



# It's Magic

George's annual Derby musings  
and predictions – 2018



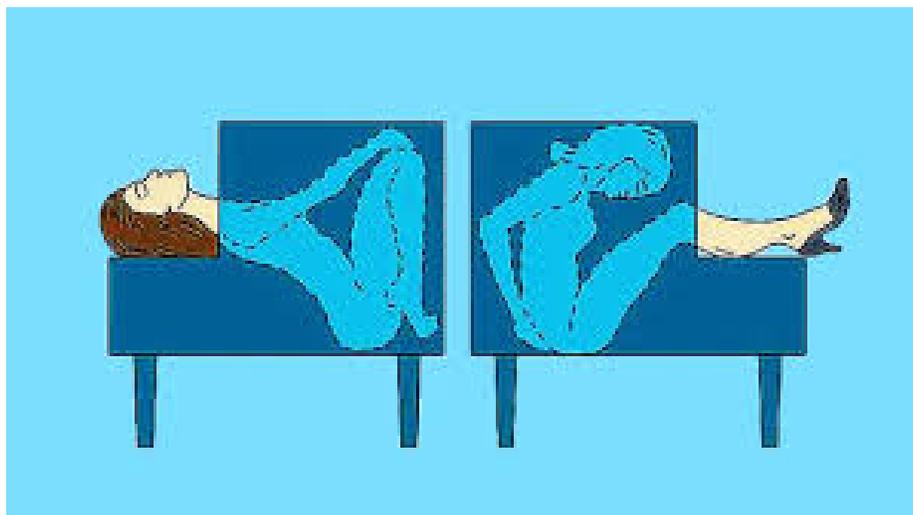
---

It's almost May 5, 2018. Everyone, especially magicians, will enjoy this year's Kentucky Derby because it will be won by *Good Magic*, last year's two year old champion. This is the strongest Derby field I have seen in years. In the next few pages, we'll look at the top contenders and, for those of you who are new to picking horses, I'll explain a bit about speed figures.

Most interesting is Mendelssohn, the foreign invader who cost \$3 million as a yearling. I'll spend a little extra time on him, and his three billionaire owners, longtime partners who don't balk at taking a "small" flutter on a young horse. If Mendelssohn overcomes all of the difficulties foreign horses usually face in the Derby, he could win it. I believe in Good Magic, but Mendelssohn on a best day could win the roses.

