

Derby winner Country House out of Preakness due to illness

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**
Associated Press

After being declared the winner of the Kentucky Derby by disqualification, Country House will not run in the Preakness because of illness, ending any chance of a Triple Crown this year.

Trainer Bill Mott said Tuesday the long shot winner of horse racing’s biggest event was no longer being considered to run in the second jewel of the Triple Crown after it looked like Country House was getting sick. After the horse started coughing, which Mott called unusual, blood work showed he was harboring some sort of virus.

“Hopefully just rest and a little time is going to be what the doctor ordered,” Mott told The Associated Press. “Other than that, he doesn’t actually act sick. He’s kind of a big, tough horse, but there’s signs that things are not going in the right direction with him.”

Country House was elevated to the winner’s circle at the Kentucky Derby in sloppy conditions Saturday after Maximum Security was disqualified for impeding other horses. His



In this May 4, 2019, file photo, Flavien Prat on Country House reacts after the 145th running of the Kentucky Derby horse race at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Ky.

absence at the Preakness means there won’t be a third Triple Crown winner in five years. Bob Baffert-trained Justify and American Pharoah have each won it since 2015.

Country Horse is the first Kentucky Derby winner not

to enter the Preakness since Grindstone in 1996. Grindstone, who was found to have bone chips in one of his knees, was the first Derby winner to be retired immediately after that race since Bubbling Over in 1926.

Because of how the Ken-

tucky Derby went, Mott said he and those around the horse were not as disappointed by this as they would’ve been under normal circumstances.

“I guess it’s been an unusual ride anyway,” Mott said of his first Derby vic-

tory. “I don’t think it hit any of us as hard as what it might have. I think we’re grateful to have the win we had and hopefully he bounces back for some races later on.”

Country House joins Maximum Security in skipping the Preakness.

The 1 3/16-mile Preakness is May 18 at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore. Though shorter than the Kentucky Derby, the race requires a quick turnaround. Maximum Security owner Gary West didn’t want to burden his colt with the Triple Crown off the table.

West on Monday appealed the decision to disqualify the horse from the Derby, which was quickly rejected by the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission because the stewards’ decision isn’t subject to appeal.

Country House was 65-1 to win the Derby, the second-longest odds in the 145-year history of the race. It was the first time the horse who crossed the finish line first was not declared the winner.

With trainer Mark Casse’s War of Will and other contenders expected to enter the Preakness, Country House likely would

not have been favored to win. Even his Derby performance was a surprise.

“I thought he showed amazing improvement from his previous race,” Mott said. “Even his running, he was up in the race, he looked like a different horse the first half of the race.”

In a statement, the Maryland Jockey Club and the Stronach Group that owns Pimlico said Country House not running “doesn’t take away from the excitement” and that they anticipate more interest from owners and trainers to enter the race.

While the stakes barn behind Pimlico will not have a Derby champion for the first time in more than two decades, Mott said Country House is a possibility to run in the third jewel of the Triple Crown, the Belmont Stakes in New York on June 8.

Keeping him out of the Preakness, though, was a no-brainer for the 65-year-old trainer.

“I’ve never liked training a horse that’s given an indication that he’s sick,” Mott said. “We will monitor him and he’s off the training list.”

NFL concussion fund pays out \$485 million, but legal fights resume

By **MARYCLAIRE DALE**
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — The NFL concussion fund has paid out nearly \$500 million in its first two years, but some players’ lawyers say there aren’t enough doctors in the approved network to evaluate dementia claims.

They went to court Tuesday to oppose a rule to require retired players to be tested by doctors within 150 miles of home to prevent “doctor shopping” and sus-

pected fraud.

Fund administrator Orran Brown said ex-players from around the country had flocked to four doctors now dismissed from the program who had “high-volume” traffic and some suspect findings.

“We didn’t notice it until the claims were coming in,” Brown said. “Forty-six million dollars went out the door on these claims before we could flag it.”

Retired players can seek awards of as much as \$3 million for moderate

dementia and \$1.5 million for mild dementia, although most men would get far less based on their age and years in the league.

The settlement resolves thousands of lawsuits that alleged the NFL long hid what it knew about the risk of concussions.

Senior U.S. District Judge Anita Brody, who has overseen the case since 2011, suggested the travel limit is needed to prevent abuse.

“A few were brought to my attention where we had

a lawyer from Pennsylvania and a player from Florida going to a doctor in Texas. And that was a red flag,” Brody said.

Philadelphia lawyer Gene Locks, who represents some 1,100 retired players, urged Brody not to adopt the rule, saying his clients agreed to the settlement believing they could choose their own doctors.

“They had bad experiences with the NFL benefit program, both during their playing time and after their playing time, when they felt

they were used and abused, and were not going to the doctors they wanted to,” Locks argued.

He said there are at least 30 different subspecialties of neurology, only a few of them well-suited to evaluate his clients.

Brown acknowledged he’s still trying to recruit doctors in some parts of the country for the program. He suggested Brody adopt the 150-mile rule but allow him to grant exceptions. The fund, expected to pay out more than \$1 billion over

65 years, has paid out \$485 million so far, and another \$174 million in claims have been approved, Brown said.

The NFL has appealed about 30% of the approved claims, but closer to 15% if the four doctors removed from the program aren’t counted, according to players lawyer David Buchanan.

“If somebody wants to travel to see a world-renowned physician, or a world-renowned neuropsychiatrist, they should have that right,” Buchanan said.

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