



THE WAIT IS OVER.

FOLLOW ALONG ON THE JOURNEY OF
AMERICAN PHAROAH
WINNING THE 2015 TRIPLE CROWN
AND MAKING...



“AMERICAN HISTORY”

STORY AND PHOTOS BY STEVE HEUERTZ (UNLESS NOTED)

He laid on the double-stall floor at Stockplace Farm, inhaling the unseasonably warm air for winter in Lexington, Kentucky. Littleprincessemma gently cleaned her newborn foal, an unremarkable but nice colt, bay or dark brown in color and the son of 2009 Kentucky Derby second place finisher, Pioneerof the Nile. It was approaching midnight on February 2, 2012, and earlier a shadow was seen in a faraway Pennsylvania town, indicating the hope of spring and only six more weeks of winter. The colt gathered his long legs, stood and took his first wobbly steps. It was impossible to know, but he represented a different hope - one that signaled there would be only three more years without a Triple Crown winner.

Ahmed Zayat bred the colt. Zayat was the former owner of the Al-Ahram Beverages Company in his native Egypt. After selling the company in 2002, he focused on a passion for horses and racing, eventually founding Zayat Stables, LLC in 2005. With the help of his son Justin as racing manager, Zayat quickly found success on the track. In their first year of competition Zayat Stables won two Grade 1 races and had two Breeders' Cup entrants. By 2007, they were the second leading owner in North America and 2008 led all owners with a total of 116 wins from 740 starters and earnings of \$6,883,902. In 2009 Zayat's Pioneerof the Nile finished 2nd in the Kentucky Derby, upset by the 50-1 shot, Mine That Bird. The following year Zayat raced the likely Kentucky Derby favorite, Eskendereya until the colt was withdrawn from consideration and retired due to injury one week before the race. In 2011, Zayat again finished 2nd in the Kentucky Derby with Nehro. In 2012, he finished 2nd in all three legs of the Triple Crown with Bodemeister in the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes and Paynter in the Belmont Stakes. Paynter showed further promise in winning the Haskell Invitational but was later diagnosed with colitis and laminitis, ending his season prematurely. Despite a poor prognosis, Zayat fought to save Paynter's life, and in doing so was honored with the NTRA Moment of the Year and Secretariat Vox Populi Award. While 2012 represented the pinnacle of Zayat's career as an owner, it was his colt born at Stockplace Farm earlier that year who would define his legacy.

Photos top left to right: American Pharoah sets his sights on the Kentucky Derby; Working out for the Derby; Hot-walking back at the barn; Making the Kentucky Derby walkover; The Churchill Downs crowd awaits the start of the race; Walking on the track to the singing of "My Old Kentucky Home"; They're off in the Kentucky Derby





“KENTUCKY DERBY”



Following the birth, Littleprincessemma and her foal moved to Pretty Rum Farm before transitioning to Vinery Stud to wean the colt from his mother. By January, he moved again to Taylor Made Farm and in August was consigned to the Fasig-Tipton Saratoga Yearling Sale. After the sale had proved unfruitful, Zayat bought the son of Pioneerof the Nile back and sent him to Florida to begin training. While the young colt initially lacked physical distinction, he was soon left with an unusually short tail after one of his peers apparently bit off a part of it. Another distinction was in his name. Justin Zayat held an online contest for fans to submit names for the promising young colt. The winning selection, American Pharoah, was copied directly from the email entry and submitted to the Jockey Club without recognition that "Pharaoh" was misspelled. Despite a short tail and misspelled name, American Pharoah graduated from Florida and transferred to the California-based barn of his new trainer, Bob Baffert.

The choice made sense. Baffert and Zayat shared a history with Pioneerof the Nile, Bodemeister and Paynter and the relationship even inspired Bodemeister to be named after the trainer's son, Bode. Baffert was also one of the best trainers of his generation, already enshrined in the Hall of Fame and completely adept at preparing talented horses for the rigors of the Triple Crown. His illustrious resume included Kentucky Derby victories with Silver Charm in 1997, Real Quiet in 1998 and War Emblem in 2002. Baffert also won the Preakness five times, one with each of his three Derby winners along with Point Given in 2001 and Lookin At Lucky in 2010. Point Given was arguably the best of the bunch and despite his 5th place finish as the favorite in the 2001 Kentucky Derby, he followed up the disappointing result with victories in the Preakness and Belmont Stakes. While it was possible Baffert would never train another horse as talented as Point Given, it apparently wasn't impossible.

American Pharoah demonstrated a calm and kind temperament rarely seen in young Thoroughbreds. He was playful, enjoyed people and relished the attention provided to him. He also demonstrated a smooth, gliding stride, seemingly skipping over the surface of the racetrack. Under the supervision of Baffert, American Pharoah worked with ease, expending little energy during his developing gallops and progressing each day until he was ready to debut in August of his two-year-old season.

