

Belmont Stakes 2020 Analysis

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PP	Horse	Trainer/Jockey
1	Tap It to Win	Mark Casse/John Velazquez
2	Sole Volante	Patrick Biancone/Luca Panici
3	Max Player	Linda Rice/Joel Rosario
4	Modernist	William Mott/Junior Alvarado
5	Farmington Road	Todd Pletcher/Javier Castellano
6	Fore Left	Doug O'Neill/Jose Ortiz
7	Jungle Runner	Steven Asmussen/Reylu Gutierrez
8	Tiz the Law	Barclay Tagg/Manuel Franco
9	Dr Post	Todd Pletcher/Irad Ortiz, Jr.
10	Pneumatic	Steven Asmussen/Ricardo Santana, Jr.

In a year unlike any other, the Triple Crown has been turned on its head with our historically longest and final race now the shortest and first leg of the trio of classics. While not unprecedented in the history of the Belmont Stakes (having had five different distances in its history, much more than the two distances the Kentucky Derby has been run at, though short of the seven different distances of the Preakness), the Test of the Champion feels a bit less at nine furlongs compared to the tradition twelve. Due to Belmont Park's unusual size, what is usually a lap around the track at most North American venues, this 1 1/8 mi race will be an elongated sprint, coming out of the chute, down the backstretch, and then around just one turn before turning down the long homestretch. Yet, do not plan on speed winning out – last year's fall meet at Belmont had it even across running styles.

Turning to this year's card, a field of ten lines up for the first leg of this year's Triple Crown. Though not the full field that many suspected, after many defects of the top three year-olds over the last few weeks changed the face of this series, we do have a good field, headlined by the Florida Derby winner and morning line favorite Tiz the Law. Seventeen years ago, these same connections tried their hands at the Belmont Stakes (and the Triple Crown) with Funny Cide; now they look to win the race that eluded them on that day. But his test will not be easy – as last out winners Tap It to Win, Sole Volante, Max Player, Fore Left, and Dr Post will all be trying to make it back-to-back. Speaking of Tap It to Win, his trainer Mark Casse came away with this race just a year ago with Sir Winston – he looks to make it two straight, and his third American Classic in three years.

And with that, let us take a look at the contenders on the next two pages!

1



Tap It to Win

Trainer:
Mark Casse

Jockey:
John Velazquez

6/1

Coming out of a 1 1/16 mi allowance over the Belmont one-turn course, this lightly raced Casse trainee is one that loves to take the lead and never look back. A sharp runner, he took his prep just gate to wire without even being tested. A no doubt winner last out, Tap It to Win has grown well since his two-year-old season. After two well beaten races in Kentucky to finish up his inaugural season, his first start of the year going sprinting was just what he needed. Now he tries to wheel a Belmont Stakes win off no stakes starts in 2020, which is quite a difficult task. Nonetheless, John Velazquez stays aboard and looks to capture his third Belmont. His pedigree screams a Classic winner – sired by Tapit out of a Medaglia d'Oro mare – which gives him a big push up here.

2



Sole Volante

Trainer:
Patrick Biancone

Jockey:
Luca Panici

9/2

It is not often we see top class horses come back on ten-days rest any more in the US, but here we are with this son of Karakontie. Last out at Gulfstream Park, Sole Volante came from way back to catch the leaders, including early Derby choice Ete Indian, and closed with class and purpose. Between his starts in the Tampa Bay Derby and Sam F. Davis, both times needing a lot of urging to get going, he cruised through this one turn mile as if he just wanted to run. His step up a furlong could matter, but as long as it is around one-turn, he is going to be a major threat. Sticking with Luca Panici seems to be the best option, as he always gets the top work out of him. His current form cycle puts him peaking in this race. He will be a major player here.

3



Max Player

Trainer:
Linda Rice

Jockey:
Joel Rosario

15/1

Sporting the colors of one of my favorite Belmont Stakes winners of all time – Ruler On Ice – this George & Lori Hall runner is coming off a long layoff to try and contend here. Last time out, Max Player was coming from behind to sweep by and capture the Withers on what looked to be a very testing from behind. While not at all a strong field, his win showed a lot of grit and determination. His figures put him in a decent spot, and he has been training sensationally in the mornings. A win here by him would not surprise me at all, but I do think he needs a race before this.

4



Modernist

Trainer:
William Mott

Jockey:
Junior Alvarado

15/1

Coming out of Louisiana, the Risen Star winner and 3rd place finisher in the Louisiana Derby is Bill Mott's chance to win here. Possibly targeting the Ohio Derby, Mott changed course and decided to try his hand at Belmont Park. But perhaps the Thistledown feature might have been a better choice. He struggled to get on in the Risen Star and took over the lead and cleared a tiring group late. Then in the Louisiana Derby he never moved an inch down the lane, looking exhausted late. I am just not sure this race sets up for him. He does have a very sharp workout in his belt coming in, but I am not sold.

