

Fortunately for Dynamic One, the bottom half of his pedigree brings a bit more stamina to the mix. His dam, Beat the Drums, was unremarkable as a racehorse, failing to finish better than seventh in two starts. But her pedigree is as classy as they come—she’s a daughter of leading sire Smart Strike out of the Storm Cat mare Storm Flag Flying, a champion filly who won four Grade 1 races up to 1 1/4 miles in distance. Her previous foals include Revved Up, a runner-up in the Arlington H. (G3) racing 1 3/16 miles on turf.

As for Smart Strike, he ranks among the most accomplished North American stallions of the last twenty years. Winner of the Philip H. Iselin H. (G1) racing 1 1/16 miles, Smart Strike has carved out a lasting legacy as a source of elite stamina. Two-time Horse of the Year Curlin, champion grass male English Channel, and two-time champion Lookin At Lucky represent just a handful of Smart Strike’s most accomplished runners. All three won Grade 1 races running 1 3/16 miles or farther—with Curlin and Lookin At Lucky nabbing the Preakness (G1)—and all three have followed Smart Strike’s example by passing on stamina at stud.

Smart Strike has also enjoyed strong success as a broodmare sire, with his daughters foaling Kentucky Derby (G1) winner Mine That Bird, Breeders’ Cup Filly & Mare Turf (G1) winner Shared Account, Pacific Classic (G1) hero Dullahan, and Hollywood Gold Cup (G1) winner First Dude, along with a handful of Canadian classic winners. The Union Rags/Smart Strike cross has proven particularly potent, with Los Alamitos Futurity (G2) winner Spielberg, and the above-mentioned Grade 1 winner Union Strike, among the standouts produced from this combination of bloodlines.

With a bit of miler speed from Union Rags coupled with some classic stamina courtesy of Smart Strike, it’s easy to see why this cross has been productive. It’s carried Dynamic One all the way to the Kentucky Derby, and perhaps the Derby winner’s circle is the next stop.

**PRO** Intriguing after just missing in Wood Memorial; improving colt relishes longer distances.

**CON** Last race came back slow; must improve Brisnet Speed ratings on class hike.
Looking for a horse who’s bred to handle the Kentucky Derby distance, even if his pedigree isn’t particularly flashy? Look no further than Sainthood. Sold for just $62,000 as a yearling, Sainthood has already shown versatility for two-time Kentucky Derby-winning trainer Todd Pletcher. He qualified for the Kentucky Derby with a runner-up performance in the Jeff Ruby Steaks (G3) over the synthetic track at Turfway Park. But Sainthood is far from a synthetic specialist—he previously broke his maiden on dirt at the Fair Grounds.

Sainthood has surely inherited this versatility at least in part from his sire, Mshawish. Over the course of five seasons, Mshawish toured the globe, racing in France, England, the U.S., Hong Kong, and Dubai. Much of his success came on turf, including a tenacious victory in the 1 1/8-mile Gulfstream Park Turf H. (G1). But Sainthood is far from a synthetic specialist—he previously broke his maiden on dirt at the Fair Grounds.

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Sainthood figures to receive another dose of stamina from the bottom half of his pedigree. While his dam, Lemon Hero, was strictly a sprinter (placing in the six-furlong Manhattan Beach S. behind future Grade 1 winner Byrama), she’s bred to pass on stamina. Her sire is Lemon Drop Kid, who matured early enough to win the Futurity (G1) as a juvenile before adding the Belmont, Travers (G1), Whitney H. (G1), and Woodward (G1) to his glowing resume of major victories between one mile and 1 1/2 miles.

As a stallion, one can usually count on Lemon Drop Kid to pass on stamina to his descendants. Sons Beach Patrol and Richard’s Kid both won multiple Grade 1 races running 1 1/4 miles or farther, while Cannock Chase took the 1 1/2-mile Canadian International (G1), and Lemons Forever claimed the 1 1/8-mile Kentucky Oaks (G1).