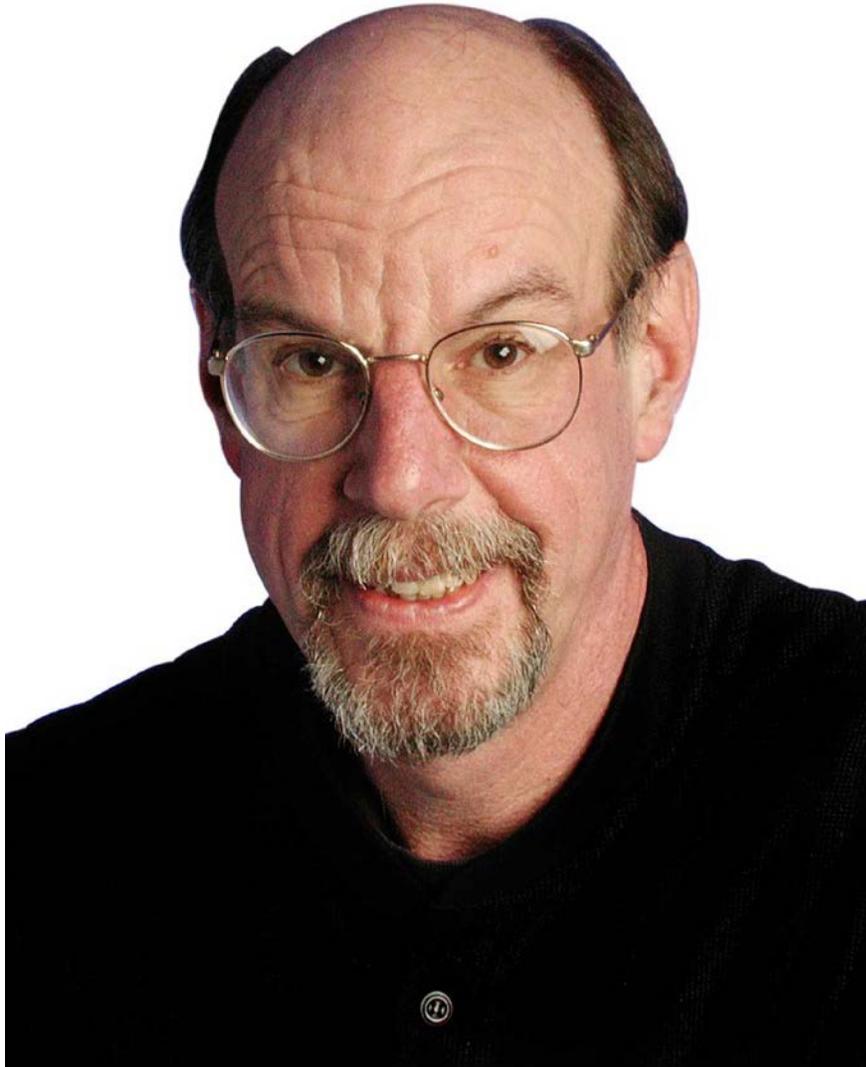
---

Speaking of magic, have you ever wondered how to saw a woman in half? I consulted the late Carnac. Here's how they do it. It takes two women.



## The Magic of Speed Figures

It's not really magic, but it seemed like that back in the 1970s when Andy Beyer, a sharp and irreverent guy from Harvard, decided there had to be a better way to pick the fastest horse than the way people had been doing it for the last 100 years.



The traditional way would compare the horse's time to the track record. A horse who ran 1/5 of a second slower than the track record would get a 99. Two fifths slower was a 98; three fifths slower a 97, etc. So, if a horse got a 98 at a world class track like Saratoga, and a 98 at Podunk Downs, who would you bet? Of course, you would want the Saratoga winner. His 98 at Saratoga had to be better than the 98 from Podunk. Even more complicated, if a horse got his 98 on a day when all the horses were running fast – maybe the dirt was packed extra hard after a rainstorm -- that 98 might not mean as much as a 98 on a slower day.

With the help of a friend who was a math major, and after cutting a lot of Harvard classes, Andy Beyer became the Isaac Newton of horse betting. Instead of just measuring raw times against the track record, he created

the more useful concept of “normalized” speed figures. In theory, a horse who earns a 98 Beyer speed figure at Saratoga would earn a 98 Beyer speed figure at Podunk Downs if he ever ran there. That was the goal. Adjust the speed figure to take into account all of the variables such as fast track or slow track and disregard the track record altogether.

For the horse summaries in this year's post, we will use Andy's figures that appear each day in the Daily Racing Form.



## Good Magic

**Trainer:** Chad Brown  
**Jockey:** Jose Ortiz  
**Earnings:** \$1,855,000  
**Cost as a yearling:** \$1,000,000  
**Sire:** Curlin (\$150,000 stud fee)

**Best 2 yr. speed:** 100  
**Best 3 yr. speed:** 95  
**Best 3 yr. old race:** The Blue Grass (1<sup>st</sup>) / April 7

---

He's the two year old champ and won the richest two year old race last fall, the Breeders Cup Juvenile. Winning the Juvenile has actually been a curse for the Derby six months later. Out of 34 Breeders Cup Juvenile winners, only two have come back to win the Kentucky Derby. Maybe the precocious two year old star hasn't continued to grow as fast as later bloomers, or maybe it was just too much effort at too young an age? The early odds on Good Magic are 12-1, which is so good for us believers.

Good Magic ran 3 times as a two year old, and capped his season with a 100 speed figure in the Juvenile. Should we be worried that his best speed figure this year is only a 95? Not at all. In fact, I am very optimistic that his clever trainer, Chad Brown, has Good Magic sitting on a career best effort. Chad Brown is a master at getting horses to peak at just the right time. The two starts this year, an 89 progressing to a 95, set him up perfectly. I believe he will improve last year's 100 significantly because his works since the Bluegrass are spectacular and horses usually progress from 2 to 3 due to the extra growth.