Baffert entered him in a 6 1/2 furlong Maiden Special Weight at Del Mar on California's southern coastline. With Martin Garcia up, American Pharoah went to post as the 7-5 favorite but the usually calm colt appeared unsettled and anxiously rocked within the starting gate. While he broke quickly and grabbed 2nd, American Pharoah couldn't catch the front-running Armed, fading to 5th with no closing kick.

Despite the finish, Baffert stepped up American Pharoah for his next start in the 7 furlong Del Mar Futurity (G1). The trainer attributed his promising colt's loss to the anxiety he demonstrated before his first race and felt removing the blinkers and placing cotton in American Pharoah's ears would likely focus him. He also gave the mount to Victor Espinoza, a two-time Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner with Baffert's War Emblem in 2002 and most recently California Chrome in 2014. With Espinoza's guidance, American Pharoah calmly entered the starting gate as the second betting choice. Breaking from post 1, Espinoza immediately made for the lead, asking his charge to settle into his smooth stride while dictating pace and position. Together, they rounded the turn, extending their lead ahead of 2nd place running Calculator. Espinoza asked American Pharoah for more, and the colt responded immediately, bounding home to an impressive 4 3/4 length victory with Calculator in 2nd, another 8 1/4 lengths in front of Iron Fist.

The dominant victory encouraged Baffert to press the accelerator and enter American Pharoah back in the 1 1/16 mile FrontRunner Stakes (G1) at Santa Anita Park. Espinoza repeated the strategy and sent the overwhelming betting favorite to the lead, asking him to settle through easy fractions. Calculator tracked the leader again, this time moving to contest him sooner. Espinoza responded with a gentle shake of the reins and within a few strides, separated from Calculator. He then showed American Pharoah the whip in deep stretch to maintain his focus but had no need to use it beyond that. American Pharoah easily put away the field on his own, 3 1/4 lengths ahead of Calculator.

With two scintillating G1 victories, American Pharoah asserted himself atop the two-year-old division with his next target the \$2,000,000 Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1), also at 1 1/16 miles over the Santa Anita oval. However, already installed as the 2-1 morning line favorite, American Pharoah suffered a deep bruise to his left front foot during training and, unfortunately, scratched days before the race. Baffert acknowledged it was one of the greater disappointments he experienced in racing. Still, he knew American Pharoah might be the best two-year-old he ever trained and much bigger goals awaited in the spring.

With American Pharaoh absent, the Breeders' Cup Juvenile saw Texas Red defeat the remaining but talented field by 6 1/2 lengths. The result was somewhat surprising as just seven weeks earlier Texas Red finished 3rd in his final prep for the Breeders' Cup - the FrontRunner Stakes - where he was 4 3/4 lengths behind American Pharoah.

Despite the premature end to his season, American Pharoah was voted Champion Two-Year-Old Male and would enter his three-year-old season as one of the early favorites for the Kentucky Derby.

Opposite page left to right from top: Dortmund sets the Derby pace; Winning the 141st running of the Kentucky Derby; Returning as the newest Derby winner; Draped in a garland of roses; Under the twin spires; American Pharoah's exercise rider, Georgie Alvarez, and groom, Eduardo Luna hug after the Derby win; The beautiful smell of Kentucky Derby roses; Bob Baffert and his son Bode each holds up four fingers, one for each of Baffert's Derby victories; The connections celebrate the win on the first Saturday in May

Baffert gave his champion a break over the winter, letting him rest and heal as preparation for a campaign with lofty aspirations. While horses historically endured heavy racing schedules prior to the Triple Crown series, modern training methods focused on having a solid two-year-old foundation and limiting prep races in the hope of a peak performance in the Kentucky Derby. Although American Pharoah's two-year-old foundation was complete, Baffert had major challenges facing him. With the injury to his foot, American Pharoah needed adequate time to heal. However, this limited his winter training and subsequent options for prep races. The pressure was on Baffert to time it just right and plan a schedule with little margin for error.

The choice was made for American Pharoah to leave his home base in California for Arkansas' Oaklawn Park, where Baffert entrusted his assistant trainer Jimmy Barnes with the primary responsibility of overseeing the colt. Oaklawn Park's schedule was preferable as it offered two key preps in the



“PREAKNESS STAKES”



Rebel Stakes (G2) and Arkansas Derby (G1). Further, the Arkansas Derby was only three weeks before the Kentucky Derby, offering a shorter window between races and the potential to tighten up American Pharoah quickly.

