

BELMONT STAKES 146



'Chrome



The first step was taken in Kentucky, the second in Maryland. The third would be taken in New York. After his victory in the Preakness, California Chrome became the 13th horse to bid for the Triple Crown since Affirmed last won it in 1978. Even though his twelve predecessors were uniquely remarkable, each failed to pass "The Test of the Champion" and win the Belmont Stakes. The resulting 36 year drought without a Triple Crown winner remained the longest in racing history, yet many refused to lose hope and instead still found themselves captivated again as 'Chrome' embarked on his own historic run.

While the centerpiece of Belmont Stakes day was undoubtedly the race itself, the New York Racing Association (NYRA) further enhanced the spectacle by adding additional stakes races to the undercard, making it the grandest day of racing short of the Breeders' Cup. Surpassing its own "Super Saturday," traditionally run every fall at Belmont Park and featuring five Grade 1 races, NYRA shuffled its stakes schedule to host a total of nine stakes races on Belmont day, including six Grade 1 races, highlighted by 'Chrome's run in the Belmont Stakes. The table was indeed set for a tremendous day of racing.

Despite the growing excitement leading up to the day, there continued to be reason that the task of winning the Triple Crown remained daunting. As the Triple Crown exists during the span of a mere five weeks, many horses attempting to sweep the three races became simply exhausted during the Belmont Stakes. This is exacerbated by the difficult length of the Derby and Preakness as races in conjunction with the Belmont Stakes, at 1 1/2 miles, being the longest of all and is likely the farthest distance any of its entrants will ever contest.

Left to right from top: Led by assistant trainer Alan Sherman, exercise rider Willie Delgado gives California Chrome a pat as the duo goes to the track on a rainy morning two days before the Belmont Stakes; California Chrome works over a muddy Belmont track; Willie Delgado gallops California Chrome around an improved track the day before the big race; 'Chrome poses for the cameras while walking the shed row.

Further, the growing trend involved many of the horses exiting the Derby as losers, choose to skip the Preakness and rest while awaiting the Belmont. This exact scenario played out this year as California Chrome was only accompanied in the Preakness by two other Derby entrants; Ride On Curlin and General A Rod. Each of the other seven Preakness contenders were the so called "new shooters" that failed to qualify for the Derby. However, the Belmont Stakes would see the return of other, well rested contenders including Derby second place finisher Commanding Curve, the second betting choice from the Derby, Wicked Strong, Medal Count and Samraat. Ride On Curlin and General A Rod joined in the fray as well and became the only horses other than 'Chrome to contest all three legs of



Left to right from top: The eleven Triple Crown winners remain honored in the Belmont infield; After a disappointing finish in the Preakness (G1), Bayern dominates his rivals in the seven furlong Woody Stephens (G2) on the Belmont undercard; Sweet Reason (left) powers down the stretch to a sweet victory in the Acorn Stakes (G1); Close Hatches (center) fights off late runs by Princess of Sylmar (left) and Antipathy (right) to win the Ogden Phipps Handicap (G1).



the Triple Crown. Equally concerning, the Belmont field was rounded out by four other horses who altogether skipped the Derby and Preakness (they did not have enough earned points to enter the Derby) and instead focused on capturing the Belmont. These contenders included Commissioner, Matterhorn, Matuszak and most notably, Tonalist, who

won the Peter Pan Stakes (G2) at Belmont Park, the main prep for the Belmont Stakes.

With that, ten horses entered the Belmont Stakes, but most hearts remained solely with one. California Chrome worked brilliantly up to the Belmont Stakes and this time there were no concerns about slow times in previous races or a heard cough days before the race. Instead, the only concern was the race itself and the growing history that stated the task was too much to ask.

As the 3-5 morning line favorite, California Chrome entered post position two of the Belmont starting gate, and awaited his date with destiny.

