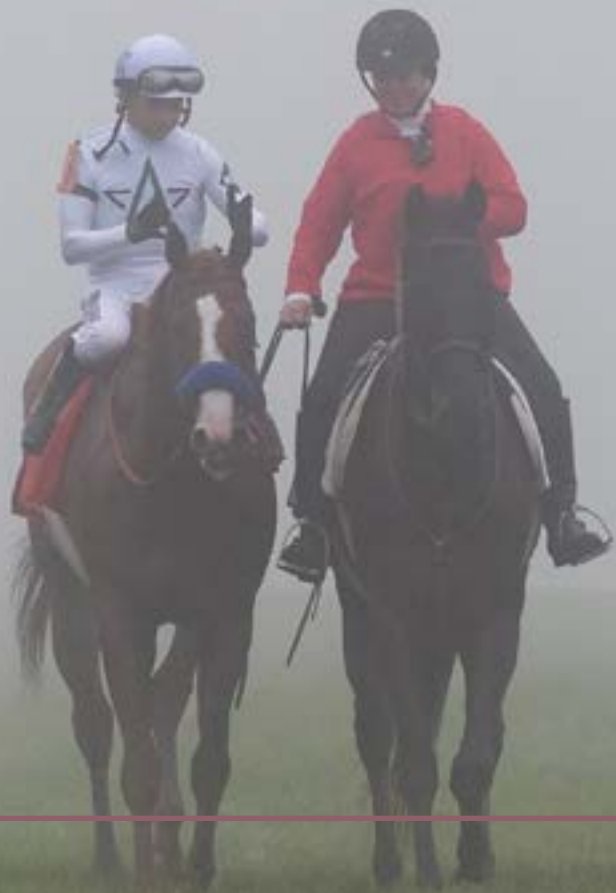


A Triple

Classic

A Jockey, a Trainer, and a Horse

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Justiflying





Cover photo: Justify and jockey, Mike Smith, are escorted to the Preakness winner's circle
 Previous page: Justifying" - Justify jumps in the 143rd Preakness Stakes
 At left: Exercise rider, Humberto Gomez, gallops Justify around Churchill Downs in preparation for the Kentucky Derby presented by Woodford Reserve (G1)
 Below: Justify's groom, Eduardo "Lalo" Luna, walks the strapping colt in the paddock at Churchill Downs during a schooling session for the Derby

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His racing journey to immortality was one of 110 days beginning on February 18 of this year. Justify didn't race in his two-year-old season after suffering a minor injury, so trainer Bob Baffert debuted him in a seven-furlong maiden special weight race at Santa Anita Park. The chestnut son of the late Scat Daddy, out of Stage Magic by Ghostzapper, raised quite a few eyebrows when he triumphed by a dominating 9 ½ lengths. Three weeks later, he won an allowance race easily by 6 ½ lengths going a mile over a sloppy track at Santa Anita. Justify's future looked bright and his connections were excited, so he was placed on the trail leading to the Kentucky Derby. There was just one problem, however, and that was the last horse to win the Run for the Roses without competing as a two-year-old was Apollo...back in 1882.

Above: Persistent rain, a sloppy track and torrid fractions can't derail Justify and his spectacular performance in the Kentucky Derby
 Following page: Justify breaks the 136-year-old "Curse of Apollo," becoming the first horse since 1882 to win the Kentucky Derby without having raced as a two-year-old

Looking back, Justify was a relative bargain when sold at the 2016 Keeneland September Yearling Sale for \$500,000. Bred by John Gunther and his daughter Tanya at Kentucky's 350-acre Glennwood Farm, the colt was purchased by the China Horse Club and Maverick Racing when other yearlings were selling for in excess of \$1MM. Justify's first true test came in the (G1) Santa Anita Derby on April 17. It would be his only opportunity to earn sufficient points to qualify for the Kentucky Derby which was a little less than three weeks away. And the competition became noticeably tougher when the field included Bolt D'Oro who established himself the prior year by winning his first three races as a 2-year-old. The expected duel came to fruition as Justify grabbed the lead from the start and progressed into a cruising gallop but was shadowed by Bolt D'Oro for the duration. Down the stretch, however, the multiple grade 1 winner could not close the gap and Justify crossed the wire with a three length win in 1:49:72. He had not only earned more than enough qualifying points but also moved into the role of probable Derby favorite.

