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$1,500,000 Grade I Preakness Stakes

Race 13 | Dirt | 9.5 Furlongs

Two weeks removed from the biggest Kentucky Derby longshot since 1913, the racing world fires back up for the second installment of the Triple Crown with the Preakness Stakes from Pimlico Race Course. On Derby Day, a contentious and hot pace melted down most of the field allowing deep closer, Rich Strike, to maneuver traffic and get up for fireworks. There's likely some lingering expectations to score something similar from our fellow once-per-year bettors that tuned into the Derby and now have a peaked interest in coming along for the Preakness as well. Let's take a look from a Pace Figure standpoint how the Derby field stacked up compared to today's contest.

While the 4F Figure is found to be the most important split in relation to the Final Figure to determine the triggering of Predicteform's Form Cycle Patterns, I often like to use the 6F Figure when it comes to longer races such as the Triple Crown menu. Sorted by 6F Pace, we find #8 Epicenter as a standout today with a 3-point advantage on the field using the last race out. In the Derby field, the same 3-point span contained 8 runners. This might infer the chances of another meltdown type contest are much less. However, later we'll get into some reasons why this alone isn't a reason to dismiss the stretch runners.

	Kentucky Derby					Preakness Stakes			
	Horse	6F	Final	6F-F		Horse	6F	Final	6F-F
13	Simplification	73.3	70.8	+2.5	8	Epicenter	76.8	80.8	-4.0
16	Cyberknife	73.2	75.2	-2.0	4	Secret Oath	73.8	80.1	-6.3
15	White Abarrio	72.2	71.9	+0.3	5	Early Voting	72.8	81.5	-8.7
8	Charge It	71.5	71.3	+0.2	1	Simplification	72.2	79.7	-7.5
17	Classic Causeway	71.1	62.1	+9.0	2	Creative Minister	71.3	80.9	-9.6
14	Barber Road	71.0	73.9	-2.9	9	Skippylongstocking	70.3	79.8	-9.5
9	Tiz The Bomb	70.6	78.7	-8.1	6	Happy Jack	68.1	73.1	-5.0
6	Messier	70.4	77.2	-6.8	7	Armagnac	66.8	72.6	-5.8
1	Mo Donegal	69.5	81.6	-12.1	3	Fenwick	65.3	60.4	+4.9
12	Taiba	69.3	78.3	-9.0					
18	Tawny Port	67.6	72.8	-5.2					
5	Smile Happy	66.3	75.8	-9.5					
20	Ethereal Road	66.2	71.1	-4.9					
21	Rich Strike	65.8	76.0	-10.2					
2	Happy Jack	65.8	72.6	-6.8					
19	Zozos	64.9	74.8	-9.9					
11	Pioneer Of Medina	64.5	73.9	-9.4					
22	Rattle N Roll	64.5	72.0	-7.5					
3	Epicenter	63.8	75.9	-12.1					
10	Zandon	63.7	77.0	-13.3					

In the next table, let's compare the dirt spreads of the fields. The Dirt Spread Formula here is 6F Figure minus Final Figure. Essentially, this gives us a figure representing the energy spent of each runner starting from 6 furlongs into the race on through the finish. A bit of a "woulda, shoulda, coulda" moment in the Derby rankings as simply boxing the 4 runners with a double-digit dirt spread for $12 would have paid over $7,000. So lesson learned there, when a race figures to feature a very hot pace and everyone agrees it's likely, take a hard look at the late dirt spreads of the field next time. On the Preakness side, no runners come off a double-digit closing effort. Really to me, the standout is that the Top 5 all share similar running lines across the board from 6F to Final to the 6F-F dirt spread, but with Epicenter having leeway to relax his advantageous 6F Figure, how much would that also bump his Final Figure thus exploding his late spread in regard to this chart?

	Kentucky Derby					Preakness Stakes			
	Horse	**6F**	**Final**	**6F-F**		**Horse**	**6F**	**Final**	**6F-F**
10	Zandon	63.7	77.0	**-13.3**	2	Creative Minister	71.3	80.9	**-9.6**
3	Epicenter	63.8	75.9	**-12.1**	9	Skippylongstocking	70.3	79.8	**-9.5**
1	Mo Donegal	69.5	81.6	**-12.1**	5	Early Voting	72.8	81.5	**-8.7**
21	Rich Strike	65.8	76.0	**-10.2**	1	Simplification	72.2	79.7	**-7.5**
19	Zozos	64.9	74.8	**-9.9**	4	Secret Oath	73.8	80.1	**-6.3**
5	Smile Happy	66.3	75.8	**-9.5**	7	Armagnac	66.8	72.6	**-5.8**
11	Pioneer Of Medina	64.5	73.9	**-9.4**	6	Happy Jack	68.1	73.1	**-5.0**
12	Taiba	69.3	78.3	**-9.0**	8	Epicenter	76.8	80.8	**-4.0**
9	Tiz The Bomb	70.6	78.7	**-8.1**	3	Fenwick	65.3	60.4	**+4.9**
22	Rattle N Roll	64.5	72.0	**-7.5**					
6	Messier	70.4	77.2	**-6.8**					
2	Happy Jack	65.8	72.6	**-6.8**					
18	Tawny Port	67.6	72.8	**-5.2**					
20	Ethereal Road	66.2	71.1	**-4.9**					
14	Barber Road	71.0	73.9	**-2.9**					
16	Cyberknife	73.2	75.2	**-2.0**					
8	Charge It	71.5	71.3	**+0.2**					
15	White Abarrio	72.2	71.9	**+0.3**					
13	Simplification	73.3	70.8	**+2.5**					
17	Classic Causeway	71.1	62.1	**+9.0**					

