



What went right (and wrong) on Saturday



George's recap of the 2017 Derby

Always Dreaming dominated the race

He made it look easy. The 2 & ¾ lengths could have been more. Jockey John Velasquez used the colt's natural speed to keep him out of early traffic trouble. Velasquez positioned his colt on the inner part of the track, which was where the ground was firmest on a sloppy Saturday. Always Dreaming looks like the type of horse who could be a Triple Crown winner. Wouldn't that be special, only two years after American Pharoah?

Fabulous training job settled him down

Always Dreaming was composed in the post parade and not a juvenile delinquent! When I wrote on Thursday, I was leery as to how he would handle the big crowd, but when I saw him on Saturday afternoon I thought, "Wow. He is so composed and professional. He is not going to blow his energy level before the start." What a difference from a week ago, when he was tossing his head and running away with accomplished exercise girl, Adele Bellinger.



Coady Photography

Always Dreaming had been training at the serene Palm Meadows facility in Florida. When he got to bustling Churchill Downs a week before the race, he went bonkers with the excitement.

This picture is an April 30 runaway. Adele is using every bit of her frame and weight. Look at her arms.

Pletcher made the right call. Get Nick Bush on the horse, with special equipment (called draw reins).

No knock on Adele, who is a poised and accomplished professional, but exercise rider Nick Bush is apparently the go-to guy for Pletcher for tough nut cases. *Turn to the next page for before and after pictures. Settling this horse down was masterful, and not for the faint of heart.*



Monday, May 1

Draw reins are for experts, and are in addition to the standard reins which run from a ring on the bit to the rider's hands.

Draw reins are first attached to the girth, and loop through a ring on the bit before going to the rider's hands. Think of a triangle: girth, bit, hands. Draw reins give the rider pulley-type leverage, allowing him to force the horse's head down.

You can see how Always Dreaming is upset on the first day with Nick, who will not let the colt raise his head.



Tuesday, May 2

Things are looking up on Tuesday.

Nick says that Always Dreaming is much better, and expects him to be a gentleman on Saturday.

I am wrongly skeptical that he can turn things around in just three more days.



Getting better, and better

I think this was Wednesday or Thursday, after Always Dreaming has started to get it.

Let's just gallop like a good horse, and save the racing for Saturday.

You can see that Nick is holding the draw reins in a fixed position, but not forcing the colt.

The colt's head is down, and he is accepting today, not fighting.

The best job on earth

You rarely read about the exercise riders, still called “boys” and “girls” although ranging past age 50 in some cases. I just need to give credit where it is due. Exercise riders convert these million dollar bundles of energy into race horses. It’s dangerous work. They love it and would do nothing else.



Nick Bush has been riding for trainer Todd Pletcher for ten years. Pletcher’s clients have unlimited money to spend on horses.

When all else fails, he will call in Nick, who was born in Kentucky and was just being a groom until someone suggested he get on a horse.

Nick’s abilities have put him on the best horses in the world, and around the world.

Here he is in Dubai.

And here he is getting interviewed about racetrack fashions, looking very shy, and probably wishing he could get back on a horse.



What Went Wrong on Derby Day?

Not much. The best horse won, so that’s what really counts. On the negative side, the track was a sloppy mess and no horse running four wide was going to finish well. You had to be on the firm inside of the track, like Always Dreaming, and not four wide in the deep stuff, like Irish War Cry. Uneven tracks on bad days are a fact of life. You could blame the track’s grounds crew, but it’s really Mother Nature.

In addition to weather, the outside horses were all playing bumper cars and banging into each other at the start, as they vied for better position, while Always Dreaming avoided all that trouble from inner post #5.

But no excuses. I should have listened to Nick Bush, who made it possible for the best horse to win.

And What Went Really Right?

People had fun. My annual Derby Post now goes to 850 friends and colleagues, who range from CEOs to parking attendants, and even includes some clergy.

Unlike Jim Cramer, my mission is not to make them money. It is just to have fun on the first Saturday in May, with a race that has now been run 143 consecutive years.



Special award this year to Anne Breault, the Program Coordinator for Continuing Legal Education of the New Hampshire Bar Association.

Within a few minutes of getting Thursday's post, Anne shot back: **I'm going to Always Dreaming.**

But I can't convince Anne to give me any CLE credits for my efforts. She says I have to take the CLE courses each year, like every other NH licensed attorney.

Oh well. Only 363 days until Derby 144. I hope you had as good a time as I did this year.

George Chimento
May 8, 2017