Now fully recovered and regularly training, Baffert entered American Pharoah in the 1 1/16 mile Rebel Stakes (G2). Although yet to make his three-year-old debut, American Pharoah was the heavy race favorite. He was also gaining even more recognition as the possible Kentucky Derby favorite since Texas Red sidelined with an injury and would miss the entire Triple Crown. While the Baffert-trained Dortmund and Todd Pletcher's Carpe Diem were also gaining attention, the racing world awaited American Pharoah's Rebel start to see if he maintained the tremendous form he demonstrated as a two-year-old. Race day brought heavy rain, a sloppy track, and questions if the colt could handle the off surface.

American Pharoah broke awkwardly from post 4 but immediately sent to the lead by Espinoza. By the time they reached the first turn, American Pharoah had appeared to settle comfortably with his ears pricked forward and his smooth stride seemingly handling the sloppy track. He set reasonable fractions considering the conditions and maintained a one-length lead while rounding the far turn. By the time he hit the stretch American Pharoah had opened up from the field and under a complete hand ride, skipped through the mud, winning going away by 6 1/4 lengths. The champ was indeed back.

This page left to right from top: Steam rises from the back of American Pharoah outside the Preakness Stakes Barn; Justin Zayat and Bob Baffert discuss strategy days before the Preakness; The affectionate and people-loving, American Pharoah; Escorting the Woodlawn Vase to the Preakness winner's circle; The Preakness garland; The 140th running of the Preakness Stakes; The Preakness infield; Last minute preparations before leaving the barn and heading to the track; Circling on the track, waiting to be saddled; Focused on the Preakness; Bob and Bode Baffert make their way to the Preakness paddock

Next up was the 1 1/8 mile, \$1,000,000 Arkansas Derby (G1). With every other Kentucky Derby prep already completed and the field mostly set, the main question remaining wondered if American Pharoah would officially become the favorite on the first Saturday in May. However, Baffert had another question he was asking himself. With all four of American Pharoah's wins occurring with him in the lead, Baffert wondered if Espinoza could get the colt to rate off the pace without sacrificing his ability to win. The question was partic-



ularly important considering the large field of the Kentucky Derby looming three weeks away and the potential that American Pharoah might not make the lead in the race. As a result, the Arkansas Derby became a direct challenge from Baffert to test his colt's versatility.

American Pharoah broke well, and Espinoza urged him to early speed but held him to the outside and back of pacesetter Bridget's Big Luvy. Moving through fractions of 22.77 and 45.99, Bridget's Big Luvy opened up four lengths on American Pharoah down the backstretch, while Espinoza settled him into his familiar glide. Heading into the far turn, Espinoza gently asked American Pharoah to close the gap and without hesitation he moved into the lead. American Pharoah continued to open up on the field and accelerated through the stretch without any urging from his rider. He crossed the wire eight lengths ahead in what was the most spectacular and easy victory of his career.



By now, Baffert's plan had been executed perfectly. The colt was fully recovered and ready for the Kentucky Derby, and he demonstrated the ability to be just as effective racing off the lead as he is on it. While he was the Kentucky Derby favorite, concerns about the race itself would undoubtedly remain.

The Kentucky Derby is unique and arguably the most challenging race in America. It opens the field to 20 entrants, all of which jockey for early position. As a result, the pace is often pressed, and leaders can tire quickly. Further, at 1 1/4 miles the distance is the longest it's entrants have experienced in their career. Although a horse like American Pharoah can look dominant winning at 1 1/8 mile, it is unknown how they will handle the extra 1/8 of a mile. Finally, with a crowd reaching upwards of 170,000 people in attendance, the excessive noise and energy can be unnerving to some horses and potentially affect their performance.

The Kentucky Derby field itself was also appearing to be one of the deepest in history. While legions of fans were following the budding superstar the were



This page left to right from top: Rain begins to pour during the Preakness post parade; Taking the early lead over the sloppy Pimlico track (Photo Credit: Debra A. Roma / Daily Racing Form); Skipping through the mud to victory in the Preakness (Photo Credit: Debra A. Roma / Daily Racing Form); Returning as the 14th horse since 1978 to win both the Kentucky Derby and Preakness (Photo Credit: Debra A. Roma / Daily Racing Form); Wearing the Preakness garland (Photo Credit: Debra A. Roma / Daily Racing Form)

now calling “The Pharoah” or simply “Pharoah,” multiple horses had a legitimate shot to win the race. It also seemed the Triple Crown series in total would be highly competitive, decreasing the chances the 37 year wait would end.

On the track, Pharoah continued to impress. His gallops remained effortless, and people marveled at his magnificently smooth stride. He was a stunning example of a Thoroughbred’s grace. American Pharoah’s final workout prior to the Kentucky Derby was a five-furlong move at Churchill Downs in :58 2/5 that was the fastest of 32 at the distance. Onlookers considered it beautifully impressive, with one of the strongest and credible endorsement’s coming from Gary Young, a clocker of 35 years. Young likened American Pharoah to Michael Jordan and stated he might be the best horse he ever saw.