Runner-by-Runner Comments

#1 Simplification (6/1)
Looked strong coming into the Florida Derby off a SOFT/REV combo but failed to sustain his previous 75/74 (4F/Final) from January by regressing to a 74/71 when taking on the extra distance. Good tactical form reversal in the Derby to relax more early for a 75/79h. However, runner starting to build a bit of a reputation for bouncing off efforts though as resume also features an impressive juvenile sprint of 75h/73 being encored with a dud 72h/60h. Back in two weeks off a strong Derby try, looks a bit hard to trust, especially if he reverts to his tactics of getting close to the pace. If he settles into his new role as one all of a sudden able to relax early and run on later, he can fit a ticket for bottom of exotics. Would really prefer double-digit odds on the board here though.

#2 Creative Minister (10/1)
One of the more lightly-raced runners in the field, he gets his first big class test today looking to burst onto a bigger scene off a good-looking string of COMP > SOFT > REV pattern progressions while holding the biggest late energy dirt spread of the field's last spins. Plenty of potential here and will likely end up well-used as a "B" horse in the public's horizontal wagers.

#3 Fenwick (50/1)
Blasted off when trying blinkers to a 71/76 DTOP maiden score at Tampa but didn't follow that with much nor hold a past foundation for it. Doesn't fit well here today.

#4 Secret Oath (9/2)
Filly takes another shot at the boys after an impressive Oaks victory off the NPT (New Pace Top). Tough spot here now having to survive a DTOP that featured a pretty substantial uptick in both 4F and Final Figure. I worry about a repeat of the Arkansas Derby try. She looked game there when making her sweeping move from last to 3rd but was ultimately turned away in stretch. Female runners have a much better sense of themselves and their own ability while male runners tend to be more worried about outdoing each other and are more willing to over-push their limits. I think this dynamic could have factored in the Arkansas Derby loss and puts her at risk here today as well. Her wins have come from sweeping by as the best while it remains a question if she has the grit to engage in a hard-fought duel. Off a DTOP, an often regressive spot, I don't know she'll offer the odds to see if she can replicate the one-on-one fight that Swiss Skydiver put up as a filly upsetting boys in the 2020 Preakness, one of the best stretch duels in recent memory being right on par with Songbird v. Beholder from the 2016 BC Distaff.

#5 Early Voting (7/2)
So far, so good for another lighter-raced runner of the field prompting positive Form Cycle Patterns with each start as a COMP debut > NPT > REV progressor. Should want the lead here and at face value is a good second choice in this race with the best upset potential. Strategically though, I like the favorite's chances to hurt his confidence here and think the value play lies in backing him to wrap things up late saving for next outing while left off the board here.

#6 Happy Jack (30/1)
They've experimented back and forth with blinkers showing mixed results. Opt to use them today and his best route run came with them while triggering a REV with a -8 dirt spread (best late speed of career). Figures much too slow for a win bet but looks the type to canter on by tired runners possibly blowing up the bottom of exotics at a price.

#7 Armagnac (12/1)
Has been an "opportunist" type with both victories coming gate-to-wire against main rivals that were heavily spent early on energy. The most recent upset of an odds-on favorite was a rival off a NEG debut. Looks like too optimistic of a spot here likely sitting in an early position he either won't like or can't sustain compared to the rivals' resumes.

#8 Epicenter (6/5)
Favorite comes out of a Derby pace meltdown where he by far out-sustained fractions of other top-half of field pace runners. Flavien Prat on Zandon said he thought he was the winner until Epicenter fought back on him and said "not today." Very few runners put in timed works for today's contest but Epicenter proved he's recovered and healthy by recording a breeze for this quick turnaround. While the 80 Final is matched by a handful of runners, the 6F Figure isn't, so any relaxation the field allows at that split gives him a chance to improve his Final Figure to one tough to match. I could see this one earning the "Meat Loaf Triple Crown"…because "2 Outta 3 Ain't Bad."
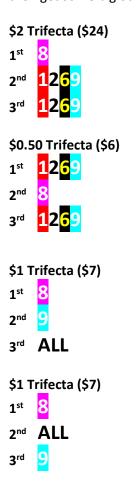
#9 Skippylongstocking (20/1)
Nice developmental foundation to prompt 3 straight NPTs then work through a DTOP to put up the 72/80 in last, by far his best performance in terms of giving late effort. Appears to be undervalued here as one that could easily run into the exotics late while peaking.