Lemons Forever, in turn, has contributed to Lemon Drop Kid’s solid record as a broodmare sire. She foaled 1 1/8-mile Breeders’ Cup Distaff (G1) winner Forever Unbridled, and seven-furlong Ballerina (G1) heroine Unbridled Forever, who carried her speed well enough to place in a trio of Grade 1 races between one mile and 1 1/8 miles.

Other notable runners produced by daughters of Lemon Drop Kid include Breeders’ Cup Dirt Mile (G1) winner Tamarkuz, Breeders’ Cup Filly & Mare Sprint (G1) winners Bar of Gold and Finest City, and 1 1/8-mile Turf Classic (G1) winners Divisidero and Digital Age.

The descendants of Lemon Drop Kid have enjoyed success across all surfaces; Beach Patrol, Cannock Chase, Divisidero, and Digital Age were turf stars, while Lemons Forever, Forever Unbridled, Unbridled Forever, Tamarkus, Bar of Gold, and Finest City did their best work on dirt. Richard’s Kid was a standout on synthetic.

In short, when you combine the genetics of Mshawish and Lemon Drop Kid, you’re apt to get a horse capable of running well on any surface. Certainly Sainthood is following this path, so there’s no reason to think he won’t handle dirt (and 1 1/4 miles) just fine in the Kentucky Derby.

**PRO** Jeff Ruby Steaks runner-up probably best after rough trip; promising colt for Pletcher.

**CON** Maiden winner may be too inexperienced to be competitive at this level.
Sometimes, we examine the breeding of a Kentucky Derby (G1) contender and think to ourselves, “No complaints about this pedigree.”

Such is the impression generated by the bloodlines of Hidden Stash, a $50,000 yearling acquisition who qualified for the “Run for the Roses” in a trio of Road to the Kentucky Derby prep races.

Hidden Stash is from the second crop of foals sired by Constitution, one of the hottest young stallions in North America.

The winner of the Florida Derby (G1) and Donn H. (G1) at 1 1/8 miles, Constitution has already sired a bevy of stakes winners, led by Tiz the Law, who won the 2020 Belmont (G1) and was runner-up in the 2020 Kentucky Derby.

Many of Constitution’s best runners have excelled at one mile or farther, as is reflected by the fact that his progeny win at an average distance of 7.2 furlongs — a solid rating for such a young stallion.

Constitution’s budding reputation as a sire of two-turn stars is understandable, when you consider he is a son of Tapit, out of a mare by Distorted Humor. Tapit is a source of stamina already responsible for three winners of the 1 1/2-mile Belmont, while Distorted Humor has sired Belmont victor Drosselmeyer and champion three-year-old Funny Cide, who won the Kentucky Derby and Preakness (G1).

Hidden Stash’s dam, Making Mark Money, wasn’t much of a racehorse. She finished second in her lone start, a 5 1/2-furlong sprint at Beulah Park. Making Mark Money’s dam, Kapsiki, also wasn’t an accomplished runner. She finished seventh in her only run at Belmont Park.

But their sires are worthy of attention. Making Mark Money is a daughter of Smart Strike, a two-time leading sire, best known for siring champions Curlin (a two-time Horse of the Year and Preakness winner), English Channel (victorious in the Grade 1 Breeders’ Cup Turf), and Lookin At Lucky (another Preakness winner).

Stamina is a strong suit for descendants of Smart Strike, who has also developed a reputation as an elite broodmare sire. Daughters of Smart Strike have produced a bevy of Grade 1 winners, led by Kentucky Derby winner Mine That Bird, and even Making Mark Money has contributed in a small way, through Hidden Stash and Stylitude, a two-time winner at one mile against claiming company.

As for Kapsiki, she is a daughter of Danzig, the acclaimed stallion who sired 200 stakes winners, according to Claiborne Farm. Preakness winner Pine Bluff, Canadian Triple Crown winner Dance Smartly, and Kentucky Derby runner-up Hard Spun are the best of the lot, while Danzig’s record as a broodmare sire is highlighted by Kentucky Derby winner Fusaichi Pegasus.

