

How they ran (and didn't) in the 2015 Kentucky Derby



George's Sunday morning recap

May 3, 2015



American Pharaoh sweeps past the underestimated Firing Line and the brave Dortmund, who was too fast, too early. They need a rematch, and I am volunteering to ride Dortmund.



Stripped of my tiara. Not wanting to pick the favorite, I came up with all the “smart” reasons to look elsewhere. American Pharoah proved me and other doubters wrong, and I am elated. Could he be that Bucephalus which racing has hoped for since

1978, when Affirmed won the Triple Crown? May 16 (the Preakness) is the next test.



Sunday morning hindsight

In the fine tradition of Sunday mornings, here’s a quick recap, with a focus on the eight horses profiled in Saturday’s post. One of them (El Kabeir) didn’t start, another (Upstart) was injured and did not finish the race. Of the remaining six, they finished in the top five spots. Not bad, except for the fumble on the winner.

American Pharoah (1st) at 5:2

A horse needs more than raw speed. He needs the composure to win a big race away from his home environment. What better test than the bourbon-soaked mob at Churchill Downs? On this score alone, **American Pharoah** could be a champion. Add in the effortless stride, which allowed him to run five wide and stay out of trouble, and he was the undisputed winner. However, the quality of his fellow Californians, Firing Line and Dortmund, promises that the next two races of the Triple Crown will not be walkovers.

Firing Line (2nd) at 9:1 and Dortmund (3rd) at 4:1



The fearsome California duo lived up to my billing that they would outclass most in the field. **Firing Line** avenged his two earlier narrow losses to

Dortmund, pressing him early, dropping back a bit, and then coming on again while bumping with American Pharoah. That’s a race horse.



But don’t discount Dortmund. He was his own worst enemy in the Churchill pandemonium. On the muscle and wasting precious energy, it took two grooms on Saturday to walk him from the barn to the paddock, and he has apparently been like that all week. It is what we backers were all concerned about. Adding to the problem, jockey Martin Garcia took him out very fast (maybe he didn’t have a choice), but leading a contested pace is not the way to finish up well at 1 & ¼ miles. Frankly, I’m surprised Dortmund stayed third – true grit - and I look for better if he can relax a bit.

Firing Line ran a superb race, pressing Dortmund, dropping back, and giving American Pharaoh a bit of a contest in the stretch. I credit the jockey of Firing Line, movie star and Hall of Fame rider Gary Stevens (Sea Biscuit). He is in his 50s, riding with an artificial knee, and blessed with a sense of timing that hasn't faded with age.



Frosted (4th) at 10:1

He showed his victory in the Wood was no fluke, but he was just catching a tiring Dortmund and never threatened for the win.



Danzig Moon (5th) at 22:1

My longshot, he got bumped very badly near the start, was squeezed tight, but still came on to finish 5th.

Mubtaahij (Elated) (8th) at 14-1

The Irish horse from Dubai just lolled in the rear and didn't do much. The travel from the mideast, and an odd type of shoe (which I did not know about until they announced it Saturday) are possible reasons. That's too bad. Sheikh Mohammed is one of the mainstays of racing, and it would be nice to see him win a Derby one day. But the fates are so unpredictable in racing. Look at the two small time guys who own California Chrome, last year's winner. The Sheikh (who more or less owns a country) is still out of the Kentucky Derby winner's circle.

Upstart (last) at 15:1

He was pulled up and may have been injured. They will have an army of vets checking him over. It's too bad we didn't get to see the real Upstart run. Hopefully, this was not career-ending.

El Kabeir (did not start) at 30-1

On Saturday morning they noticed some heat in one of his hooves, and wisely scratched him. Don't feel badly for the owner. He also owns American Pharaoh.

2016 seems so far away.....

The consolation, of course, is that American Pharaoh is a brilliant star who will keep us hoping for a Triple Crown. And even if that doesn't happen, we have a great rivalry brewing with Firing Line and Dortmund. And, across the pond, guess what? California Chrome is running at Ascot. The lovable yokels who own him will be hobnobbing with the Queen.

That's the beauty of racing. The average guy will never own a pro sports team, but anyone can own a horse. And the less expensive horses don't read their pedigrees. They just run against members of their extended family. Remember, as I pointed out yesterday, 80% of thoroughbreds have the same common ancestor, that Arabian stallion which Tom Darley brought to England in 1704.

Next year, in Louisville.

George

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