



Breeders' Cup World Championships Friday, Nov. 3 and Saturday, Nov. 4

Distaff Notes Tuesday, October 31, 2017

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Abel Tasman – The 3yo daughter of Quality Road co-owned by China Horse Club International and her breeder Clearsky Farms, was shipped from Santa Anita Park to Del Mar overnight with 15 other horses trained by Bob Baffert. After the two-hour trip, Abel Tasman and the others walked. She will return to the track Wednesday.

With victories in the four Grade 1 races this year, Starlet, Kentucky Oaks, Acorn and Coaching Club American Oaks, Abel Tasman put herself in position to win the Eclipse Award as the 3yo filly champ. She was second in his most recent start, the Cotillion at Parx Sept. 23 and will face older fillies and mares for the first time in the Distaff.

The Distaff has been won by 3yos 10 times. The most recent 3yo winner was Untapable in 2014.

Hall of Fame jockey Mike Smith will ride Abel Tasman. He has won the Distaff a record five times. His most recent winner was Royal Delta in 2012.

Champagne Room – Sharon Alesia, Ciaglia Racing, Exline-Border Racing, Gulliver Racing and Robin Christensen's Champagne Room jogged early on the main track at Del Mar Tuesday morning under exercise rider Eddie Inda.

Winner of last year's 14 Hands Winery Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies, Champagne Room drew post position one for Friday's Distaff and will be ridden by Mario Gutierrez for trainer Peter Eurton.

"It is what it is," Eurton said of the inside draw. "(With the one hole) she can get aggressive when she feels the pressure around her. I would love to switch with Paradise Woods (who drew post position seven) and be able to control things."

Elate – Claiborne Farm and Adele Dilschneider's 3yo filly Elate seems to be rounding into top form for trainer Bill Mott at the right time and enters the Breeders' Cup Distaff, a race that appears to be a compendium of multiple year-end championship title contests, with a noticeable amount of momentum. The daughter of Medaglia d'Oro has been dominant in consecutive Grade 1s, including a 5 1/2-length drubbing of next-out Grade I winner It Tiz Well in the Alabama at Saratoga on Aug. 19 and an overhaul of older fillies and mares in the Beldame at Belmont on Sept. 30.

While older mares Stellar Wind and Forever Unbridled square up for said division's bragging rights, Elate must defeat four-time Grade I winner Abel Tasman for a possible sophomore filly championship. The last time they met, only a head separated the two after a battle that lasted the better part of the final three furlongs in Saratoga's Coaching Club American Oaks on July 23. Said effort was Elate's last loss.

On Tuesday morning, the dark bay homebred galloped over the main track at Del Mar, two days after a breezing impressively in her first feel of the surface.

"It went well. She walked through the paddock and we toured it again with her. We walked through then came out and had an easy gallop of about a mile and a quarter," Mott said. "Her two races since (last facing Abel Tasman) have visually been better. She looked loaded (in the Beldame) and ran a great race.

"You have to bring the right horse to the dance," Mott said of being a five-time winner of the Distaff. "With a 3-year-old filly, they have to be on the improve at the end of the year. You're reaching out anytime you're running a 3-year-old against hickory old seasoned horses like Dallas Stewart's Forever Unbridled and she's tough. She hasn't raced much, but it seems to be working for her."

Forever Unbridled – Charles Fipke's homebred Forever Unbridled got her first look at the Del Mar main track Tuesday morning. Leaving Barn BB and galloping a little over a mile at 6:30 a.m. with trainer Dallas Stewart watching attentively from the six-furlong pole, she appeared comfortable and to have traveled well. Leading her on pony was assistant trainer Bentley Combs, who hopes to follow in the successful footsteps of former Stewart assistant Brad Cox when he ventures out on his own this year.

The daughter of Breeders' Cup Juvenile winner Unbridled's Song and Kentucky Oaks winner Lemons Forever enters the Breeders' Cup Distaff in top form, with two victories from as many starts, including a defeat of iconic champion Songbird last out in the Personal Ensign at Saratoga on Aug. 26.

Last year, the three-time Grade I-winning earner of \$2,086,880 was a valiant third behind Beholder and Songbird in the Distaff, closing from five lengths astern those champions to within 1 1/2 lengths at the wire. Finishing 2 1/2 lengths behind her that day was Stellar Wind, the morning-line favorite for this year's Distaff.

"She shipped in in good shape," Stewart said. "She looks great and is all dappled out. We're very happy with her."

After taking the Personal Ensign, Stewart mentioned Belmont's Beldame — a race she won in 2016 — as the likely next stop. Instead, he opted to give her another significant gap going into the Breeders' Cup.