Kentucky Derby





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Justify’s jockey Mike Smith was almost prophetic of things to come with his post-race remarks. “If he moves forward off this race, which he should,” said Smith, “then it’s even kind of scary to think about. What you’re seeing now is raw talent. He’s got so much room to grow and to even get better.”

It has been a long and triumphant road for the 52-year-old Smith who began breaking horses at age eight in his native New Mexico, dropped out of high school in the 9th grade and took out a jockey’s license at age 16. Smith is the second leading jockey of all-time with over \$312 million in career earnings and the horses he has commandeered are a Who’s Who of the sport’s very best from the past quarter century including Holy Bull, Skip Away, Zenyatta, Lure, Azeri, Arrogate, Shared Belief and Songbird. He has won more Breeders’ Cup races (26) than any other jockey and has continually earned his nickname of “Big Money Mike” with each passing year. Smith was no stranger to the Triple Crown series, having won each of the classic races. Across a career of more than 35 years, there has been very little the hall of fame jockey has not achieved. But the holy grail of horse racing remained on the horizon.

The sun did not shine bright on the old Kentucky home during the 144th running of the Kentucky Derby. In fact, a day of steady precipitation brought nearly three inches of rain and the wettest Derby ever. Justify, now owned by the China Horse Club, Head of Plains Partners, Starlight Racing and WinStar Farm, was the morning line favorite at 5-2. He faced a formidable field of 19 others highlighted by 2017’s Two-Year-Old Juvenile Champion Good Magic and Mendelssohn, the 2017 Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Turf Champion. A crowd of 157,813 turned out for the most exciting two minutes in sport despite the rain and mud.



Justify broke quickly from the starting gate and free of trouble and ran close to the lead occupied by the expected pacesetter Promises Fulfilled. The opening quarter mile was run in a torrid 22:24 seconds. For a collection of 3-year-olds running 1¼ miles for the first time in their lives, this could be concerning. Justify still trailed Promises Fulfilled closely after the first half mile which was completed in a swift 45:77 seconds and run remarkably over a sloppy track. Justify charged ahead at the final turn while Good Magic made his move as well and settled into second as a battle ensued down the stretch. Justify held off his challenger, however, and won by 2 ½ lengths in 2:04:20. The Curse of Apollo was broken and for the sixth consecutive year, the post time favorite won the Kentucky Derby.

“He’s got that ‘it’ factor,” said Mike Smith afterwards. “He is so above average, he’s got unbelievable talent, and he’s got a mind to go with it. It takes a lot to try to keep up with him, and then you’ve got to try to run him down after that.”

For Bob Baffert, it was his fifth Kentucky Derby win, the most recent being Triple Crown winner American Pharoah’s 2015 triumph. “He’s a superior horse,” said Baffert of Justify. “I knew in that last eighth, he was going to win and I was just in awe of the performance. I mean, that’s the best Kentucky Derby-winning performance that I’ve brought up here. He just put himself up with the greats.”

Opposite page: After his smashing Derby win, Justify takes a bath at Pimlico and focuses on the Preakness Stakes (G1) and the second leg of the Triple Crown
Above: Justify (left) and two-year-old champion, Good Magic, duel for the Preakness lead in the slop at Pimlico
Following page: Justify (far right) emerges first from the fog at Pimlico and holds off a late rally by Bravazo (far left) to win the Preakness Stakes

A photograph of four jockeys racing horses on a dirt track. The jockeys are wearing colorful silks and helmets. The horses are in full gallop, kicking up dirt. The word "Preakness" is overlaid in a stylized, cursive font on the left side of the image.