Hidden Stash might not be the most accomplished horse in the 2021 Kentucky Derby field, but his pedigree is packed with classic influences. Racing 1 1/4 miles on the first Saturday in May is unlikely to be an obstacle from a breeding standpoint.
For some horses, the Kentucky Derby (G1) is the race they were born to pursue. Their bloodlines have been carefully mixed and matched in search of glory running 1 1/4 miles, on dirt, on the first Saturday in May.

But other horses have backup plans built into their pedigrees, and Dream Shake is a perfect example.

The Santa Anita Derby (G1) third-place finisher boasts a versatile pedigree, which suggests he can succeed over a wide variety of distances and surfaces. Whether he wins or loses the Kentucky Derby, Dream Shake will have no shortage of potential career paths in the months or years following the Run for the Roses.

Dream Shake’s sire, Twirling Candy, never met a race condition he couldn’t handle. His signature victory came in the Malibu (G1), at seven furlongs on dirt, which he won in the blazing time of 1:19.70. But Twirling Candy also nabbed the 1 1/8-mile Del Mar Derby (G2) on turf and the 1 1/8-mile Californian (G2) on synthetic. He also placing second by a head in the 1 1/4-mile Pacific Classic (G1) over synthetic.

As a son of Twirling Candy, Dream Shake has the potential to excel under a wide variety of conditions, but the dark bay colt received another dose of versatility from the bottom half of his family. His dam, the allowance-caliber dirt sprinter Even Song, is a daughter of Street Cry, out of Brownie Points, a mating with the potential to produce virtually any type of racehorse.

Twirling Candy’s sire, Candy Ride, was similarly versatile. A Group 1-winning miler in his native Argentina, Candy Ride proved equally effective running long on dirt in the U.S., where he dominated the Pacific Classic on dirt in the track-record time of 1:59.11. Candy Ride tends to pass this versatility on to his progeny, as he has sired major winners across all surfaces and distances, and Twirling Candy is following the same path.

Twirling Candy’s stud record is an eye-catching display of adaptability. Concrete Rose won the 1 1/4-mile Belmont Oaks (G1) on turf, Gift Box won the 1 1/4-mile Santa Anita H. (G1) on dirt, Finley’s Luckycarm and Collusion Illusion won Grade 1 races sprinting on dirt, Morticia was a multiple Grade 3 winner sprinting on turf, and One Bad Boy became a Canadian classic winner when he nabbed the 1 1/4-mile Queen’s Plate over the synthetic track at Woodbine.

As a son of Twirling Candy, Dream Shake has the potential to excel under any and all conditions. If we had to venture a guess, we might predict Dream Shake will find his sweet spot racing seven furlongs to 1 1/16 miles, on both dirt and turf, most notably the Ouija Board Distaff H. (G3) on grass. She also finished second behind Zenyatta in the 1 1/16-mile Apple Blossom H. (G1) on dirt.

Brownie Points won eight stakes over distances ranging from seven furlongs to 1 1/8 miles, on both dirt and turf, most notably the Ouria Board Distaff H. (G3) on grass. She also finished second behind Zenyatta in the 1 1/16-mile Apple Blossom H. (G1) on dirt.

Brownie Points has proven even more successful as a broodmare. In addition to Even Song, she has produced the six-time graded stakes winner Synchrony, Honeybee (G3) heroine Chocolate Kisses, and HBPA S. winner Point System. You guessed it though—synchrony was best on turf, Chocolate Kisses excelled on dirt, and Point System secured her signature win on synthetic.

All this is a long-winded way of reiterating our opening statement — Dream Shake has the potential to excel under any and all conditions. If we had to venture a guess, we might predict Dream Shake will find his sweet spot racing seven furlongs to 1 1/16 miles on dirt.