On the Wednesday before the race, American Pharoah drew post 18 and was installed as the 5-2 morning line favorite in the Kentucky Derby. While he would be far from potential traffic occurring near the rail, the wide post made it difficult to take the lead and increased the likelihood he would be hung wide around the turns.

The first Saturday in May brought with it beautiful weather and the largest crowd in Kentucky Derby history, totaling 170,513 in attendance. The cotton stuffed in his ears likely muffled the chorus of signing during the post parade and the roar from the crowd as American Pharoah waited in the starting gate. When the gates opened Espinoza urged Pharoah for early speed and dropped him toward the pack, finding themselves five wide from the rail the first time under the wire. The undefeated Dortmund surprisingly set the early pace with Firing Line just outside him. Rounding the clubhouse turn, American Pharoah closed into 3rd, behind and outside of both Dortmund and Firing Line. Similar to the experience gained in the Arkansas Derby, American Pharoah raced off the pace and wide through the turn and into the backstretch. Dortmund settled on the lead while posting moderate fractions of 23.24 and 47.34 with Firing Line and Pharoah right behind. The leading trio remained unchanged around the far turn with American Pharoah taking the longest trip of all, five paths wide. Firing Line moved first to strike the lead and Espinoza asked Pharoah to follow. Entering the stretch Firing Line passed Dortmund while American Pharoah widened further and Espinoza straightened him with a right-handed whip. American Pharoah corrected his path and barreled down on Firing Line, taking the lead. Dortmund was spent, unable to handle the charge yet Firing Line refused to relent. Espinoza continued to ask the champ for more, deeper than he had ever gone before. American Pharoah answered the request and surged past Firing Line, separating by one length at the wire under the shadow of the twin spires.

American Pharoah finished the Kentucky Derby in a gut-wrenching duel that found the leaders tiring greatly at the end. The final time of 2:03.02 was relatively slow for the Derby. However, considering the wide trip and extra distance travelled by American Pharoah throughout the race, the victory was a true testament to the heart and dedication of a champion, overcoming the greatest obstacle he ever faced.

With the Derby test passed, it was initially unknown how American Pharoah would respond from the first difficult race of his career. Surprisingly, the race appeared to take very little out of him, and he remained the picture of health, returning to his effortless gallops around the track.

The next move involved shipping to Baltimore where Pharoah would contest the Preakness Stakes, his third race in a mere five weeks. Now a Kentucky Derby winner, American Pharoah was greeted with even more fanfare at Pimlico, yet Baffert declined the invitation for his champion to stay in the traditional Derby winner’s stall. Instead, he opted for a more secluded stall with slightly fewer distractions and continued his ongoing assessment of the colt’s preparations for the Preakness.

Only eight horses entered the Preakness, including the surprising last second addition of American Pharoah’s former stablemate, Mr. Z, who was just sold by Zayat to Calumet Farm. Although the field was significantly smaller than the Kentucky Derby, a new concern arose when American Pharoah drew post position 1. While the Derby found Pharoah starting and racing wide, the Preakness presented the opposite and the fear of being stuck on the rail and pinched from a chance at the lead. Further, both Firing Line and Dortmund returned to challenge American Pharoah again in the hope of reversing the outcome of their fierce stretch duel in the Derby. Despite this, the Derby winner was assigned the morning line favorite at odds of 4-5.

Preakness day started beautiful and sunny with the possibility of heavy rain near race time. As the skies darkened and post neared, it appeared the predictions were right. With the call to the post also came a downpour of water, torrential in nature. The track beneath the post parade became sloppier with each step and the rain so heavy it was difficult to see. Still, there was no sign of lightning and the horses moved toward the starting gate knowing the race would go on despite the uncomfortable conditions. The rain began to ease slightly as the storm moved quickly overhead. By the time the gates opened, and American Pharoah made a quick move to grab the lead, Espinoza had to be thrilled. While the rain and it’s resulting slop were unenjoyable to many, he had the confidence in knowing American Pharoah’s floating stride would handle it just as fine as he did in the Rebel two months earlier.

With Mr. Z pressing him from the outside, American Pharoah dashed through the slop in a quick opening quarter in 22.90 before settling into a half mile in 46.49. He opened up on Mr. Z down the backstretch with Dortmund hanging in third and Firing Line well off the pace this time and near the back of the pack. Dortmund challenged Mr. Z from the outside, and the two closed in on American Pharoah as they entered the far turn. Divining Rod moved into the pack while Firing Line dropped further back and out of contention. American Pharoah pulled away again despite the challenge of Divining Rod. Dortmund and Mr. Z tired and fell further back while Divining Rod veered out, obstructing a late run by Tale of Verve. American Pharoah continued to pull away from the field, dancing through the mud. Tale of Verve navigated around Divining Rod but had no chance of catching The Pharoah. He was alone again at the wire, seven lengths in front of his nearest competitor, something he was much more used to compared to the close finish at the Derby.