Preakness



Next stop was the 143rd Preakness Stakes two weeks later in Baltimore. In four prior attempts, Bob Baffert had never lost a Preakness with a Derby winner and had won the second jewel of the Triple Crown six times going into the May 19 race. For the 65-year-old Baffert, the journey began many years ago on a ranch in Nogales, Arizona where his family raised cattle and chickens. Bob's father purchased some Quarter Horses when he was 10 and the younger Baffert was hooked. As he grew, Baffert was both a jockey and then a trainer of Quarter Horses until the 1980's when he switched to training Thoroughbreds. In 1992, he captured his first Breeders' Cup championship with the sprinter Thirty Slews. Baffert got his first taste of the Triple Crown races four years later when he trained Cavonnier who lost the 1996 Kentucky Derby by a nose to Grindstone. The winner was trained by D. Wayne Lukas and it launched a classic rivalry that has continued for 22 years.

In each of the next two years, Baffert horses missed winning the Triple Crown by a matter of feet. In 1997, the great Silver Charm was 100 yards away from claiming the crown when he was caught and passed by Touch Gold in the final strides of the Belmont Stakes. The following year, Real

Above: Trainer, Bob Baffert, walks Justify upon his arrival at Belmont Park

Left: Justify shows off his "kicks" while taking a bath at Belmont Park

Opposite page: Humberto Gomez takes Justify for his first spin around "Big Sandy"

"That was tough," said Baffert afterwards. "He didn't bring his A game, but he was good. He was good enough. It takes a great horse to win like that."

Quiet lost his Belmont bid at the wire by a mere four inches to Victory Gallop. In 2001, Baffert's Point Given won convincingly in both the Preakness and Belmont Stakes but had finished a disappointing fifth earlier on in the Kentucky Derby. And the heart-break returned once again the following year when War Emblem captured the first two jewels, only to stumble out of the gate at the Belmont and finish eighth. Baffert's success grew each year and he became leading money-winning trainer in the U.S. four times along with four Eclipse Awards for outstanding trainer. But it wasn't until 2015 he was presented with a fourth opportunity at horse racing's trifecta and this time, the amazing American Pharoah brought an end to a 37-year drought when he became the sport's 12th Triple Crown champion.

The morning weather forecast for Pimlico Race Course on May 19 called for persistent rain throughout Preakness Day. But the crowd of 134,487 had no idea what that would also include. Justify had proven he could compete and win in the rain, mud and slop in two of his four career races. Just before the afternoon's 10th race, a heavy fog came in and covered the track. Three races later, as the Preakness field of eight approached the gate, the fog had grown thick and greatly limited visibility for both TV and in-person viewers. Justify broke cleanly from the gate and battled head-to-head with Good Magic throughout the first 3/4 mile.

For close to 20 seconds, the only glimpse the Pimlico crowd had of the rivals was on the big screen monitors. As they approached the final turn, Mike Smith had a different view. "I looked over and saw Good Magic and thought, 'Oh man, it's going to be a match race.'" As the horses emerged from the mist at the top of the stretch, fans saw the familiar blaze of Justify break through first as he separated himself from Good Magic. The duo drove down the stretch and were soon joined by Tenfold and D. Wayne Lukas' late-charging Bravazo. But it wasn't enough as Justify hung on to defeat Bravazo by a half-length, completing the mile and 3/16 in 1:55:93.

Belmont



It was Bob Baffert's record-tying 7th Preakness title. "That was tough," said Baffert afterwards. "He didn't bring his A game, but he was good. He was good enough. It takes a great horse to win like that."

Nearly 100 years ago, a chestnut Thoroughbred named Sir Barton won the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness Stakes and the Belmont Stakes in a space of 32 days before the trio of races was ever referred to as the Triple Crown. Since then, Triple Crowns tend to be won in clusters within decades. There were three winners in the 1930's (Gallant Fox,

Left: 3...2...1...Lift-off! Justify surges like a rocket from the Belmont starting gate

Above: Belmont Park erupts as Justify barrels down the stretch toward racing immortality

They call it "The Test of Champions" for a reason.

