



## Wellspring Derby Preview Party Final Picks and Plays

By Bill Doolittle

Hi, everyone, and thanks so much for being a part of the Wellspring Derby Preview Party – the 27<sup>th</sup> edition, and a tremendous success, You responded to the call to the post with an exceptional outpouring of giving and festive spirit.

And thanks, too, for checking back to hear my final picks and thoughts for Saturday's 151<sup>st</sup> Run for the Roses, the 2025 Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs.

First, the Big Rule is: Don't let anybody talk you off your Derby Pick. Including me!

That said ...

While I mentioned a number of horses that could make good showings in the Kentucky Derby, many of you may have noticed I was strongest on two: **Journalism** (No. 8) and **Baeza** (21). I've thought for some time that the top performers for this year's Kentucky Derby could be those two ~ and that pair responded with a one-two finish in the Santa Anita Derby, a month ago in California. If matched again in the Kentucky Derby, they could finish one-two again, with Baeza maybe even winning. It'll take a heckuva hoss to beat Journalism, the deserving favorite in the 151<sup>st</sup> Run for the Roses.

Journalism is the deserving favorite for the Kentucky Derby – a strong, sleek and fluid-flowing thoroughbred who has won his last four starts and caught everyone's eye. Baeza, on the other hand, may not even get in the race (probably won't, it looks like). He currently ranks 21<sup>st</sup> on the list of Derby entrants in points – primarily because of a technicality that awarded fewer points for the prestigious Santa Anita Derby, than other final preps. Being lightly raced, Baeza did not build up any spare points in other prep races that could have put him in the field. The thing is, Baeza doesn't know points from pomegranates. Eye to eye, I might like Baeza even better than Journalism.

I also liked Baeza because he is named for the great jockey Braulio Baeza who was the No. One rider in North America in the early 1960's, one of the first Latin and

Caribbean jockeys to come to America and make it big. He won the 1963 Kentucky Derby with Chateaugay, and rode many other champions, including Buckpasser.

But sentiment and nostalgia won't overcome a points problem, and we'll assume Baeza won't get in and Journalism will air.

That's what I said: air. As in win decisively. Journalism has that kind of presence, and a beautiful, rhythmic running action. His principal owner, Aron Wellman, is the owner of the colt's dam, Mopotism, and was editor of his high school newspaper at Beverly Hills High. Hence his name – and a fine one I think, for the souvenir mint julep glass that is inscribed with Kentucky Derby winners who have written their names into history.

Who else?

Well, there are certainly other fine horses in this field, talented colts who are steaming into this race in high gear. Those include **Rodriquez** (4), **Publisher** (13), **Sovereignty** (18) and **Sandman** (17). And maybe **Luxor Café** (7) from Japan. Luxor Café is a Kentucky-bred, by the way. He came from off the pace to destroy his competition in Japan and earn a spot in the Kentucky Derby. Rallied from well back to fly well ahead in an eighth of a mile.

In contrast, Japanese-bred **Admire Daytona** (6) earned a Derby berth with a gritty triumph in Dubai, racing on the lead and staying to the wire to triumph in a three-horse photo. International rider Christophe Lemaire will be aboard.

But going back to those we mentioned before, the closers are Sandman, Sovereignty and Publisher, with the deepest late runner of all being Sandman, who will be 'way back – but ridden by the daring rider Jose Ortiz, who is not afraid to wait. Jose's brother Irad Ortiz Jr. rides Publisher for the first time, and that can move any horse forward. Sovereignty, second in the Florida Derby, will try to come on in the final half mile of the 1 ¼ miles race. What I like best about him is his powerful back, which you don't see so much from the side, as I saw the other day looking down on him from the clocker's stand. Wow!

Finally, Rodriquez made his mark in New York, galloping in front to win in the fastest time of any of the Kentucky Derby preps. And the fastest final quarter mile. A free runner. When asked about Rodriquez, six-time Derby winning trainer Bob Baffert said, "This is the perfect kind of horse for Mike Smith to ride."

Rodriguez will have company on the front end from **East Avenue** (12). But I think Mr. Rodriguez will ultimately be the one for Journalism to catch.

And catch him, I believe he will.

Make it ~~8-4-7~~.

And don't forget those closers: ~~18-13-17~~. Any of those could win.

Plus, maybe lightly-raced **Grande** (10) with Derby master jock Johnny Velazquez, and **Burnham Square** (9), a professional racehorse with plenty of races under his belt. Maybe even **Tiztastic** (14) at a price.

Of course, if Baeza gets in ... Look Out!

### **Make your bet count**

Betting: My No. 1 advice is the minute you walk into the track, even on Friday, bet your horse with All, in the exacta. Let's say that's Journalism, No. 8. Take a \$1 exacta wheel, 8 *with* All. Costs \$19. That means you have 8 winning, with EVERY other horse in the race second. 8 wins, you win.

But if your horse is good enough to win, he's certainly good enough to be second. So take *another* \$1 exacta wheel of All *with* 8. Another \$19. That means you have every other horse in the race on top of your horse second. Now your total is up to \$38. Less than a bottle of wine at Jack Fry's.

If you run first or second, you will have the exacta. It might not produce a big payoff, since Journalism is the favorite. But it could. And surely enough that you won't mind the bother of cashing.

To be sporting, I'd recommend taking that 8 with All again, so you will win more. Remember, *the less you bet the more you lose when you win*. That's my motto.

After the Derby bets you make coming in the door, you may proceed to your seat. Or settle in front of the TV at home to contemplate further wise investments. But you are down on the Derby.

## Kentucky Oaks and other fun bets

In the Kentucky Oaks on Friday, undefeated Good Cheer will be the strong favorite, and La Cara is a fast rival. But I will try to hit a better price with **Ballerina d'Oro** (6) at 10-1, ridden by Flavian Prat.

And there are a couple Derby gimmick exacta boxes for fun: Like the \$1 exacta box of like-minded names Journalism and Publisher. Book readers could smile. Cost \$2.

An even more fun \$1 exacta box bet would come if the Ortiz brothers, Irad Jr. and Jose, could run one-two in the exacta for another \$2. Brothers have never even come close to running one-two in 150 years. But if it wins, you can say: "The Ortiz brothers, how simple is that? Where were you!"

Win or lose, have a great First Saturday in May - and don't forget to add another contribution to Wellspring, for mental health recovery. You'll be glad you did.

Good Luck!

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