Opposite page left to right from top: Baffert checks out the Belmont track the day before the race; Heading toward a Triple Crown bid; Working out the day before the Belmont Stakes; Ahmed Zayat gives his homebred a kiss after his final Belmont work; The statue of Triple Crown winner, Secretariat in the Belmont paddock; Waiting to get into to sold out Belmont Park; Support for American Pharoah was found all over Belmont Park; The eleven Triple Crown winner’s are honored in the Belmont infield; The crowd swells around the Belmont paddock; 90,000 fans packed Belmont Park; “American Pharoah”; Anticipation builds throughout the crowd; Making his way to the track and a shot at racing immortality; Awaiting the start; Breaking immediately for the lead





Again, the final time of 1:58.46 was slow for the Preakness, but the weather conditions occurring had an immediate impact on the surface of the track and nature of the race. Firing Line and Dortmund seemed to struggle greatly through the conditions while only one horse appeared unaffected. American Pharoah's victory in the Preakness was another example of his greatness exemplifying his adaptability to manage any challenge presented to him. No matter the post position, the trip or weather, he was unquestionably superior to his peer's and a worthy candidate to sweep the Triple Crown.



The next step always seemed different from the others, something almost unfair. After a horse wins both the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness Stakes, the focus immediately shifts to the Belmont Stakes in the hope of claiming the elusive crown. However, since 1978 every Triple Crown headline reminded us that Affirmed remained the last horse to win it. Since then 13 different horses attempted to follow Affirmed, with each failing to do so (one scratched prior to the race). Bob Baffert had been in this position three times himself, failing each time, once with Victor Espinoza as his jockey. Just one year earlier Espinoza found himself again bidding for the crown but again was unable to complete the feat. It appeared the Belmont Stakes always provided a hurdle too great to overcome. Often it was the grueling 1 1/2 mile distance, the short five-week schedule since the Kentucky Derby and fresh opponents who skipped either of the previous races that brought failure in the Belmont. There were also the unforeseen events of past Belmont's affecting horses such as Spectacular Bid, Big Brown, I'll Have Another and California Chrome. No matter the circumstance, the "Test of the Champion" repeatedly flunked its students.



Still, there appeared to be a method. Of the eleven Triple Crown winners, six were Champion Two-Year-Old's with each of the last five awarded the honor. Since 1978, only one of the previous 13 Triple Crown hopefuls was a Champion Two-Year-Old when Spectacular Bid attempted the feat just one year after Affirmed. Now, American Pharoah became the 14th horse to attempt a sweep of the Triple Crown, and first to do so as Two-Year-Old Champ since Spectacular Bid's failed attempt in 1979.



Instead of departing Baltimore directly for New York, Baffert shipped American Pharoah back to Churchill Downs. Baffert felt comfortable at Churchill Downs and followed a similar strategy with his previous Triple Crown contenders in the hope the environment would be less chaotic than the frenzy building at Belmont Park. Jimmy Barnes continued



“TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION”

“AND AMERICAN PHAROAH MAKES HIS RUN FOR GLORY! AS THEY COME INTO THE FINAL FURLONG, FROSTED IS 2ND WITH 1/8 OF A MILE TO GO. AMERICAN PHAROAH’S GOT A TWO-LENGTH LEAD. FROSTED IS ALL OUT. AT THE SIXTEENTH POLE, AND HERE IT IS, THE 37-YEAR WAIT IS OVER! AMERICAN PHAROAH IS FINALLY THE ONE! AMERICAN PHAROAH HAS WON THE TRIPLE CROWN!!!”

to manage Pharoah’s daily routine as Baffert returned to California, with constant updates from Barnes as to how the now dual classic winner was progressing.

The news remained promising. American Pharoah came out of the sloppy Preakness in good shape, maintaining his appetite, weight, and energy level. He returned to his regular gallops with the same ease he always demonstrated and seemed to be thriving at the calm Churchill environment. Still, many questioned Baffert’s decision to ship back to Kentucky instead of heading directly to Belmont. The fear was it caused extra travel for a horse who had now competed in three races, in three different states in just five weeks. Further, the Belmont would be his greatest test of all, at the furthest distance he would likely ever race. Lastly, critics cited the choice potentially limited Pharoah’s opportunity to become familiar with the deep, sandy and sometimes tricky Belmont track. However, if any modern trainer knew what he was doing, it was Baffert. Despite his previous Triple Crown failures, Baffert had more experience than any active trainer in what was essentially uncharted waters. At every turn, he trusted his instinct and did what he believed was best for the horse. Finally, the time came for American Pharoah to make one more trip and begin his final preparations for a bid at racing immortality.

