

Nyquist not the buzziest of favorites for Kentucky Derby

BETH HARRIS
AP Racing Writer

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Go ahead and pity Kentucky Derby favorite Nyquist. He has the unenviable task of following in the hoof prints of Triple Crown champion American Pharoah, and so far isn't getting the respect expected for the only undefeated horse in the race.

Nyquist heads into the Run for the Roses on Saturday at Churchill Downs as the early 3-1 favorite in a full field of 20 horses. Deservedly so, based on a resume that includes being a champion at age two, victories at four different tracks in the East and West, and an ability to overcome all sorts of obstacles in his races.

Still, Nyquist isn't the buzziest of horses. Heck, even his owner J. Paul Reddam said that as a fan he'd bet against his horse. Handicappers and racing fans haven't been talking up the bay colt named for Detroit Red Wings player Gustav Nyquist (Reddam is a fan) either.

Nyquist has won his seven races, including four prestigious Grade 1s, by a combined 15 lengths — an average of just over two lengths. He rarely does more than he needs to and nothing dazzling. He tends to drift out in the stretch, which could indicate the distance he's run is about as far as he wants to go. He doesn't even have any markings — no blaze on his head, no white stockings on his feet.

His sire, Uncle Mo, was a juvenile champion and the 2011 Derby favorite scratched the day before the race with an illness. Nyquist is one of his three offspring in the race, but nobody knows if Uncle Mo's first crop of foals can run the classic distance of 1 1/4 miles because there is no proven pedigree.

Yet Nyquist has a supporter in Bob Baffert, the Hall of Fame trainer who guided American Pharoah.

"He does it workmanlike, but he does it fast. When you're fast and you stay out of trouble in a 20-horse field, that's a big edge," Baffert said. "He's got the heart, and



Exercise rider Jonny Garcia rides Kentucky Derby hopeful Nyquist during a workout Tuesday at Churchill Downs.

a horse with heart will go further than they're supposed to go."

In a year of can-you-top-a-Triple-Crown winner, Nyquist has already done so financially. He's earned a record \$3,322,600, including a \$1 million bonus for winning the Florida Derby in his last race.

None of the doubt deters Doug O'Neill, who trains Nyquist.

"I'm optimistic we're going to win," he said. "He's definitely shown us that he's going to run a big race."

O'Neill reached the Derby winner's circle in 2012 with I'll Have Another, who went on to win the Preakness Stakes. The colt was scratched the day before the Belmont Stakes because of a career-ending tendon injury, dashing the sport's hope of a Triple Crown winner.

"It took a few minutes of being depressed and feeling sorry for yourself, but it quickly jumped into how amazing it was to win the Derby and the Preakness," he recalled.

O'Neill was dogged by controversy throughout the Triple Crown series that year for past medication violations. He served a suspension after the Belmont as punishment for one of his other

horses testing positive for a higher than allowed limit of a drug. In 2014, O'Neill was forced to sit out the Breeders'

Cup world championships under that event's "convicted trainer rule."

He is eager to put the past

at rest when asked about his rough ride four years ago, saying, "I'm not going to go there."

O'Neill credits Nyquist for creating a positive vibe around the Southern California-based trainer's barn.

"Having a horse like Nyquist has given us an opportunity to really show everyone how we're here to serve the horses and see the love and care given to the horses," he said. "He's been a gift in many ways."

Besides O'Neill and Reddam, jockey Mario Gutierrez is along for the ride again, all having learned valuable lessons four years ago.

"We found out that time that we had success doing what we'd been doing all along," O'Neill said. "It worked, so we're just doing that again — same patterns, same style. We just want to stay on course. That's what's going to work. We know that now."

Baffert is back to saddle 12-1 shot Mor Spirit in

pursuit of his fifth Derby victory and second in a row. He won in 1997 and '98 with Silver Charm and Real Quiet.

"I just hope I have a horse to root for turning for home," he said.

Steve Asmussen, Chad Brown and Todd Pletcher are taking aim with two horses each. Asmussen has Creator and Gun Runner, both co-third choices at 10-1; Brown has My Man Sam and Shagaf, a pair of 20-1 shots; and Pletcher has Destin and Outwork, both listed at 15-1.

Exaggerator is the early 8-1 second choice, trained by Keith Desormeaux and ridden by his younger brother Kent.