**Trainer:** Todd Pletcher  
**Jockey:** J.J. Castellano  
**Earnings:** \$882,920  
**Cost as a yearling:** \$500,000  
**Sire:** Into Mischief  
 (\$100,000 stud fee)

**Best 2 yr. speed:** 84  
**Best 3 yr. speed:** 99  
**Best 3 yr. old race:** Florida Derby (1st)  
 / March 31



## Audible

One of four Todd Pletcher entries in this year's Derby. (Others are Vino Rosso, Magnum Moon, and Noble Indy). Pletcher has so many owners, he does this every year. Audible's win in the Florida Derby was without any real challenge, except for Hofburg who came running at the end. Tough choice for jockey John Velasquez. Who to ride - Audible, or Vino Rosso, the horse he rode to victory in the Wood Memorial? He stuck with Vino Rosso (page 10) but I think that is because he gets more rides during the year from the owner of that one. Audible has won 4 in a row out of 5 starts, and is 8:1 in the morning line.

## Hofburg



**Trainer:** Bill Mott  
**Audible Jockey:** Irad Ortiz, Jr.  
**Earnings:** \$227,950  
**Cost as a yearling:** \$300,000  
**Sire:** Tapit (\$300,000 stud fee)

**Best 2 yr. speed:** 60  
**Best 3 yr. speed:** 94  
**Best 3 yr. old race:** Florida Derby (2nd)  
 / March 31

Only one win from 3 starts, and speed figures are not spectacular. Usual jockey, Jose Ortiz, abandons him to ride Good Magic (but brother Irad picks up the mount, and they are each very talented). Hofburg's best finish is a second in the Florida Derby behind Audible, who earned a 99. Hofburg's 94 is so-so. Am I crazy? Probably, but here's what I like. This year's Kentucky Derby is loaded with horses who have lots of early speed. They will be charging together and looking each other in the eye, draining emotional energy from each other. Hofburg will give up early ground but, if he can weave through traffic, his considerable late kick may get him into the money. Veteran trainer Bill Mott is patient. It is not Bill Mott's style to enter lightly raced horses, so why, why, unless very confident. 20-1 in the Morning Line. Don't quit the day job.



## Justify

**Trainer:** Bob Baffert

**Jockey:** Mike Smith

**Earnings:** \$666,000

**Cost as a yearling:** \$500,000

**Sire:** Scat Daddy (\$30,000 stud fee)

**Best 2 yr. speed:** No figures. Did not run at 2

**Best 3 yr. speed:** 107

**Best 3 yr. old race:** Santa Anita Derby (1st) / April 7

*Only 1 horse has won the Derby without any racing as a two year old. That was Apollo in 1882.*

Justify did not run as a two year old. But oh what a year he has had in 2018 as a 3 year old. Three starts, and each a coronation with winning margins totaling 19 lengths. His Santa Anita Derby speed figure (107) is the highest in the field, and it was effortless. For connections, you just don't get better than trainer Bob Baffert and jockey Mike Smith. He's the 3-1 Favorite in the Morning Line.

So is he another Apollo? We just don't know if he will be tough enough to get dirt in his face and jostle with 19 others on that run to the first turn in the Derby, or if he will take to the Churchill Downs surface, having only run at Santa Anita. Could he get caught in a fast starting duel and wear himself out? Bottom line, I'm not fighting history and expecting him to be the next Apollo. If he ends up winning and if he proves himself to be the superhorse he seems to be after just three races as a three year old, I'll happily order double portions of fried crow, a repast we handicappers get used to after a while.



## Bolt d'Oro

Trainer: Mick Ruis  
Jockey: Victor Espinoza  
Earnings: \$1,016,000  
Cost as a yearling: \$630,000  
Sire: Medaglia d'Oro (\$250,000 stud fee)

Best 2 yr. speed: 103  
Best 3 yr. speed: 102  
Best 3 yr. old race: Santa Anita Derby (2<sup>nd</sup>) / April 7

There will be sceptics, simply because he finished second to potential superstar Justify in the Santa Anita Derby on April 7. Bolt d'Oro had a bit of trouble in the Santa Anita Derby, and the Santa Anita track was very favorable to horses who could get the lead first. So it was perfect for Justify. I think Bolt d'Oro is much better than his second place to Justify. He is a very honest horse who does not quit trying. His jockey, Victor Espinoza, has won three Derbies, with mounts on Derby/Preakness winner California Chrome, Triple Crown winner American Pharoah, and War Emblem. Non-celebrity Trainer, Mick Ruis, says he has brought a suitcase full of cash.