But there’s no way to know for certain. By the end of 2021, Dream Shake could be an elite dirt sprinter, a terrific long-distance turf star, or even a Kentucky Derby winner. Your guess is as good as ours!
Kentucky Derby (G1) winners might be elite racehorses, but they don’t necessarily make elite stallions. Derby winners who sire Derby winners are a relative rarity; in the long history of the “Run for the Roses,” there have been only 12 Derby-winning father/son duos, most recently when 1990 Derby hero Unbridled sired 1996 Derby winner Grindstone.

This formidable bit of history will be put to the test when O Besos starts in the 2021 Kentucky Derby. The late-charging Louisiana Derby (G2) third-place finisher is a son of Orb, who employed identical stretch-running tactics to prevail in the 2013 Kentucky Derby. A quarter of a century after Unbridled and Grindstone, can Orb become the latest Derby winner to sire a Kentucky Derby winner?

It’s a tough question. Orb was certainly bred like a Derby winner; sire Malibu Moon is responsible for a bevy of Grade 1 winners running one mile or farther, while Orb’s dam sire is none other than Unbridled. The latter might be a stamina influence, but Malibu Moon brought a dose of miler speed to the equation, providing the balance of speed and stamina so often necessary for success in the Kentucky Derby.

As for Orb, he’s yet to set the world on fire at stud. Through April 18, he’s sired just one graded stakes winner from four crops of foals, with Sippican Harbor prevailing in the seven-furlong Spinaway (G1) as a juvenile at Saratoga. But to Orb’s credit, his progeny have excelled over a wide variety of distances and surfaces—sprints and routes, dirt and turf, the Orbs seem to handle it all. Much like Malibu Moon, Orb brings an element of speed to the mix, so we don’t have to worry about the irony of Orb being too much of a stamina influence to sire a Kentucky Derby winner.

In fact, one can argue Orb’s stud record leans a little too far toward speed, but at least O Besos’ pedigree is backed up on the dam’s side by some solid (if not instantly recognizable) two-turn lineage.

O Besos’ dam, Snuggs and Kisses, was never up to competing at the graded stakes level, but she did conclude her career with a tenacious victory over Grade 1 winner Daisy Devine in the 1 1/16-mile Bayou H. at Fair Grounds. Prior to the emergence of O Besos, her most accomplished foal was Transatlantic Kiss, runner-up in the Kelly’s Landing S. sprinting seven furlongs at Churchill Downs. But Snuggs and Kisses is also the dam of Six Percent, a maiden and allowance winner over distances from one mile to 1 1/16 miles.

Snuggs and Kisses, in turn, is a daughter of Soto, who displayed an affinity for Churchill Downs (and for racing two turns) when rallying to victory in the 1 1/16-mile Kentucky Jockey Club (G2). The once-beaten son of elite sprinter/miler Dehere was eventually sold to stand at stud in Saudi Arabia, but prior to his departure from North America, Soto sired a few notable runners. Suni won multiple Group 1 races on the National Association of Racing (NAR) circuit in Japan, including the 1,600-meter Zen-Nippon Nisai Yushun (G1), while Kaweah Princess stretched out over 1 1/8 miles to win the Ballerina (G3) at Hastings Racecourse in Canada.

From limited opportunities, Soto has also enjoyed some success as a broodmare sire. His unraced daughter Whom Shall I Fear produced Fear the Cowboy, winner of the 1 1/8-mile Skip Away (G3) and third in the 1 1/4-mile Santa Anita H. (G1), while Kaweah Princess foaled the 1 1/8-mile West Virginia Derby (G3) runner-up Game Over.

Any analysis of O Besos’ pedigree must acknowledge that his sire, dam, and damsire aren’t known for churning out Grade 1 winners like clockwork, so from a class perspective, it’s fair to wonder if the Kentucky Derby is a bridge too far for O Besos. But the history of racing is filled with stories of unheralded horses outrunning humble bloodlines to achieve greatness, and at least running 1 1/4 miles should be within reach for O Besos.