"Just the timing, from the (June 17) Fleur de Lis (Handicap) to the Personal Ensign; she did well with that, so we stuck with it," Stewart said. "We're just here to win. We're not worried about the (championship) circumstances. That's what counts."

Regular rider Joel Rosario, aboard six of her previous seven starts, was replaced by John Velazquez for Friday's race. Rosario had won four graded stakes with the bay mare, including a stealthy and much-lauded piloting last out in the Personal Ensign. Velazquez has ridden her twice, both victories — the 2015 Comely Stakes at Aqueduct and 2016 Apple Blossom Handicap.

When asked, Stewart declined to comment on the switch.

Mopotism – Though listed as the longest shot on the morning line, this 3yo daughter of Uncle Mo owned by Reddam Racing inspired assistant trainer Leandro Mora to burst out with "we're going to shock the nation with her. She's been knocking on the door. She's been running with all of the best fillies in the nation.

"I liked the way she breezed the last time with (Classic entrant) Pavel. They were head and head around there and finished head and head."

She galloped 1 1/2 m Tuesday with Amir Cedeno in the saddle. International riding star and multiple Breeders' Cup winner Frankie Dettori rides Saturday.

Paradise Woods – Though a multiple graded stakes winner and earner of nearly a half-million dollars, this Richard Mandella trainee is buried as fifth choice on the morning line in one of the deepest and most talented fields among Breeders' Cup Distaffs.

Nevertheless, Mandella, one of the more successful of Breeders' Cup winning trainers, remains hopeful that his 3yo daughter of Union Rags can reach deep into her talent and bring home the victory.

"She likes to be on the lead but she can also come from a bit off the pace so we'll just have to wait and see how it all shakes out. She's a very talented filly," Mandella said.

She galloped once around Tuesday morning. Flavien Prat is her regular rider and will be aboard Friday.

Romantic Vision – The Spinster winner Romantic Vision took to the Del Mar track for the first time with a 1/4m jog followed by an easy 1m gallop the day after her arrival from Kentucky.

"Just gave her an easy morning," trainer Rusty Arnold said. "It's hard to tell your first day but she's handled the track just fine. She didn't get in here until about 5:30 last night so she hasn't had the chance to completely settle in. This is really her first day here but so far all is well."

The 5yo mare is ending her career at the peak of her ability, having won the Locust Grove at Churchill Downs in September and the Spinster at Keeneland in her last two starts.

"I have no pressure on me," Arnold said. "Six weeks ago we weren't a stakes winner and now we're a 'Win and You're In' and a Grade 1 winner. She hasn't beaten a field like this but she's not run against a field like this. Anything she gets will be nice."

While a berth in the Distaff was always the goal for Romantic Vision, one final start after Keeneland before joining the world-class broodmare band of owner G. Watts Humphrey would have happened regardless of the Spinster result.

"She was either going to run here or in the Falls City (at Churchill Downs) so our plans never changed at all," Arnold said.

Stellar Wind – The morning line favorite for the Distaff galloped 1 1/4m early Tuesday morning, three days out from the final start of a career that includes six Grade 1 wins.

"Going early has been her routine here for three years so I didn't want to change it," trainer John Sadler said. "We gave her a nice gallop, leaning toward being a strong gallop toward the end, bringing her up to the race on Friday."

The 5yo has 10 wins overall from 15 starts and that record could be even more impressive if she hadn't been competing during the same span that saw future Hall of Fame females such as Beholder and Songbird also based on the West Coast. Two of Stellar Wind's five defeats came in the Distaff and with a little racing luck she might have won either or both of them.

"At Keeneland she had a rough trip and that was bore out by the long inquiry (resulting in no change, with Stopchargingmaria first by a neck over Stellar Wind in second). Last year, she just picked a very inopportune time to not break well. We went through this in depth because of the magnitude of what it meant and Victor (Espinoza) said she stood beautifully, but the moment they sprung the gates she was taking one step back.

"She's not nervous in the gate but she's a little distracted. She's a horse that likes to stop and look at her surroundings. We thought that the ground she lost getting off slow is what cost her."

That race, of course, was one for the ages, with Beholder nosing out Songbird. After breaking in the air and racing wide, Stellar Wind still managed to rally for fourth, with another multiple Grade 1 winner, Forever Unbridled, in third.

"She's had a few races where she didn't get out good, including the Kentucky Oaks (as the post-time favorite)," Sadler said. "She's not the fastest gate horse in the world but now that Victor knows her so well I don't think it'll be a problem."