American Pharoah arrived at Belmont Park on Monday, June 6, 2015, greeted by media and wet conditions that felt all too familiar to Baltimore. He settled into trainer John Terranova’s barn with cameras clicking at his every move. The next few days provided him an opportunity to test his smooth gallop over the



Opposite page top to bottom: Following American Pharoah; Series of next three photos: “AMERICAN PHAROAH IS FINALLY THE ONE! AMERICAN PHAROAH HAS WON THE TRIPLE CROWN!!!”

This page from top left to right: “AMERICAN PHAROAH IS FINALLY THE ONE! AMERICAN PHAROAH HAS WON THE TRIPLE CROWN!!!” Witnessing history; Hugs and smiles; Three fingers for the Triple Crown; Entering the packed Belmont winner’s circle



Belmont track. The results appeared the same as they always had; The Pharoah seemed to have no problems with “Big Sandy.”

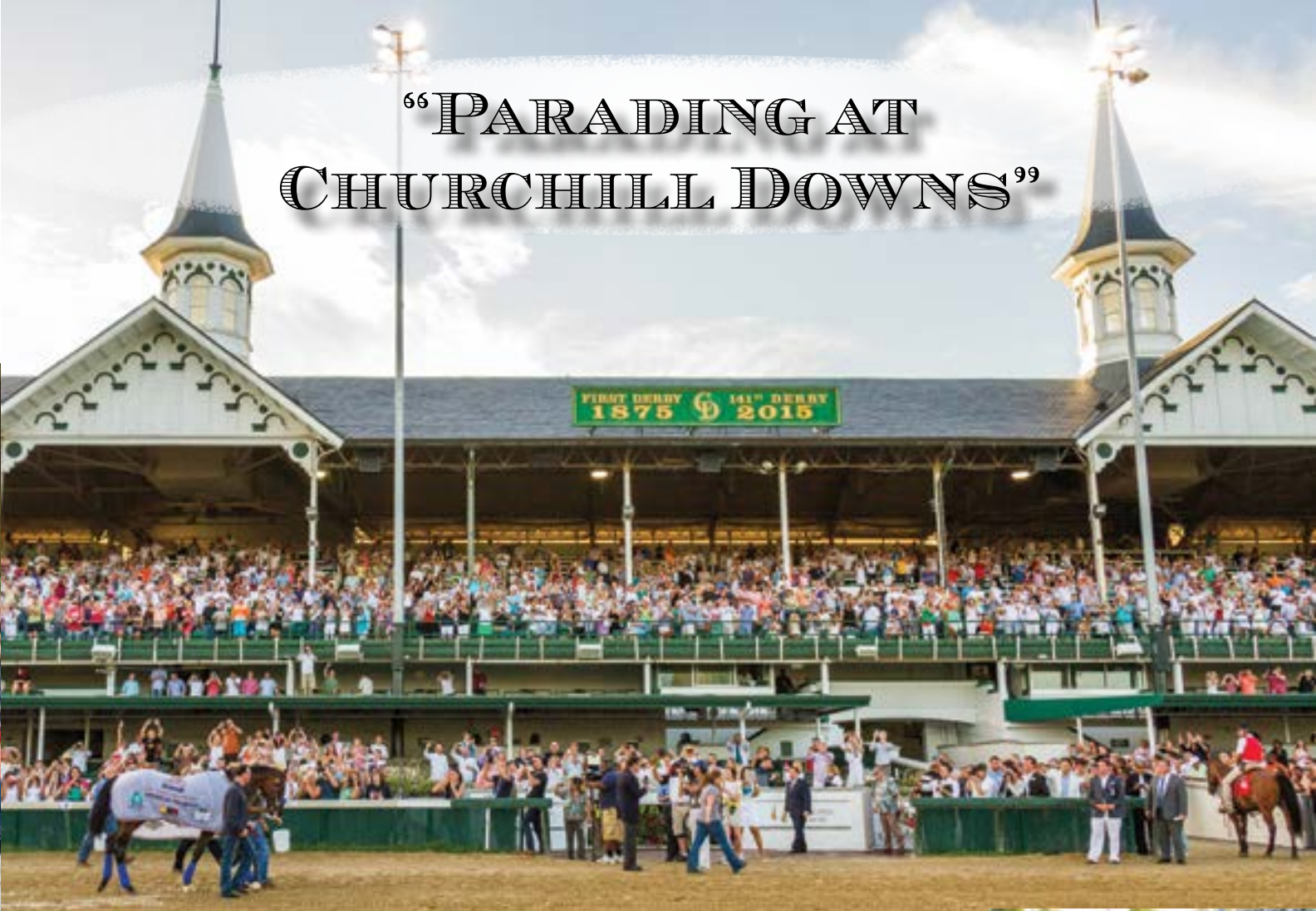
The day after he arrived, a field of eight was entered in the Belmont Stakes. It was surprisingly smaller than recent Belmont fields, but deep and talented nonetheless. American Pharoah drew post 5, listed as the 3-5 morning line favorite. Of his seven competitor’s only Madefromlucky had skipped both the Derby and Preakness, instead winning the Belmont’s prep race, the Peter Pan Stakes (G2), just four weeks earlier. Each of the other six raced in either the Derby or the Preakness and were equally fresh like Madefromlucky. American Pharoah was the only entrant in the field contesting all three races. His biggest threats appeared to be Frosted, Materiality, and Keen Ice, the respective 4th, 6th, and 7th placed finishers in the Kentucky Derby five weeks earlier.