Maybe—just maybe—O Besos can follow in the footsteps of his sire and secure a career-defining victory on the first Saturday in May.

PRO Only runner to make a late impact in his final prep; may have more to offer in Derby.

CON Pace-dependent closer may not receive a favorable set up; Speed numbers are light.
Get Her Number doesn't have the most commercially popular pedigree, which is surely one reason why the bay colt sold for just $45,000 as a 2-year-old in training. But once you reach the racetrack, the lines between blue-blooded and blue-collar racehorses begin to blur, as Get Her Number demonstrated when battling to victory in Santa Anita's American Pharoah (G1) on the Road to the Kentucky Derby.

Among Get Her Number's beaten rivals was the $1 million yearling Spielberg, proving that purchase price isn't everything. The truth is, Get Her Number hails from a family of talented, classy racehorses. They might not be the flashiest names on an auction page, but they're more than capable of producing honest competitors.

Get Her Number's sire, Dialed In, is a great example. Winner of the 2011 Florida Derby (G1) and Holy Bull (G3), the stretch-running youngster wasn’t quite tactical enough to excel in the classics, finishing eighth in the Kentucky Derby (G1) and fourth in the Preakness (G1).

But as a son of 2003 Horse of the Year and stamina influence Mineshaft out of a mare by renowned stallion Storm Cat, Dialed In always had the pedigree to be a capable sire in his own right. His best foals have largely followed in Dialed In’s footsteps, competing admirably on dirt at levels just below the very elite. Multiple Grade 2 winner Gunnevera has fared best, placing second in the 2018 Breeders' Cup Classic (G1), but Ms Locust Point and The Tabulator have also displayed graded stakes-caliber talent on the main track.

Get Her Number is the second foal produced by Fancier, a low-level claimer who won three races sprinting on dirt. Her affinity for the main track can be considered surprising since her sire, Bernstein, was a pure turf horse who won a pair of Group 3 races sprinting in Ireland. A son of Storm Cat out of a mare by 1978 Triple Crown winner Affirmed, Bernstein is best known for siring grass stars at stud, with Breeders' Cup Mile (G1) winners Tepin and Karakontie among his most successful foals.

But Bernstein has occasionally been known to sire capable dirt horses, including 2010 Kentucky Derby fourth-place finisher Make Music for Me, and as a broodmare sire he's passed on a bit more versatility. In addition to Get Her Number, Bernstein's daughters have foaled 2016 Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Fillies (G1) winner Champagne Room (a champion 2-year-old filly) and two-time Grade 1 winner Gormley (victorious in the 2017 Santa Anita Derby (G1)).

Dig deeper into the recesses of Get Her Number's pedigree, and you'll continue finding top-quality bloodlines. Mineshaft's sire is A.P. Indy, winner of the 1992 Belmont Stakes (G1) and one of the most reliable sources of stamina in modern pedigrees. Fancier's broodmare sire is Fusaichi Pegasus, winner of the 2000 Kentucky Derby and a son of Mr. Prospector, a breed-changing sire with a seemingly countless number of classic winners among his male-line descendants.

It's hard to say what racing conditions will ultimately suit Get Her Number the best—his pedigree contains both dirt and turf influences, and Get Her Number has already won races on both surfaces. Distance proclivities are similarly unclear; he’s bred to handle at least a mile and possibly further, though Bernstein could tip the scales in favor of miler speed more than classic stamina.

But surface and distance preferences aside, it’s clear Get Her Number has inherited the talent to compete at a high level. There’s a reason why some bloodlines are consistently popular at auction—they consistently produce high-level winners. But this doesn’t mean less popular bloodlines can’t toss up elite runners every now and then, with Get Her Number serving as the latest in a long line of examples.

**PRO** Finished with good energy after troubled trip cost him in Arkansas Derby.

**CON** Will need an epic turnaround after finishing off the board in both starts this year.