The crowd erupted in cheers, the bell rang and the gates flew open. Trouble was immediately found. At first glance it looked as if California Chrome stumbled out of the gate. Instead, Matterhorn (3), just to 'Chrome's right, veered into the dual classic winner and stepped on the back of his right front hoof, tearing off a chunk of it. It was only

Fans



Fans



Left to right from top: A view of the giant Belmont track from the grandstand; Overlooking Belmont Park; Many dressed in the purple and green colors of Dumbass Partners; Everyone was hoping to see a Triple Crown for California Chrome; The Triple Crown trophy (front) is on display with the Belmont Stakes trophy (back); Supporting 'Chrome on his big day; Fans hope California Chrome can check off the Belmont Stakes and complete the Triple Crown.



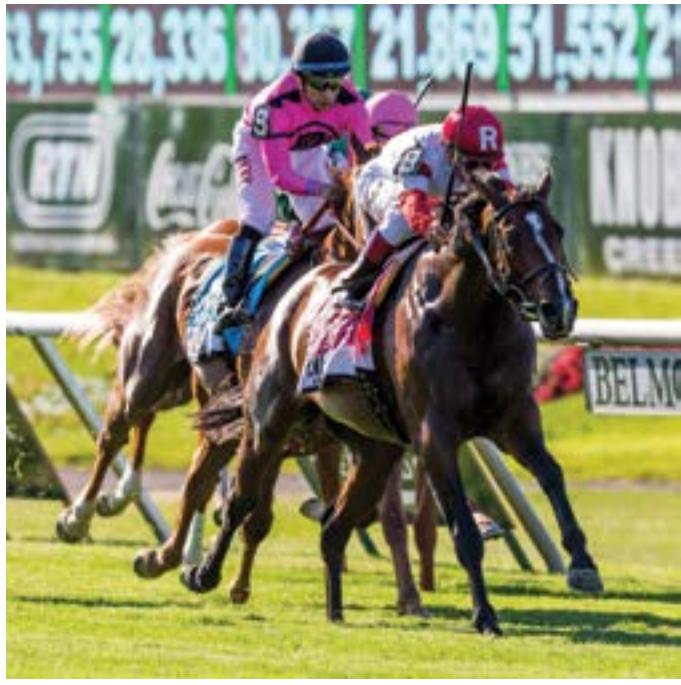
And More Fans



Left to right from top: The massive Belmont Park grandstand was full with fans hoping to witness history; Belmont Park hosts the 146th running of the Belmont Stakes; Belmont Park was packed with racing fans on this special day; Coffee Clique (center) takes the Just a Game Stakes (G1) by a nose over long-shot Strathnaver (left); Last years Belmont Stakes winner, Palace Malice, takes another big race at Belmont Park when he wins the Metropolitan Handicap (aka, the Met Mile) (G1) while continuing his dominance as a 4-year-old.

steps into the race and California Chrome now had a substantial wound to endure for the next 1 1/2 miles. Despite the mishap, California Chrome cleared the gate relatively well and attempted to establish a good racing position. However, the inside post position kept him on the rail as many of the horses to his right closed on him. One of these horses, Commissioner (8), surprisingly moved for the lead and held it as the field entered the clubhouse turn. Whereas in the Derby and Preakness, jockey Victor Espinoza, was able to clear California Chrome to the outside in a prime stalking position, the Belmont proved different and he was forced to race from the inside, on the rail, a position ‘Chrome historically didn’t enjoy. Nonetheless, California Chrome settled in his position off the pace while Commissioner set an opening 1/4 mile of 24.06 with General A Rod (10) in second to his outside. Tonalist (11) moved up from the outside and into third as California Chrome remained stuck on the rail and shuffled back into fourth. General A Rod moved closer to the pacesetting Commissioner as the field completed 1/2 mile in 48.52. Wicked Strong (9) raced in fifth to the outside of ‘Chrome and Medal Count (1) sat in sixth and near the rail. The field maintained this position through 3/4 mile in 1:12.84 until entering the fi-





