

Belmont Stakes

Distance, rivals challenge American Pharoah’s Triple try

By BETH HARRIS
AP Racing Writer

NEW YORK — All that separates American Pharoah from ending the longest drought in horse racing history — 37 years without a Triple Crown winner — is 1 1/2 miles and seven rivals determined to make him earn a victory in the Belmont Stakes.

Twelve horses before him have tried to complete the sweep of the Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont and failed since 1978. Now it’s American Pharoah’s turn Saturday.

The bay colt with the unusually short tail appears to have come through the Derby and Preakness with energy to spare, and he’ll need it in the longest and most grueling of the three-race series.

American Pharoah galloped around the big Belmont oval Thursday before visiting the paddock where he will be saddled on race day. He will take to the track again Friday for his final tuneup. He is the heavy 3-5 early favorite.

Before Affirmed swept the 1978 Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont, 25 years had passed between Triple Crown winners Citation in 1948 and Secretariat in 1973. Now it’s 37 years, with a

chance for American Pharoah to make history and goose the struggling sport or become just another miss.

“There’s a lot of anxiety,” said Bob Baffert, the only trainer to lose the Belmont three times with horses that had won the first two legs. “I don’t even think about the history.”

American Pharoah and seven rivals will run the longest race of their lives Saturday. If there’s rain in the forecast, give the edge to American Pharoah, who romped to a seven-length win in the Preakness after a massive downpour occurred as the horses were going to the starting gate.

The colt’s grand-sire, Empire Maker, won the 2003 Belmont, spoiling Funny Cide’s Triple Crown bid.

This time, the competition seems committed to sticking closer to American Pharoah, whose preferred running style is at the front, although he’s shown he can sit off the early pace and win. How many of the horses press the early pace will determine who has enough gas left for the 1,097-yard run down the stretch.

“I want him to break cleanly and freely,” Baffert said, “and have Victor put him in the mode where he’s comfortable. I’m sure

Belmont Stakes post positions				
American Pharoah will attempt to become horse racing's 12th Triple Crown winner and first since Affirmed pulled off the hat trick in 1978.				
PP	Horse	Jockey	Trainer	Odds
1.	Mubtaahij	I. Ortiz	M. de Kock	10-1
2.	Tale of Verve	G. Stevens	D. Stewart	15-1
3.	Madefromlucky	J. Castellano	T. Pletcher	12-1
4.	Frammento	M. Smith	N. Zito	30-1
5.	American Pharoah	V. Espinoza	B. Baffert	3-5
6.	Frosted	J. Rosario	K. McLaughlin	5-1
7.	Keen Ice	K. Desormeaux	D. Romans	20-1
8.	Materiality	J. Velazquez	T. Pletcher	6-1
Weights: 126 pounds Distance: 1 1/2 miles Purse: \$1.5 million				
First place: \$800,000 Second place: \$280,000 Third place: \$150,000				
Fourth place: \$100,000 Fifth: \$60,000 Post time: 6:50 p.m. EDT				



AP Photo/Matt Slocum, File
In this May 15 file photo, jockey Victor Espinoza, celebrates aboard American Pharoah, after winning the 140th Preakness Stakes horse race at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore. American Pharoah will try for the Triple Crown when he runs in Saturday’s 147th running of the Belmont Stakes.

they’re all going to be pretty close together.”

Just as horses aren’t used to running 1 1/2 miles, jockeys aren’t used to riding races that long, either. The Belmont has undone some who have moved too soon and burned out their horses. Others have moved too late and let the leaders get away.

The track’s deep, sandy surface can prove tiring to run on, the turns are sweeping, and the poles used by jockeys to judge their location are placed differently than at the mile

tracks where most of them ride.

American Pharoah’s California-based jockey, Victor Espinoza, has experience in the Belmont, having lost two other Triple tries, with California Chrome last year and War Emblem in 2002.

Women’s Soccer

Host Canada opens Women’s World Cup against China

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Canada coach John Herdman pretty much summed up the prevailing sentiment when he was asked what he was looking forward to most about the Women’s World Cup.

“Winning,” Herdman said. Join the crowd, coach.

Canada, ranked No. 8 in the world, opens women’s soccer’s premier tournament with a group-stage match against No. 16 China on Saturday in Edmonton, one of the six Canadian cities hosting the monthlong event. The final is July 5 in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Twenty-four teams are competing this year, up from 16 that took part in the 2011 tournament in Germany. Japan won that one on penalty kicks in a memorable final against the United States.

