

## PA DERBY COULD DECIDE 3YO CHAMPIONSHIP

In assessing the current state of the three-year old division, one has to wonder exactly how significant the G1 Pennsylvania Derby will be come late September. The answer could well be – very. Let's take a look at where things currently stand entering the summer season and the major races left for the leaders in racing's glamour division.

Although the spring Triple Crown prep season and the following classics produced no clear cut leader, it's not hard to make the argument that Always Dreaming would be declared champion if the vote was taken today. The Kentucky Derby winner always gets a few extra "bonus" points for winning America's most important race and the Bodemeister colt also has a win in the G1 Florida Derby, but his lead would have to be considered tenuous. He performed poorly in the Preakness and has since taken time off to freshen himself for the important races still to come. Cloud Computing took the Preakness, winning a stirring stretch battle with last year's two year-old champion Classic Empire after sitting a perfect trip behind two dueling front runners. Tapwrit followed with a win in the Belmont Stakes,

So what remains? The last big race of the year is the Breeders Cup Classic. Having grown and matured during the course of the year, the three year-olds are now able to race on even terms with their older counterparts and a win during championship weekend at DelMar would prove significant when the votes begin to get cast. But a victory by any horse other than Arrogate in the Classic seems unlikely. The magnificent grey racing for Bob Baffert is clearly the top race horse on the planet. So that leaves us with the Haskell, the Jim Dandy, the Travers and finally, the Pennsylvania Derby.

It is entirely possible that the first three of those races will produce three different winners. No horse will run in all three and to win two of them against rivals that appear quite evenly matched would be a significant accomplishment. So it seems likely the major players battling for the 3YO championship will arrive at Parx on September 23rd with a Grade 1 prize in play. If one of those major players should land in the Parx winner's circle late that Saturday afternoon that one final, important victory could very well be the win that garners the votes needed to be named three year-old champion for 2017.

The G1 Cotillion is likely to attract the star of the three year-old filly division, Unique Bella. The dynamic Tapit filly was dominant in the early part of 2017. A powerful victory in the G3 Santa Ynez Stakes and then back to back G2 wins in the Santa Ysabel and Las Virgennes put her at the top of the class. A shin issue forced her to miss the G1 Santa Anita Oaks and the G1 Kentucky Oaks. Trainer Jerry Hollendorfer, who won the 2016 Cotillion with champion filly Songbird has already expressed interest in the Cotillion as a means to ready Unique Bella for the Breeders Cup. Her star power will most certainly make the Cotillion a must-see event once again.

The G3 Gallant Bob continues to attract some of the top sprinters in the 3YO division. Another strong field in 2017 could well move the bar higher and bring the race Grade 2 status for 2018.