

PA DERBY OFFERS \$1 MILLION OPPORTUNITY

Blessed with another Triple Crown winner this season in Justify, and knowing that at year's end his career would move to the breeding shed, racing fans across America were anxiously awaiting news regarding the undefeated colt's final series of races before the ride was over. When the initial news came from the Justify camp that he was dealing with an ankle problem, most of those close to the game who know how it's played expected the worst. And indeed those fears were realized when the dreaded word "retirement" finally came down. A meteoric rise to stardom, a racing career that lasted all of 111 days, a sweep of the spring Classics to become a Triple Crown champion would become his full and final resume. And now, for the others, opportunity knocks.

While his departure leaves a great void in the 3YO division and racing in general, what it does do is create tremendous opportunity for any number of talented young horses to add prestigious wins to their records and of course, the accompanying cash that goes along with a major trip to the winners circle. The heir apparent is most certainly last year's 2YO champion, Good Magic. The Curlin colt may go down in history with his name alongside the likes of Sham and Alydar, outstanding horses in their own right, but born into a crop that included a racing superstar. Big things were expected of Good Magic after the brilliance he displayed in winning the Breeders Cup Juvenile last November, but that was months before Justify's big blip first appeared on our radar screens. While a top three year-olds accomplishments are largely measured by his record at Churchill, Pimlico and Belmont, when looked at closely, what Good Magic has done this year cannot be undersold. He won the G2 Blue Grass Stakes, a major prep on the way to Kentucky. No one was beating Justify that first Saturday in May, but Good Magic ran huge, running a terrific second and then going all out in the Preakness, trading blows with the champ for 14 of 15 rounds, before finally succumbing, but in truth, finishing a mere one length behind. And now, rested after the taxing spring campaign, returning to the races with a thoroughly convincing victory in the G1 Haskell to remind us of indeed how talented he is. Having won the race just 2 years ago with Connect, trainer Chad Brown may find the G1 Pennsylvania Derby, its \$1 million purse and bonus money in play, too hard to pass up and bring his horse to Bensalem September 22nd.

Hofburg is another colt with the ability to answer that knock of opportunity. By all measure, his campaign thus far for Hall of Fame trainer Bill Mott has been an unusual one. Mott is widely regarded as a trainer who takes his time with young horses, opting to watch them grow, mature, develop and improve as the racing season progresses. Impressed enough by his early looks at the son of leading sire, Tapit, Mott sent Hofburg to the G1 Florida Derby having raced just twice in his career, a fourth in his lone start as a 2YO at Saratoga and a maiden special weight win in his 3YO debut at Gulfstream. No one was very surprised when Hofburg finished as runner-up behind a sharp performance from Audible, clearly "justifying" Mott's confidence in his inexperienced colt. A "better-than-it-looked" seventh place finish in the Kentucky Derby and third in the Belmont would follow, before a recent victory in the Curlin Stakes at Saratoga produced a 100 on the Beyer scale, making him one of only a handful of 3YO's to reach a triple digit Beyer this year. Mott is also no stranger to the Pennsylvania Derby, winning here twice (Rock and Roll – 1998 and To Honor and Serve – 2011).

The G1 \$1million Cotillion Stakes has hosted the eventual 3YO filly champion four of the last six years. (Abel Tasman – 2017; Songbird – 2016; Untapable – 2014; Questing – 2012). There is little doubt the division's championship has already been decided having been dominated by the magnificent filly, Monomoy Girl. Red hot trainer Brad Cox has already stated that the Cotillion is clearly on his radar, a final prep before the Breeders Cup Distaff at Churchill Downs. Having lost only once as a 2YO – a neck in the G2 Golden Rod Stakes – the Tapizar filly has been simply unbeatable as a 3YO. After opening her 2018 campaign with a win in the G2 Rachel Alexandra at the Fair Grounds in February, she has now run off four consecutive Grade 1 wins. A five and a half length romp in the Ashland, holding off the terrific Wonder Gadot, who then went on to beat the boys in the Queen's Plate at Woodbine and is now scheduled to run in the Travers, in the Kentucky Oaks, and then dominating wins in the Acorn and Coaching Club American Oaks. She's as versatile as she is good. She rallied from last to win the Rachel Alexandra and she went wire to wire to win the Ashland and CCA Oaks. Her career record now shows 8 wins from 9 starts, only a neck from being undefeated, with earnings of \$1,660,750.

The Cotillion could take on dynamic proportions if trainer Mark Casse were to bring Wonder Gadot. He has already stated that his goal for Wonder Gadot is a rematch with Monomoy Girl and a chance to possibly steal the 3YO filly championship in the process. A daughter of Medaglia D'Oro, Wonder Gadot, was Canada's champion 2YO filly of 2017. Her win against the boys in the Queen's Plate was her second over her male rivals, besting them again in the Prince of Wales Stakes, giving her two legs of the Canadian Triple Crown. The divisional championship clearly goes through Monomoy Girl and any chance of winning would require beating her head-to-head. There's a perfect opportunity to do so right here at Parx on September 22nd.