nal turn and Espinoza found room to move ‘Chrome to the outside and around the three horses in front of him. However, this position hung ‘Chrome four wide and needing to cover additional ground around the giant Belmont turn. Meanwhile, Medal Count moved into fifth and remained on the rail while Tonalist began asserting pressure on the leaders as the field finished one mile in 1:37.13. Entering the stretch, Commissioner continued to lead from the rail while General A Rod held second to his outside, Tonalist third outside of him, and California Chrome continued to race four wide in fourth, but finally with a clear path in front of him. Commissioner continued to hold the lead as General A Rod faded and Medal Count moved up. Tonalist continued to grind into second and bared down on the lead. California Chrome fought to his outside but didn’t show the same “push button” move he had displayed it in the Derby and Preakness; it appeared he was finally tiring. Wicked Strong continued to fight from off the pace and to ‘Chrome’s right. Nearing the finish Tonalist inched closer to Commissioner and the two hit the wire almost simultaneously. Medal Count finished in third just behind them and California Chrome and Wicked Strong were similarly close, contesting for fourth. The final verdict had Tonalist edging Commissioner by a head to win the Belmont Stakes. Medal Count was one length behind and California Chrome and Wicked Strong finished in a dead heat for fourth, just 3/4 of a length behind Medal Count.



Triple Crown Hopeful

Left to right from top: Real Solution fires late to win the Manhattan Handicap (G1) over the Belmont turf; Fan support for California Chrome was seen all over Belmont Park; Even the lead ponies support ‘Chrome; The crowd grows with excitement in anticipation for ‘Chromes Triple Crown bid; California Chrome’s saddle-cloth for the Belmont Stakes; Victor Espinoza and California Chrome make the walk to the track after the call to the post; ‘Chrome steps onto the track moments before his run for history

Post Parade



Left to right from top: The post parade featuring the Belmont Stakes field; Breaking from the gate, Matherhorn (left) veers into California Chrome and steps on his right front hoof, injuring it just steps into the race; A closeup of California Chrome's feet shortly after leaving the gate, showing the wound left on his right hoof after Matherhorn stepped on it; Tonalist (left), with Joel Rosario up rallies late to overcome pacesetter Commissioner (right) and with the 146th Belmont Stakes, spoiling California Chrome's Triple Crown bid; A disappointed Victor Espinoza and California Chrome return after the race



For the 13th time since 1978, a horse failed in his bid to win the Triple Crown. Despite the disappointment immediately felt, California Chrome truly lost nothing more than a race. Instead, he further validated his ability as a racehorse, never giving up despite poor racing luck and enduring an injury immediately after leaving the starting gate. On another day, with better luck, he just might have ended the drought that has long plagued racing fans.

However, 'Chrome's gutsy effort was immediately overshadowed when his co-owner, Steve Coburn, during a post-race interview, slammed the connections of Tonalist and other entrants that did not contest all three Triple Crown races. While speaking with NBC's Kenny Rice, Coburn staid, "Well, I thought he was gaining ground, but he didn't have it in him, apparently. You know what? He's been in three, this is his third very big race. These other horses, they always set 'em out. They set

Tonalist



Left to right from top: Tonalist cools off after his Belmont victory; Trainer Christophe Clement congratulates jockey Joel Rosario for a great ride aboard Tonalist; Tonalist's saddlecloth after his Belmont Stakes victory; Tonalist and Joel Rosario are led into the Belmont Park winner's circle.

'em out and try to upset the apple cart. I'll never see, I'm 61 years old and I'll never see in my lifetime, I'll never see another Triple Crown winner because of the way they do this. It's not fair to these horses that have been in the game since day one. I look at it this way, if you can't make enough points to get into the Kentucky Derby, you can't run in the other two races." When Rice asked a question to clarify what Coburn was saying, he continued, "That's right, it's all or nothing. It's all or nothing because this is not fair to these horses that have been running their guts out for these people and for the people that believe in them. To have somebody to come up like, this is a coward's way out, in my opinion. This is a coward's way out." Finally, in response to Rice asking if Coburn felt the other contenders "came right after" his horse, Coburn said, "Yes, exactly. Our horse had a target on his back. Everybody else lays out one, or they won't run in the Kentucky Derby or the Preakness, they'll wait until the Belmont. You know what? If you've got a horse, run him in all three. If you've got a horse that can, that, Carolyn (Coburn says as he attempts to redirect his wife Carolyn's efforts to stop him from continuing). If you've got a horse that

earns points to run in the Kentucky Derby, those 20 horses that start in Kentucky are the only 20 eligible to run in all three races. This is the cowards way out."