Trainer Dale Romans, who is 0-for-6 in his hometown race, saddles 12-1 shot Brody's Cause, saying the stakes-winning colt has done everything he needs to make it to the winner's circle.

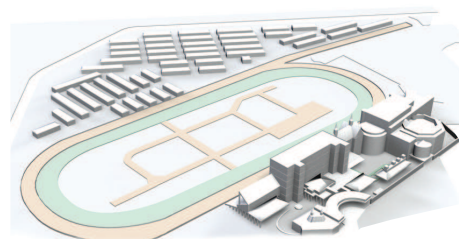
Clearly so has Nyquist.

"Hopefully this year we'll have an American Pharoah-type of journey," O'Neill said.

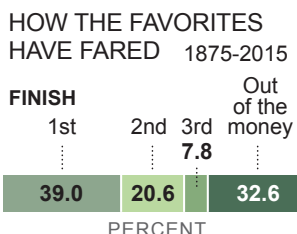
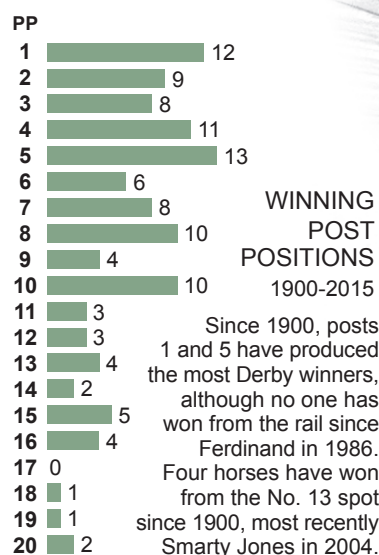
142ND RUNNING OF THE KENTUCKY DERBY

Coming up roses

A year after American Pharoah began his run to horse racing's first Triple Crown in 37 years in the Kentucky Derby, here comes undefeated Nyquist. Last year's 2-year-old champion, out of post 13, has established himself as the favorite for the Derby, bringing a 7-0 career record into Churchill Downs.



CHURCHILL DOWNS
Louisville, Ky.
Post time 6:34 p.m. EDT



THE FIELD

Post position, horse, trainer/jockey and opening odds:

POST	Horse	Trainer/Jockey	Odds
1	Trojan Nation	P. Gallagher/A. Gryder	50-1
2	Suddenbreakingnews	D. Von Hemel/L. Quinonez	20-1
3	Creator	S. Asmussen/R. Santana, Jr.	10-1
4	Mo Tom	T. Amoss/C. Lanerie	20-1
5	Gun Runner	S. Asmussen/F. Geroux	10-1
6	My Man Sam	C. Brown/I. Ortiz, Jr.	20-1
7	Oscar Nominated	M. Maker/J. Leparoux	50-1
8	Lani	M. Matsunaga/Y. Take	30-1
9	Destin	P. Pletcher/J. Castellano	15-1
10	Whitmore	R. Moquett/V. Espinoza	20-1
11	Exaggerator	Keith Desormeaux/K. Desormeaux	8-1
12	Tom's Ready	D. Stewart/B. Hernandez, Jr.	30-1
13	Nyquist	D. O'Neill/M. Gutierrez	3-1
14	Mohaymen	K. McLaughlin/J. Alvarado	10-1
15	Outwork	T. Pletcher/J. Velazquez	15-1
16	Shagaf	C. Brown/J. Rosario	20-1
17	Mor Spirit	B. Baffert/G. Stevens	12-1
18	Majesto	G. Delgado/E. Jaramillo	30-1
19	Brody's Cause	D. Romans/L. Saez	12-1
20	Dancing Candy	C. Sise, Jr./M. Smith	15-1

NOTE: Shown are post numbers. Program numbers may not be the same if horses are scratched.

Cathryn Sophia wins Kentucky Oaks

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Cathryn Sophia took charge entering the stretch and rolled to victory Friday in the 142nd Kentucky Oaks Friday at Churchill Downs. Cathryn Sophia found

her opening at the top of the stretch, overtook the fading Lewis Bay and pulled away to beat Land Over Sea.

It was trainer John Servis and jockey Javier Castellano's first Oaks win.

Triple Crown winner American Pharoah thriving in new home

By RICHARD ROSENBLATT
AP Racing Writer

VERSAILLES, Ky. — American Pharoah is led out of his stone palace of a barn, head up, eyes alert, a little heavier these days but still pretty well sculpted. In a few minutes, the champion will be walked over to the breeding shed, a mere 50 yards away. By now, the Triple Crown winner has the routine down pat.