You rarely see BRIS speed figures like this: 103 (age 2) and 102 (age 3) in the final prep. You also don't usually see a horse these days who runs hard as a two year old and is still competitive. Last year he had three straight wins and went into the Breeders Cup Juvenile as the favorite. He finished a disappointing third to Good Magic, but he had a horrible wide post position (#11) and bobbed at the start. **He is better than the 8:1 Morning Line odds. He is my second choice.**



## Mendelssohn

Trainer: Aidan O'Brien  
 Jockey: Ryan Moore  
 Earnings: \$1,961,092  
 Cost as a yearling: \$3,000,000  
 Sire: Scat Daddy  
 Best 2 yr. speed: 86  
 Best 3 yr. speed: 106 (estimate)  
 Best 3 yr. old race: UAE Derby (1<sup>st</sup>) in  
 Dubai / March 31

### Did I save the best for last?

**Horses that ship in from overseas have it tough in the Derby:** new feed because FDA regulations won't let them bring in their own feed, a long plane trip, quarantine, new surroundings and, for Mendelssohn, some concern that his jockey pushed him unnecessarily in his last race when he **won by 18 & 1/2 widening lengths**. His trainer, Irishman Aidan O'Brien, is the winningest trainer in Europe, entrusted with the most expensive horses by the world's wealthiest owners. Jockey Ryan Moore is very good (overseas) and you don't want to switch riders, but I do wish Mendelssohn had an American jock with more experience at Churchill Downs.

Let's first have some fun and discuss the owners, three fabulously wealthy guys, Michael Tabor, Derrick Smith, and John Magnier, with residences including Barbados, Monaco and, of course, the Isle of Man, (because who likes to pay taxes)? They are billionaires who gamble bigtime, on currencies, hotels, you name it, and horses. **They are owners of the most famous stud farm in the world, Coolmore Stud**, with operations in Tipperary, Kentucky, and Australia.



**John Magnier**, a drop-out at 15 when his father died, married into the family of Vincent O'Brien, then the most famous horse trainer in Europe. Magnier partnered with Robert Sangster, owner of the Vernon Pools, the betting pool for football (soccer) in the UK. With a special fondness for Northern Dancer offspring, they bought some of the best US horses at incredible prices and took them to Ireland, where they have become the foundation sires for the best horses running in Europe today. The value of Coolmore has been estimated at \$4 billion.



Currently standing at the Kentucky division of Coolmore Stud is American Pharoah, winner of the Triple Crown in 2016 and considered by many to have the perfect stride in a racing horse. His two year olds will race in 2020.

**Common denominators for the Coolmore partners: it's best to own the house, and you don't need to be born rich to get rich.**



*Michael Tabor*

Years ago, **Michael Tabor** (born Taboroski), son of a Russian immigrant glassmaker in East London, considered being a hairdresser, but thought twice. He then went to work as a bookmaker, which is legal in the UK, a jurisdiction where you can bet on anything, including who will be the next pope and who will win the presidency in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Like his partners Smith and Magnier, he just has the type of mind that can figure odds, precisely, and stay on the winning side. Tabor borrowed £30,000 and parlayed that into his first fortune by buying and selling 114 bookie shops in the UK. If he has ever made a bad investment, I don't know about it. He even wins at the races. (My hero.)

**Derrick Smith** got his start with international bookmaker Ladbrokes. After learning that business and how to figure the odds, his skills easily transported to trading currencies for staggering amounts and property development. He has more than 4% of Mitchells and Butler, owner of 1,700 restaurants and pubs in the UK with 44,000 employees.



Derrick Smith now owns the biggest house in Barbados. I like his boat, the Calypso, which cost \$50 million.



John Magnier, who developed Coolmore Stud into what it is today, could be considered the most influential person in worldwide racing, along with Sheikh Mahktoum, the ruler of Dubai and owner of Darley Stud, a primary competitor with Coolmore for world's best breeding farm. He has vast holdings in addition to Coolmore. For fun, Magnier was a 29% owner of Manchester United (top UK soccer team) until he sold it in 2005 to a billionaire buddy.