While Coburn eventually apologized for his statements, the initial effect cast a dark cloud over the wonderful story that was Dumbass Partners and the amazing accomplishments of their valiant horse. In actuality, Coburn expressed valid points regarding the nature of the Triple Crown, but the timing of and manner in which he chose to go about voicing these concerns was in poor form.

Despite some validity, Coburn appeared to struggle realizing the Triple Crown is, in many ways, purposefully designed as exceedingly difficult and possibly even unfair. In fact, it is this difficulty that makes it so special and one of the rarest accomplishments in sports. Changing this format would essentially cheapen the experience and allure that is the Triple Crown. Instead, it's inherent difficulty is what draws us back

to it, continually waiting for the one to receive the baton passed from Affirmed. Until then, we will continue to wait, for as long as it takes.

That California Chrome was not that horse is nothing for his connections and fans to feel saddened about. This remarkable animal transcended the racing community and took the collective public along for a magically memorable ride in the spring of 2014. It was a ride that reminded us that true greatness isn't a birth right or something that can be bought only by the deepest of pockets. Instead, its potential can exist in any us, whether we be of the equine or human variety. The only thing that matters is that we have the fortitude to believe in it, even in the face of repeated failure and especially when it seems hopelessly impossible. For that, we as racing fans are forever grateful. Thank you California Chrome, you remind us of why we love this sport. Without such love, any crown wouldn't even be worthy of wearing.

Tonalist heads back to his barn with a garland of carnations and a classic victory to his credit.



Steve Heuertz Bio

It started with a horse named Cowboy. Disregarded and discounted, this nine-year-old Red Dun Quarter Horse left his life as a ranch horse in South Dakota and ventured a new path into the life of Steve Heuertz in 2004. Shortly thereafter, a bond was formed that fully catapulted Steve into the world of the horse where he became fascinated with the wonderful capabilities of this majestic animal.

Of particular interest were the speed, endurance and competitive spirit demonstrated by the equine heroes within the sport of Thoroughbred Racing. Although initially satisfied with observing from afar, Steve became increasingly captivated by the sport and turned toward capturing the splendor of racing via his other passion, photography. The result was a recipe where he could combine his great love for horses, racing and photography into one harmonious blend that was greater than the sum of its parts.

Since then, racing has taken Steve across the country to such wonderful places as Saratoga Race Course, Churchill Downs, Santa Anita Park, Pimlico Race Course, Belmont Park, Keeneland and Hooiser Park. During these travels, Steve has been fortunate to witness and photograph equally wonderful races such as the Kentucky Derby, Preakness Stakes and Belmont Stakes (racing's famed Triple Crown) as well as the Travers Stakes, Santa Anita Derby, Indiana Derby, Stephen Foster Handicap and Breeders' Cup, among others. However, residing in the Chicago suburb of St. Charles, IL, Steve regularly frequents Arlington Park and Hawthorne Race Course where he has enjoyed capturing magnificent races like the Arlington Million and Hawthorne Gold Cup.

Today, Steve's passion for horses, racing and photography is like a fire that continues to be stoked. While either behind the lens capturing the thrill of a Grade 1 race or in the saddle loping around a field with Cowboy, Steve has learned to operate under the simple truth that the more he is able to involve the horse in his life, the happier his days become.

Steve Heuertz: Steve's horse and loyal friend, Cowboy, a 19-year-old, Red Dun Quarter Horse