The Americans, ranked No. 2, are among the favorites, along with top-ranked Germany and third-ranked France. The U.S. women are in Group D, the so-called “Group of Death” that includes upstart Australia, Sweden and former U.S. coach Pia Sundhage, and perennial African champion Nigeria.

Group D opens with a match between the United States and Australia in Winnipeg on Monday, but probably the most anticipated match of the group stage is the showdown between the U.S. and Sweden next Friday. It pits Sundhage against former assistant Jill Ellis, who took over the U.S. team last spring.

The players, many of whom played for Sundhage, were keeping perspective on the match.

“It’s just another game for us, it’s just another in the group round,” said U.S. defender Meghan Klingenberg. “We’re not looking at it as the ‘Group of Death’ or the easiest group, or whatever it is. We’re just looking at it as a game we have to win because we want to be on the podium at the end of this tournament.”

Some things to watch as the tournament gets underway:

THE SHOW MUST GO ON: The women’s game and the World Cup have not really been touched all that much by the scandal rocking FIFA, the sport’s international governing body.

The only telltale sign of its impact came when FIFA Secretary General Jerome Valcke withdrew from the tournament’s opening news conference in Vancouver. He was replaced by Tatjana Haenni,

FIFA’s deputy director of the competitions division and head of women’s soccer.

At the news conference, Canadian Soccer Association President Victor Montagliani was asked if there were any improprieties associated with Canada’s bid for the event — a reflection of the corruption allegations facing FIFA as a whole.

The question was a bit amusing because Canada was the only country that bid. Zimbabwe withdrew.

“I actually think that it’s a positive thing that the first tournament after whatever happened last week is the Women’s World Cup. Because women’s football is a very pure form of football. And I think women’s football can shine some light in the dark clouds that are hanging over the game,” Montagliani said.

ASSESSING THE UNITED STATES: There have been mixed reviews of the U.S. team in the matches leading up to the World Cup, starting with an uncharacteristic loss to France in Lorient in February and ending with a listless 0-0 draw against South Korea in New Jersey last Saturday.

The players themselves say they are unconcerned, trusting a process. “Everybody, don’t freak

out,” forward Abby Wambach said. “We’re going to be fine.”

TURF WARS: The event is the first senior World Cup, for the men or women, to be held on artificial turf.

That hasn’t gone over well with many players, who believe that artificial turf exacerbates injuries and changes the way the ball moves.

Wambach led a group of players who filed a legal challenge last fall, alleging gender discrimination — because the men’s World Cup is always played on real grass. The players withdrew their action earlier this year when it became clear it wouldn’t be considered before the event.

All six stadiums and 18 practice fields in Canada are outfitted with fake turf.

GOAL LINE TECHNOLOGY: This is the first Women’s World Cup that will use goal-line technology aimed at taking the guesswork out of the ref’s hands when it comes to those critical goal/not-goal questions.

The Hawk-Eye system trains seven cameras on each goal. If there’s a score, a signal is transmitted to a watch worn by each match official.

Goal-line technology was also used in the men’s World Cup last

year in Brazil. That system was provided by the German company GoalControl.

So what spurred technology’s intrusion into the Beautiful Game? The 2010 World Cup. A shot by England’s Frank Lampard in the second round against Germany was clearly over the line, but disallowed. That goal would have tied it 2-2. Instead Germany won 4-1.

SAYING GOODBYE: Several stars have announced that this will be their final World Cup, including Japan’s Homare Sawa, who is playing in her sixth — a record among women and men.

German goalkeeper Nadine Angerer also said she is retiring after this year. And Wambach will likely to hang up her cleats — although she may stick around for the 2016 Olympics.

“We have stars like Alex Morgan and Sydney Leroux and Megan Rapinoe who are going to continue on for many years on this team. And hopefully I’m going to be riding out off into the sunset with a World Cup championship,” Wambach said. “For me it would be an amazing thing to be able to leave this team on a high note and know that it’s in good hands with those players.”

MLB

Amphibious pitcher makes debut

Venditte becomes first pitcher in 20 years to pitch with both arms in MLB game

By HOWARD ULMAN
Associated Press

BOSTON — Pat Venditte took his warmup pitches in his major league debut with his right arm. And his left.

The ambidextrous pitcher entered the game against the Boston Red Sox at the start of the seventh inning after being called up Friday by the Oakland Athletics.