The day of reckoning met with beautiful skies, and a sold out crowd of 90,000 in attendance. While the fantastic Belmont Stakes card served as an appetizer the electricity throughout the crowd grew with anticipation as race 11 approached. Finally, Pharoah departed the calm setting at the Terranova barn and began the walk to Belmont’s paddock.

With the regular cotton in his ears, American Pharoah curiously observed the mass of people surrounding the saddling area. The routine seemed very familiar to him. He was walked first, saddled by Baffert, and walked some more,

This page top left to right: The horse that made history; The Belmont crowd sustained a deafening roar for 15 minutes; Leaving the track as the 12th Triple Crown winner; The connections celebrate ending the 37 year Triple Crown drought; Returning to the Terranova barn; Georgie Alvarez thanks the colt after his amazing accomplishment

“PARADING AT CHURCHILL DOWNS”



before being met by his regular partner Espinoza, with a pat on the neck and a leg up into the saddle. The trumpet sounded a familiar tune, and American Pharoah turned to make a final walk through a tunnel where eleven immortals had also walked before. Upon exiting the tunnel, he was greeted with cheers and applause from the 90,000 in attendance that drowned out the sound of Frank Sinatra playing over the loud speakers. With a few more steps, American Pharoah was on the track, feeling the sandy dirt beneath his feet. Espinoza casually sat aboard, blowing bubbles with the gum he was chewing, undoubtedly replaying 2002 and 2014 in his head. The pair was met by a lead pony and outrider, escorting them through the post parade. Eventually, the rider let them go, and Pharoah and Espinoza were alone to stretch out over the track.

Only they know the words Espinoza shared with his mount as they circled back and headed for the starting gate. It was the type of moment measured by heartbeats and respiration, a time when words seemed trivial and likely went unremembered. Suddenly, there was no time left and no last final preparations needing to occur. American Pharoah loaded into post 5 and awaited the sound of a bell that would open the pathway before him.

He hesitated for a brief moment, perhaps lost in the moment surrounding him. American Pharoah quickly refocused and followed the urging of Espinoza to make the lead. Frosted followed Pharoah just to his outside while the speedy Materiality closed in from his outside post, taking 2nd from Frosted as the



This page top left to right: Parading the Triple Crown winner under the twin spires; The Triple Crown and Kentucky Derby trophies on display at Churchill Downs; Bob, Jill, and Bode Baffert watch the champ parade; Baffert's assistant trainer Jimmy Barnes walks with Pharoah inside the Churchill paddock



field entered the clubhouse turn. American Pharoah set an easy opening quarter in 24.06 with his ears pricked forward, seemingly just loping along. Materiality continued just one length back while Muhtahij and Keen Ice engaged Frosted. American Pharoah continued through a half mile in 48.83 with Materiality just behind and to his outside while Muhtahij, Keen Ice, and Frosted exchanged positions just behind the leaders. Madfromlucky waited behind Frosted as American Pharoah continued to lead through three-quarters in 1:13.41 and a mile in 1:37.99. American Pharoah entered the far turn with a moment of separation from Materiality who appeared to be tiring from the pace. Muhtahij moved from the rail and into 2nd as Frosted and Keen Ice took over Materiality. Frosted pushed past Muhtahij, but American Pharoah separated himself by two lengths as they passed the quarter pole. The rest of the field was done, with only Frosted remaining a threat as he tracked Pharoah into the stretch, and best explained by race caller, Larry Collmus:

“And American Pharoah makes his run for glory! As they come into the final furlong, Frosted is 2nd with 1/8 of a mile to go. American Pharoah’s got a two-length lead. Frosted is all out. At the sixteenth pole, and here it is, the 37-year wait is over! AMERICAN PHAROAH IS FINALLY THE ONE! AMERICAN PHAROAH HAS WON THE TRIPLE CROWN!!!”