WAGERS

The Pick: #8 Epicenter

If you've read my stuff before, it takes some convincing for me to back a well-bet favorite but all is not lost value-wise. Time and time again, when a dominant force asserts themself on a field, we often get a chance for the next-in-line short odds to bow out allowing some decent payoffs to come through. We're looking for one of two things to happen here in regard to #4 Secret Oath and #5 Early Voting, the next two betting choices. If Epicenter can establish himself the eventual winner here early enough, you could see confidence shaken in either of these and a weakened late effort bowing to the pecking order that's been established. We've seen this happen in these big races many times where you then get some big odds trotting along up into the exotics.

$2 Trifecta ($24)

1st   8

2nd   1 2 6 9

3rd   1 2 6 9

$0.50 Trifecta ($6)

1st   1 2 6 9

2nd   8

3rd   1 2 6 9

$1 Trifecta ($7)

1st   8

2nd   9

3rd   **ALL**

$1 Trifecta ($7)

1st   8

2nd   **ALL**

3rd   9

4-Ticket Total: $44.00

For small-ball budgets, toss #1 Simplification and stick to first two wagers to reduce investment to $15.

The higher rollers can boost the base bets and defensively add #5 Early Voting in the first two tickets.

HISTORICAL WINNERS

ROMBAUER (2021)		
F	W84.1	77.8	W69.1
6F	71.1	67.8	58.0
6F-F	-13	-10	-11
P	DTOP		SOFT
T	PIM	KEE	GGX
S	DIRT	DIRT	DIRT^
L	9 1/2	9	9
C	FAST	FAST	FAST
D	05/15/21	04/03/21	02/13/21

SWISS SKYDIVER (2020)		
F	W85.3	81.6	W76.8
6F	72.7	70.1	68.0
6F-F	-13	-11	-9
P			SOFT
T	PIM	CDX	SAR
S	DIRT	DIRT	DIRT
L	9 1/2	10	9
C	FAST	FAST	FAST
D	10/03/20	09/04/20	08/15/20

WAR OF WILL (2019)		
F	W80.4	77.2	72.8
6F	72.1	68.8	71.8
6F-F	-8	-8	-1
P		DTOP	
T	PIM	CDX	FGX
S	DIRT	DIRT	DIRT
L	9 1/2	10	9
C	FAST	SLOPPY	FAST
D	05/18/19	05/04/19	03/23/19

JUSTIFY (2018)		
F	W78.7	W78.0	W74.9
6F	71.5	76.3	64.3
6F-F	-7	-2	-11
P			SOFT
T	PIM	CDX	SAX
S	DIRT	DIRT	DIRT
L	9 1/2	10	9
C	SLOPPY	SLOPPY	FAST
D	05/19/18	05/05/18	04/07/18

CLOUD COMPUTING (2017)		
F	W79.3	73.5	73.4
6F	71.4	72.4	70.2
6F-F	-8	-1	-3
P	REV		
T	PIM	AQU	AQU
S	DIRT	DIRT	DIRT**
L	9 1/2	9	8 1/2
C	FAST	FAST	FAST
D	05/20/17	04/08/17	03/04/17

EXAGGERATOR (2016)		
F	W74.0	83.6	W73.4
6F	65.2	71.0	66.1
6F-F	-9	-12	-7
P			SOFT
T	PIM	CDX	SAX
S	DIRT	DIRT	DIRT
L	9 1/2	10	9
C	SLOPPY	FAST	SLOPPY
D	05/21/16	05/07/16	04/09/16

AMERICAN PHAROAH (2015)		
F	W73.4	W81.4	W80.2
6F	72.0	74.5	75.0
6F-F	-1	-7	-5
P	NPT		
T	PIM	CDX	OPX
S	DIRT	DIRT	DIRT
L	9 1/2	10	9
C	SLOPPY	FAST	FAST
D	05/16/15	05/02/15	04/11/15

CALIFORNIA CHROME (2014)		
F	W79.3	W79.1	W78.8
6F	71.4	73.8	72.2
6F-F	-8	-5	-6
P	REV		
T	PIM	CDX	SAX
S	DIRT	DIRT	DIRT
L	9 1/2	10	9
C	FAST	FAST	FAST
D	05/17/14	05/03/14	04/05/14

OXBOW (2013)		
F	W75.8	74.3	69.8
6F	64.9	77.2	65.0
6F-F	-11	+3	-5
P	NPT		
T	PIM	CDX	OPX
S	DIRT	DIRT	DIRT
L	9 1/2	10	9
C	FAST	SLOPPY	FAST
D	05/18/13	05/04/13	04/09/13