Omaha, War Admiral) and four in the 1940's (Whirlaway, Count Fleet, Assault, Citation). After Citation's 1948 triumph, the sport saw a Triple Crown drought for 25 years until the mighty Secretariat set speed records for the Derby, Preakness and Belmont in 1973 which he still holds today...45 years later. The 1970's also brought us Triple Crown winners Seattle Slew and Affirmed. This was followed by a lengthy 37-year gap until American Pharoah captured the crown and electrified the world of sports in 2015. Three different decades with multiple winners. And we were about to learn if there might be a fourth.

They call it "The Test of Champions" for a reason. Three races in 35 days. After these three-year-old, growing colts have run a mile and a quarter, followed by a mile and 3/16ths, they are asked to run a mile and a half. It is a distance they have never run before in their lives and likely won't encounter again. And they do so against fresh, rested competition on a surface at Belmont Park nicknamed "Big Sandy" for having the reputation of being deep and notoriously tiring. It isn't easy and it seems only the truly great succeed.



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On June 9, Justify faced nine rivals and if that wasn’t enough, he drew the sometimes-challenging No. 1 post. The naysayers argued his Preakness win was less than impressive and he was likely tired. The stage was set for something special and a television audience of 12.7 million and a raucous Belmont crowd of 90,000 were not disappointed. Justify broke quickly from the gate to take the lead and set the pace with comfortable fractions. He maintained a cruising speed through the backstretch and when approaching the final turn. Wood Memorial champion Vino Rosso and jockey John Velazquez made a move to reduce Justify’s lead to a length but could get no closer. Only 24-1 longshot Gronkowski attempted to challenge Justify at the end but it just wasn’t enough. Thoroughbred horse racing had its 13th Triple Crown winner and Justify joined Seattle Slew as only the second unbeaten champion.

Opposite top: Leading every step of the way, Justify cruises to victory in the Belmont Stakes, becoming the 13th Triple Crown winner in American Thoroughbred Racing history. He joins Seattle Slew (1977) as the only other undefeated Triple Crown winner and becomes the first horse to have accomplished the feat without having raced as a two-year-old
Opposite bottom left: Mike Smith kisses the newly redesigned Triple Crown trophy
Opposite bottom right: Team Justify receives the Belmont Stakes trophy

Above: Assistant trainer, Jimmy Barnes (left), Eduardo “Lalo” Luna and Humberto Gomez (right), walk Justify back to the barn after parading for the fans at Churchill Downs, exactly one week after winning the Triple Crown

Following page: Mike Smith celebrates the defining moment in an already remarkable, Hall-of-Fame career

At age 52, Mike Smith became the oldest jockey among the 11 others who won the Crown. “This horse ran a tremendous race. He’s so gifted,” said Smith.

“He’s sent from heaven. I tell you, it’s just amazing. I can’t describe the emotions that are going through my body right now.”

With the victory, Bob Baffert joined “Sunny Jim” Fitzsimmons as the second trainer to win two Triple Crowns and broke a tie with D. Wayne Lukas by winning a record 15th classic race. “He was showing me the same signs (as American Pharoah did in 2015),” said Baffert afterwards. “He showed me that brilliance. Superior horse. I mean he could have won every race on the undercard today. He’s just that kind of horse.”

Six career starts six wins and total earnings of \$3,798,000. Unfortunately, these totals are final after Justify’s connections announced July 25 he would be retired from racing. Discovery of filling in an ankle that would have required two to three months of rest defeated the champion when no other opponent could. A new career is on the horizon, however, racing fans will always have these classic moments to remember his time in the sun, rain and fog.



In 2014, some racing fans and industry professionals stated that 37 years without a Triple Crown winner was evidence the rules should be changed and the spacing between races be extended. Since then, both American Pharoah and Justify have proven it should be difficult, there should be obstacles and it takes an incredible horse to rise to the top. Who knows? Maybe these are the glory days of racing.