**Not bad for a 15 year old dropout.**

---

<sup>1</sup> For Pope, there are 5 Cardinals with succession odds of about 7:1, and our Sean O'Mally is 14:1. Donald Trump is 7/4 for 2020; Bernie Sanders, Kamala Harris and Mike Pence are each about 10:1; Elizabeth Warren is 16:1.

## What about Mendelssohn, and why is he so special?

For starters, **he runs on dirt as well as turf**. Many horses can't handle both. Exceptional ones can. His European owners first put him on grass, because European racing is almost all grass racing. At the age of two, he won a million dollar race on the grass, the Breeders Cup Juvenile Turf. (This is not as prestigious as the Juvenile dirt stakes, won by Good Magic on the same program.) After a rest, they prepped him in Ireland and then jetted to the Dubai Racing Festival. On March 29, he raced on dirt for the first time for a \$2 Million purse and simply shamed the field, scampering away by 18 & ½ lengths. He is another superstar in the making, regardless of what he does in the Derby.

**He ships well.** Last year's Breeders Cup win was in DelMar, California. Get out your map. That is a long trip, even by jet. Travelling does not seem to bother him. Some horses freak out, but he is a globe trotter, having won now in California, Ireland, England and Dubai.

**He's fast, but does not have an official 3 year old speed figure to prove it.** Why no speed figure? They only create speed figures in the US. Overseas they judge horses by the quality of the opponents, which is called Class handicapping. Beyer has extrapolated a Speed Figure for Mendelssohn, based on older US horses who ran in Dubai on March 31. The Beyer estimate is that Mendelssohn earned a 106, just one tick below Justify's 107.

## Honorable Mentions

<b>Trainer:</b>	<b>Todd Pletcher</b>
<b>Jockey:</b>	<b>John Velasquez</b>
<b>Earnings:</b>	<b>\$620,500</b>
<b>Cost as a yearling:</b>	<b>\$410,000</b>
<b>Sire:</b>	<b>Curlin (\$150,000 stud fee)</b>
<b>Best 2 yr. speed:</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Best 3 yr. speed:</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Best 3 yr. old race:</b>	<b>Wood Memorial (1st) / April 7</b>

Vino Rosso



He will not be in the first flight, but will be coming at the end. His sire Curlin was a horse of the year whose stud fee is \$150,000! Curlin is also the sire of Good Magic. It's a plus that jockey John Velasquez selects him over Audible, but that may also be because he rides more horses for Mike Repole, a New York co-owner who has been very loyal to Velasquez and trainer Pletcher. The biggest handicap for Vino Rosso is that he is the favorite of the New York "wise guys," alleged smart money handicappers who are invariably wrong in the Derby. He is 12-1 in Morning Line.



## Magnum Moon

**Trainer:** Todd Pletcher  
**Jockey:** Luis Saez  
**Earnings:** \$1,177,800  
**Cost as a yearling:** \$75,000  
**Sire:** Malibu Moon  
(\$75,000 stud fee)

**Best 2 yr. speed:** No figures. Did not run at 2  
**Best 3 yr. speed:** 98  
**Best 3 yr. old race:** Arkansas Derby (1st) / April 14

Magnum Moon is 4 for 4, with his last race a breezing win in the \$1 million Arkansas Derby. Such a great horse, and it took 10 pages to get to him? The only knock is that he never started as a two year old, presenting the same dilemma as with Justify: two undefeated colts whose only knock is that they started their racing careers late. I just have to side with history and say No to Magnum Moon. Every Derby winner since Apollo in 1882 has run as a two year old, at least once.

## So who do I like?

- At 12-1 or even close to that, it's Good Magic for win and show.
- For a long shot to finish in the money, it's Hofburg at 20-1.
- If you must play trifectas, exactas, superfectas, and other tickets to the poor house, mix up Good Magic and Hofburg with the other live ones in this order: Bolt d'Oro, Audible, Justify, Mendelssohn, Vino Rosso and Magnum Moon.

## Enjoy the two minutes.

Win or lose, the Kentucky Derby is magic. The strong field promises that this will be the best Kentucky Derby in years.



Be sure to enjoy yourself, and may there be good magic every day for you.

**George Chimento**  
May 4, 2018