



News brought to you by

INHBPAA

Indiana Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association



Brockton George Could Be Sleeper In Indiana Derby At Indiana Grand Racing & Casino

Story & Photos By Jennie Rees, Eclipse Award-winning freelance writer



SHELBYVILLE, Ind. (Friday, July 14, 2017) — Don't tell trainer Kenny McPeek that he's swinging for the fences by running Brockton George in Saturday night's \$500,000 Indiana Derby. To hear the ever-confident McPeek lay out his thinking, running in Indiana Grand's signature stakes is more like a well-timed bunt.

Never mind that Brockton George hasn't raced in 7 1/2 months. And that was only his second start, coming in a mile maiden race on grass at Churchill Downs. McPeek has always been extremely high on the colt, a son of the late Harlan's Holiday, with whom the trainer won the 2002 Florida Derby and Blue Grass Stakes.

"I don't agree," he said when it was suggested he was going for some serious power-hitting in this spot. "There's one top horse in the race. Irap's a good horse, no question, but he broke his maiden in the Blue Grass. Good horses will handle any jump. That's not the problem. The problem is that the horse unfortunately had a little setback in January. When it happened, it was like, 'Darn, there goes my best 3-year-old.' He's easily the most talented."

McPeek took Golden Ticket — whose only prior victory was a maiden race — off a four-month layoff to win Saratoga's prestigious 2012 Travers Stakes in a dead heat. Repent hadn't raced in almost five months in 2002 when he lost the Travers by a neck. That same year, McPeek captured the Belmont with 70-1 Sarava, which remains the highest odds ever for a winner of the Triple Crown finale.

"I just wasn't interested in running him in a \$40,000 allowance at Ellis," the Kentucky-based McPeek said of Brockton George. "It's not that far to go, up the road. I mean, even if he runs third or fourth, you're cash-flowing for the owner. To me, it's a no-brainer. I studied the race, all the probables. If he has the kind of talent we think he has, then he's in the mix. If he jumps up and surprises, it wouldn't surprise me at all. You have to hope that a horse like Irap has run hard all spring and into summer, and he could take a step back, too. If that happens, maybe the fresh horse does win. But fitness is not a problem."

Brockton George's setback was a stress fracture of the tibia that simply required time off to heal. He has uncorked some impressive works at Churchill Downs preparing for his return. "And could have done it easier," McPeek said. "He gets a little bit bored once he gets past horses. He pulls up a little bit. 'OK, I got by him, no problem.' Extremely handsome horse, too.

"He hasn't missed a beat since he came back. A real athlete, anyway. I don't think there's any doubts he's a stakes horse or I wouldn't be trying this. If I had a \$75,000 or \$100,000 to run him in and the timing was similar, I'd probably go there. But I didn't see anything else."

McPeek also trains Senior Investment, Keeneland's Coolmore Lexington winner who was third in the Preakness, for Paul Fireman's Fern Circle Stables. "I can say this, because it's the same owner," he said. "This is a better horse than Senior Investment."

Fleming on the road again

If it's July, that's Darren Fleming is on the road. Fleming is one of trainer Steve Asmussen's chief assistants. The past two weeks he's gone from his normal Lone Star Park base, where he goes after Oaklawn Park's winter meet, to Prairie Meadows (where the barn won the Iowa Derby with Hence), to Ellis Park, to Churchill Downs to bring Untrapped to the Indiana Derby. Sunday he'll return Untrapped to Churchill Downs and then go back to Ellis Park. At some point he'll get back to finish up the Lone Star meet, then on to Remington Park.

Fleming said overseeing only one horse is like a vacation. And he likes what he's seeing in Untrapped, who was third in the Grade 3 Ohio Derby in his first start since finishing 12th in the Kentucky Derby. Untrapped started off his Derby campaign with a second in the Fair Grounds' Grade 3 Lecomte and Grade 2 Risen Star and third in Oaklawn's Grade 2 Rebel. That was followed by a sixth, though beaten only by a total of five lengths, in the Arkansas Derby, after which a one-race experiment with blinkers was abandoned. "He's looks really good," Fleming said. "I had him all winter at Oaklawn. He looks like he's grown and matured since I saw him in April. He just needs a breakthrough. He's run hard all year. He deserves one."

Watch Me Whip also seeking breakthrough performance

Watch Me Whip was a late addition to the Indiana Derby as trainer Dale Romans wanted wait until the last minute to see how the Smart Strike colt was doing. Watch Me Whip was second in a 1 1/16-mile allowance race won by Indiana Derby contender Awesome Saturday by three lengths.

Watch Me Whip long has been held in high regard by his barn, then went out and won his April 14 debut in impressive style. Ambitiously placed in a stakes race at Pimlico on the Preakness undercard, he encountered some trouble and wound up eighth.

"You're only 3 once and only get to run in these Derbys one time in a horse's life," Romans said. "I really think he's a talented horse that just needs that breakthrough race to get to the highest level. And I think it's coming."

He agrees that is true with much of this field, adding, "I like that horse that beat us in the allowance race. That was a very competitive, tough race. But with another race under his belt, fourth race in his career, he should be getting better and better. If he can get back to the (handicapping) number he ran in his first race, then I think we're looking at big things."

Romans admits "throwing him to the wolves" a little bit in the Pimlico stakes. "It was hot and humid, second start of his life, and he just didn't perform," he said. "But he came back and ran well with the second in the allowance race and I think now he's ready to step on up."

Romans, owner Albaugh Family Stables and jockey Robby Albarado ran into Indiana Derby favorite Irap in Keeneland's Blue Grass Stakes, finishing fourth to that horse with Gotham winner J Boys Echo.

"He's a good horse, a really good horse," Romans said of Irap, who also won the Ohio Derby. "He's definitely the class of the field and horse to beat. It's his race to lose."

The 15th season of Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing continues through Saturday, Oct. 28. Racing is conducted Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 2:05 p.m. EST with Saturday racing beginning at 6:05 p.m. EST. Thursday racing will be held July 6 – Aug. 24 at 2:05 p.m. EST.

About Indiana Grand Racing & Casino: Indiana Grand Racing & Casino holds multiple awards from industry publications for customer service, entertainment, gaming and dining. Located in Shelbyville, Ind., Indiana Grand features 2,200 of the latest slots and electronic table games in addition to a one-mile dirt race course and a seven-eighths mile turf course offering live Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing each year. Simulcast wagering is also offered year-round at Winner's Circle Brewpub & OTB located on the casino floor as well as an off-track betting facility located in Clarksville, Ind. For more information, please visit www.IndianaGrand.com.