Wearing a specially designed glove, he threw warmup pitches with his right hand then switched to his left to face lefty Brock Holt.

After Holt grounded out to first, Venditte put his glove on his left hand and pitched to righty Hanley Ramirez, who singled on the second pitch. Then, still pitching with his right arm, he got righty Mike Napoli to ground into an inning-ending double play.

Fans may stare when Venditte switches his glove from one hand to the other, but the Athletics promoted him because he pitched very well this season at Triple-A Nashville.

“There’s a little bit of a sideshow to it for good reason,” Melvin said. “But the reason he’s here is because he’s performed.”

Venditte took the mound to the song “Both Sides, Now,” performed by Joni Mitchell.



AP Photo/Charles Krupa
In this two image combination, Oakland Athletics relief pitcher Pat Venditte (29) delivers with his left and right hand to separate Boston Red Sox batters during the seventh inning at Fenway Park in Boston, Friday..

In 17 outings this season, 16 in relief, Venditte was 1-0 with a 1.36 ERA and held opponents to a .167 batting average. In eight minor league seasons, the first seven in the New York Yankees organization, he has a 2.37 ERA with 52 saves and nine starts.

The last time a pitcher threw with both hands in a major league game was on Sept. 28, 1995, when Greg Harris did it with the Montreal Expos. It was the next-to-last game of a career in which he appeared in 703, and he is the only pitcher in the modern era to do that.

In other moves, the Athletics optioned right-hander Dan Otero to Nashville and moved Coco Crisp to the 60-day disabled list with a neck

injury.

Oakland catcher Stephen Vogt faced Venditte in the minors about five years ago.

“It’s a sight to see and he’s very good both ways,” Vogt said. “When we signed him I was excited because I want to see what it’s like to catch a guy like that. He’s kind of got the same stuff from both sides. So whether it’s a right-handed hitter or a left-handed hitter, you call the game accordingly. It’s fun to see.”

Venditte has the matchup edge, throwing left-handed to lefties and right-handed to righties, except when he’s facing a switch-hitter. In that case, the rule states he must decide which arm he’s throwing with and the batter adjusts to that. He rarely, if

Fan badly injured at Fenway

BOSTON (AP) — The Athletics and Red Sox came to a stop while a woman was treated for life-threatening injuries after she was struck by a broken bat that flew into the stands.

Concerned players watched. The crowd went quiet.

Everything that followed meant little Friday night — Oakland’s Pat Venditte becoming the first pitcher in 20 years to throw with both arms in the same game, Wade Miley pitching impressively for Boston, the Red Sox beating the Athletics 4-2.

“Any time anybody’s taken off the field on a stretcher you have your fingers crossed,” Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. “You realize that that’s a lot more important than a baseball game.”

With one out in the top of the second inning, Oakland’s Brett Lawrie’s bat broke on his groundout to second and flew into the stands between home plate and third base. Medical personnel rushed to the box seat where the woman, whose head was bloodied, was sitting. There’s no netting in front of the seats in that area.

Josh Reddick finished the inning with another groundout to second.

Then, with Mookie Betts waiting to lead off the bottom of the second for Boston, play was delayed for several minutes while the woman was treated, placed on a stretcher and wheeled away for more treatment.

“I heard her,” Betts said. “I

looked around, saw some blood and looked away.”

Boston police spokesman David Estrada confirmed the bat hit the fan and said her injuries were life threatening. She was taken to Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

“There was just some bad luck,” Lawrie said. “There’s really no time (for fans) to react behind the dish. ... Unfortunately, everything’s so close behind there.

“Hopefully, everything’s all right,” he added.

Dustin Pedroia had three hits for Boston, which led 3-0 after four innings and ended Oakland’s four-game winning streak.

Miley (5-5) allowed an RBI single to Marc Canha in the fifth, but Boston made it 4-1 on a run-scoring single by Brock Holt in the bottom of the inning off Scott Kazmir (2-4).

“He’s settled in to the type of pitcher he was for three years in Arizona,” before Boston traded for him before this season, Red Sox manager John Farrell said. “Take away the first three, four starts of the season and he’s gotten back to attacking the strike zone down.”

Lawrie led off the seventh with his fifth homer of the year.

Miley allowed two runs on six hits in 7 1-3 innings. Junichi Tazawa got the last two outs in the eighth and Koji Uehara escaped a second-and-third jam in the ninth for his 12th save in 14 opportunities.