The roar from the crowd was deafening, unlike anything many ever heard before. Victor Espinoza rode American Pharoah out through the wire, waiting to celebrate and ensuring he had the race in hand. They crossed the finish line going away, 5 1/2 lengths in front of a valiant Frosted. The final time was a sparkling 2:26.65, the sixth fastest Belmont Stakes of all time and the second fastest of any Triple Crown winner, only behind Secretariat’s world record mark. Further, American Pharoah ran the last quarter mile in 24.32, even faster than the legendary Secretariat.

The celebration had built for 37 years and finally the top blew off Belmont Park. It seemed surreal, almost impossible, yet continued to unfold in front of the 90,000 that held the roar for a duration approaching 15 minutes.

This page top left to right: Everyone wanted a glimpse of American Pharoah; Media swarmed around racing’s biggest celebrity; Circling the paddock; Pos-ing for photos; Taking in the scene; Standing in the winner’s circle; Ahmed Zayat enjoys the Triple Crown trophy; Victor Espinoza receives his Kentucky Derby trophy



Espinoza couldn't contain his exuberance, beaming with a smile and embracing the greeting outrider in a hug. American Pharoah was breathing heavy but appeared amazingly unbothered by a test many had previously failed before him. In the grandstand, Baffert fought back tears, thinking of his deceased parents and wishing they could be here. Zayat too erupted with emotion, accepting congratulations, handshakes and hugs from the many surrounding him. Back on the track, Espinoza savored the moment and paraded the newest Triple Crown Champion in front of the entire Belmont grandstand, giving every person in attendance a chance to see and honor the remarkable colt.

Amidst a sea of people, the connections made their way to winner's circle awaiting their picture to be taken, recording the moment of history. Finally, Espinoza dismounted, and American Pharoah was unsaddled, draped in a blanket that already listed him as the 12th Triple Crown winner. Ironically, the blanket misspelled the champion's name, spelling "Pharaoh" correctly.

As American Pharoah headed back to the Terranova barn, the celebration continued above the winner's circle. Zayat was first presented with the Belmont Stakes trophy, followed by another trophy, made 37 years ago and finally handed to its rightful owner. Zayat accepted the Triple Crown trophy and hoisted it high above his head before sharing it with Baffert, Espinoza and his son Justin, who repeatedly kissed it.

Back at the Terranova barn, American Pharoah settled in for a final night in New York. The following morning he awoke to media and fans still celebrating his accomplishment. He even appeared on the Today Show along with Baffert and Espinoza before boarding a plane and returning to Churchill Downs, where he met a hero's arrival.

One week later Churchill Downs paraded the Triple Crown Champion during its "Downs After Dark" race card. Around 30,000 people flocked to witness the event. Many crowded the paddock area where American Pharoah was circled, stopping occasionally to observe the amazing scene and pose for pictures. He was likely the most photographed horse in history - with people everywhere clicking the shutter and capture the moment they saw American Pharoah in person.

Back at his Churchill barn, Baffert appeared humbled, embracing the moment and sharing his special horse with people that wanted a chance to meet him in person. American Pharoah loved it, appreciating the regular visitors and enjoying interacting with people in a manner rarely seen with Thoroughbred racehorses.

The celebration continued at Churchill Downs for over a week before it was time for American Pharoah to return home to California. Again, he was met by an adoring public and visitor's including celebrities such as actress Julia Roberts and NFL quarterback, Drew Brees. Santa Anita also paraded American Pharoah for the public, once again drawing thousands of fans wishing to see and honor their newest hero.

The celebration inevitably continued within the hearts of racing fans who long awaited the arrival of their next Triple Crown winner. It will never really stop much in the same way horses such as Secretariat, Seattle Slew, and Affirmed remain celebrated today. However, for American Pharoah himself the time for celebration was eventually replaced by a return to business as usual. Despite his tremendous value as a stallion and the financial reasons that supported retiring the champion, Zayat chose to keep American Pharoah in training, knowing he meant something far more valuable than any stud deal could offer. Further, American Pharoah just seemed to love running, enjoying the thrill of bouncing over the track with his beautiful stride. With the Triple Crown in hand, American Pharoah set a new sight on continuing his already illustrious racing career and the possibility of making even more American History. The long-term goal became the Breeders' Cup in late October at Keeneland in Lexington, Kentucky, not far down the road from Stockplace Farm. There, American Pharoah will enter his final race and hope to become the first horse to win the newly titled "Grand Slam" - winning the Triple Crown and Breeders' Cup Classic.

This page top left to right: American Pharoah enjoys his breakfast, the morning after the parade; The sign hanging outside Bob Baffert's Churchill Downs barn

⁶⁶AMERICAN PHAROAH⁹⁹