No more early morning workouts under the watchful eyes of trainer Bob Baffert. No Victor Espinoza asking the big bay for every ounce of energy over 11 grueling races in 17 months. No more huge media crowds around him, or cameras clicking away at his every move. No more parades at Churchill Downs or Santa Anita Park.

Welcome to paradise, also known as Coolmore Ashford Stud, a magnificent 2,000 acre empire in the heart of Bluegrass country. This is home to racing's first Triple Crown winner in 37 years, a luxurious resort for the first horse to win the Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont Stakes since Affirmed in 1978, and just the 12th in history.

Nyquist trainer Doug O'Neill is well aware that more fans are paying attention.

"They now have heard a lot about horse racing in the last year, year and a half and that's a credit to Pharoah," he said, "and hopefully Nyquist can carry the torch farther."

At Ashford, mares are carrying the torch for American Pharoah. Two days after winning the Breeders' Cup Classic in his final race at nearby Keeneland on Nov. 1, he arrived at his new home to much fanfare. When the breeding season started in mid-February, Pharoah was ready, willing and able. Since then, he's covered about 100 mares, and could double that amount by



In this photo taken April 21 Triple Crown winner American Pharoah stands with a handler at Coolmore's Ashford Stud farm in Versailles, Ky.

the end of the season in June. He commands a stud fee of \$200,000.

One thing hasn't changed.

"He's still as sweet and cuddly as he's always been," owner Ahmed Zayat said after a recent visit with American Pharoah. "He has taken to his new role like he did to the racetrack."

Here's a look at what's up with American Pharoah:

BABY BOOM

Breeding sessions are scheduled in the morning, afternoon and evening. There are 14 stallions at Ashford — 13 active, plus Thunder Gulch — and American Pharoah has shown he's a quick learner.

"He's a pro in the breeding shed," stallion manager Richard Barry said. "Everything has gone smoothly."

His first date was Untouched Talent, a broodmare who produced Bodemeister, a Zayat-owned horse who finished second in the 2012 Derby. She is expected to deliver Pharoah's first foal sometime in January.

Zayat has seen the breeding process.

"He's a champ, so nice. The girls love him," Zayat said. "He's as fertile as you can get at this point. Up to now, we've bred nine and they are all in foal, all pregnant.

He's enjoying life. His condition is unreal and his coat shines."

If American Pharoah covers 175 mares in his first season — at \$200,000 each — he would bring in \$35 million for Coolmore, which bought breeding rights from Zayat last year. In his racing career, Pharoah earned \$8.6 million.

DAILY ROUTINE

When he first arrived at Ashford, American Pharoah was given a camp buddy, 1995 Derby winner Thunder Gulch. The thinking was an older, more experienced stallion would show the new kid the ropes of retirement. A little over five months later, "he's just one of the

boys now," said Barry, "and has settled in to the same routine as all the other stallions."

"Thunder Gulch was an important part of that process and helped American Pharoah to settle but now that he has got the hang of everything Thunder Gulch's work is done," he added.

Currently, American Pharoah shares the same barn as Munnings, Giant's Causeway, Competitive Edge and Verrazano. It's the closest barn to the breeding shed.

As for his daily routine, it's not complicated. Breeding in the morning, out in the paddock afterward, then lunch. Back to the breeding shed, to the paddock, dinner, and then they are bedded down for the night. However, if a horse is "particularly busy," Barry said, there's an evening breeding session.

"Horses are creatures of habit and like a routine," Barry explained.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

Zayat has been back and forth to Churchill Downs in the past week, but won't be at the Derby. He says he'll be home in New Jersey with his family. He was in Louisville to celebrate the opening of the American Pharoah exhibit at the Kentucky Derby Museum.

Baffert is in the thick of the Derby again with Mor Spirit. The four-time Derby winner is far from the center of attention, but he's been signing autographs all week on the backstretch. He and his wife, Jill, and their son Bode visited Pharoah this week, and also showed up at the Derby museum.

Espinoza, meanwhile, picked up the ride aboard Whitmore for the Derby. He had not ridden in many Derby prep races, but was a last-minute replacement for Irad Ortiz, Jr., who will be riding My Man Sam. He, too, visited American Pharoah this week.