5



Farmington Road

Trainer:
Todd Pletcher

Jockey:
Javier Castellano

15/1

Pletcher's first of two in this one, Farmington Road comes out of a very flat Arkansas Derby attempt. He was well beaten by Nadal and King Guillermo, showing almost no move. His prep in the Oaklawn Stakes was lost at the start but did show some promise rallying from way back. Nothing in his form is showing that he is a contender for this one.

6



Fore Left

Trainer:
Doug O'Neill

Jockey:
Jose Ortiz

30/1

I am somewhat shocked by the 30/1 figure on the Doug O'Neill trainee, who looked excellent in winning the UAE 2,000 Guineas. While we have no idea what he would have done in the UAE Derby, which looked to be his next target, he cruised on gate to wire in the one-turn mile affair. I was extremely impressed by his gate speed and his late cruising speed was one to remember. While he did get distracted down the stretch, I would not worry too much about that here. While the layoff may be too much to overcome, he is still worth a long look, at the very least for the exotics.

7



Jungle Runner

Trainer:
Steven Asmussen

Jockey:
Reylu Gutierrez

50/1

This is an intriguing starter for Asmussen. He has not shown much at all racing against lesser in most of his starts, outside of his maiden breaking Remington Park score and the Clever Trevor – though neither race was overly impressive. Since stepping up, he has not been able to compete at the top level, beaten a combined 62 lengths in his last three. Pass.

8



Tiz the Law

Trainer:
Barclay Tagg

Jockey:
Manuel Franco

6/5

Now we get to the favorite – Tiz the Law. A son of Constitution, the Florida Derby winner comes in off great speed figures and back to back wins. His Florida Derby win was by far one of the best wins for a three-year-old this season. He can be a good breaker when he wants to and has the form cycle to take this. His worktab has been sub-optimal since that Florida Derby win, however, which does worry me. Nonetheless, the last time he was at Big Sandy, he took the one-turn Champagne Stakes with ease and looks to do so again. A deserving favorite off his last two efforts, he will be fighting down the stretch. One to watch the whole way around.

9



Dr Post

Trainer:
Todd Pletcher

Jockey:
Irado Ortiz, Jr.

5/1

Pletcher brings his second chance in off a big step up in company, coming out of the Unbridled Stakes at Gulfstream Park. A maiden breaker in his first start on the year, he poses a huge challenge for anyone in this group. Last out he sat patient the whole way around before fighting down the stretch, squeezing in between horses, and then finishing with a bump and run. Still young, he looks to have a lot of promise and is nothing to balk at. I do think he wants to go longer than this, but the long stretch at Belmont Park should aid him in the stretch out. Watch out!

10



Pneumatic

Trainer:
Steven Asmussen

Jockey:
Ricardo Santana, Jr.

8/1

The better of the two Asmussen runners, the third-place finisher in the Matt Winn looked to have the win down the stretch last out before coming up with just shorter strides than his foes Maxfield and Ny Traffic. Lucky for him, neither of them are here, but he still has nine others to contend with. For me, he seems better suited elsewhere, as his finishing ability is just a tad too short for this, but nonetheless one to watch. His current training cycle suits well for him, with a nice bullet workout earlier this month before a tuning just days before the race – the same thing Asmussen did prior to his last start.

Selections

Winner: (1) Tap It to Win

His last few have been building up to this race superbly. Casse waited till May to get a run under him on the year, which I thought was perfect for this. He came out of a live non-winners of one race down at Gulfstream Park before flashing early speed and never looking back last out at Belmont. Personally, I do not see another runner that can go with him early – and he is the type to grab the lead and not let go. I am ready for him to impress.

Hit the Board: (9) Dr Post

Maybe I am living too much on his last race, but his ability to battle and push away in the Unbridled Stakes last out showed me a toughness that I do not see in any other runner. He was able to catch an alright pace up front and push his way to the wire in a short stretch. He should relish the extra distance. He is progressing nicely in his last two and should be sitting on a big one.

Longshot: (3) Max Player

While probably needs another run before being a contender, that does not mean that he cannot be prominently finishing. He is primed to be gaining ground throughout and tracking the stalkers – positioning himself for a one run to the finish. While probably not on the pace of the winner, he should be able to pick off some horses to grab a spot.

Of course, I would not ignore Tiz the Law or Sole Volante in any bets – both pose a challenge in this field. But I am not quite on board with either as a win contender and I do think that Dr Post offers a bit more value and better chance of hitting the board behind Tap It to Win (or possibly even winning the race as well).

The Belmont Stakes is always a race where anything can happen, even when its shorter and much earlier than its other Classic counterparts. Even with the changes, it is still the Test of Champions and the start to the much awaited (and delayed) 2020 Triple Crown.