The Covid-19 Triple Crown, 2020

We’re off to the races again but what a year 2020 was!

The 2020 Triple Crown and and three-year-old races were unusual to say the least. Normally the Kentucky Derby at 1 1/4 miles is run on the first Saturday in May, often in the mud, at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky. The race has about twenty horses and is possibly the toughest race of their careers early in their three-year-old year. This is basically equivalent to twelve year olds running a tough race. It is an extreme test of speed and stamina and some horses never recover from it.

Two weeks later, they run the 1 3/16 mile Preakness at Pimlico in Baltimore. That’s usually an easier race and often the Derby 1-2 finishers are favored and do well in this race. Then the 1 1/2 mile Belmont is three weeks later early in June. Later in the season the top horses run in the (1 1/8 mile Haskell at Monmouth, New Jersey and the 1 1/4 mile Travers at Saratoga in August. The season culminates at the Breeders’ Cup in November.

This year because of the worldwide Covid-19 cases and deaths and the poor US response, the...
when most tracks were closed. They held the \( \frac{1}{4} \) mile Florida Derby on March 28.

After the preps, the Belmont Stakes was held on June 20. Besides the change of date, it was run at the shorter distance of \( \frac{1}{8} \) miles. Then the Haskell on July 18 which was followed by the Travers at \( \frac{1}{8} \) miles on August 8. Then the \( \frac{1}{4} \) mile Kentucky Derby was run on September 5. Finally, the Preakness at its usual distance of \( \frac{1}{8} \) was run on October 3 at Pimlico in Baltimore. Later the horses ran in the Breeders’ Cup in Lexington at Keeneland on November 6 and 7.

We begin the analysis with the Florida prep races. Tiz the Law easily won the grade III Holy Bull at Gulfstream on February 1 and then he won the grade I Curlin Florida Derby at \( \frac{1}{8} \) mile by just under 3 lengths. Tiz the Law was sired by Constitution, the winner of four races out of eight run winning $1,031,596. Constitution was sired by Tapit and dam sire Distorted Humor who is often rated the top US broodmare sire. Tiz the Law’s superb breeding shown in Figure 1 includes the two-time Breeders’ Cup Classic winner Tiznow.
Table 4: The chart of the Belmont Stakes. Source: EQUIBASE. Used with permission.

| Last Raced | Pgm | Horse Name (Jockey) | Wgt M/E | PP | Start | 1/4 | 3/4 | Str | Finish | Odds | Comments |
|------------|-----|---------------------|---------|----|-------|-----|-----|-----|--------|------|----------|
| 2SMay20 | 9 | Tiz the Law (Franco, Manuel) | 125 | L | 8 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 4 1/2 | 6 | 2/1 | 5th | 0.90 | 2w, ask 3/1, kick away |
| 1aField | 10 | Dr Post (Orta, Jr, Ind) | 125 | L | 10 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 4 | 6 | 2/1 | 4th | 0.90 | 2w, ask 3/1, kick away |
| 21Mar20 | 9 | Max Player (Rosario, Joel) | 125 | L | 9 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 6 1/2 | 6 | 2/1 | 3rd | 0.90 | 2w, ask 3/1, kick away |
| 2May20 | 1 | Tap to Win (Valenzuela, John) | 125 | L | 14 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 4 | 6 | 2/1 | 4th | 0.90 | 2w, ask 3/1, kick away |
| 1Jun20 | 1 | Sole Volante (Pizarro, Lucca) | 125 | L | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 4 | 6 | 2/1 | 4th | 0.90 | 2w, ask 3/1, kick away |
| 2Jun20 | 1 | Modernist (Alvarado, Junior) | 125 | L | 9 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 6 1/2 | 6 | 2/1 | 4th | 0.90 | 2w, ask 3/1, kick away |
| 6Field | 1 | Fore Left (Orta, Jose) | 125 | L | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 2/1 | 4th | 0.90 | 2w, ask 3/1, kick away |
| 2May20 | 1 | Jungle Runner (Gutierrez, Rey) | 125 | L | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 2/1 | 4th | 0.90 | 2w, ask 3/1, kick away |

Table 5 shows the Derby field with the morning line odds and Table 6 gives the handicappers picks.

Number 1-Finick the Fierce, who has just one eye, was vet scratched for security reasons. Also, Number 6-King Guillermo was scratched for health reasons.

Because of Covid-19 restrictions, many of the top jockeys like the Ortiz’s were in Saratoga but Javier Castelano, Florent Gerout, Mike Smith and John Velazquez and Manny Franco (Tiz the Law’s jockey) were there.

The 146th Kentucky Derby

The Derby at 1 1/4 miles was held on the September 5th, the first Saturday in September (not May as usual). The last time the Derby was not run in May was in 1945. Racing had been suspended from December 1944 till war conditions permitted. After VE day, the Derby was scheduled for June 9 when Hoop Jr won. The Preakness and Belmont Stakes were run on June 16 and 23 respectively.

The Derby was run on a drying out but not muddy track. There were no fans and considerable Covid-19 precautions but it was on TV and betting sites. Since RGS and Betfair were blocked, I bet on Twin Spires, the very nice Churchill Downs site. It does not have rebates, at least at my level, but it did have a lot of bonus betting. It is very user friendly plus has a lot of good information including a video.

Tiz the Law easily won the Florida Derby, the shortened Belmont Stakes, and the Travers by multiple lengths. Hence he was a legitimate less than even money favorite. Indeed, on one site with about 12 handicappers, all had him picked first. But others, particularly 10-Thousand Words, 15-Ny Traffic, 16-Honor AP and 18-Authentic were close behind.

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The pedigree for Authentic, who won beating Tiz the Law, is shown in Figure 4.

My bets were as follows. I focused on 17 first, second or third or out with 18, 16, 15, 10 in first and second position and 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, 18 in 3rd and 4th positions for trifectas and superfectas plus some exacta, win, place and show.

Comments on the race: Steve Roman rated the winner, Authentic, at -54PF on his scale. The time for the ten furlong race was 2:00:61 versus Secretariat’s record of 1:59:2. But as Steve pointed out, this was a very fast track all day and the race was run in September not May (4 months later). He said that the par value for a September race should be about 12PF units better then May because the horses have matured but indeed they have raced less and differently than usual so older but did not necessarily have more actual racing experience. Steve suggests instead of a par of -56 it should be -68.

The finish was 18-Authentic at 8-1, 17-Tiz the Law at 3-5, 9-Mr Big News at 46-1 and 16-Honor AP at 7-1. My bets did fine with the $2000 account ending up at $5799. A minor error in the superfecta ticket gave an extra ticket rather than the superfecta. Otherwise the Twin Spires betting site worked well, is user friendly and is to be recommended. Some bonuses for new bettors gave two $100 bonuses which was sort of a rebate. With no fans or on-track betting, fewer horses entered and nine favorites who did not win during the day, wagering was a lot less in 2020 versus 2019.

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Table 5: Field for the Derby

| # | Silks | Horse / Sire | Rating | Trainer / Jockey | Last Start | HRN |
|---|-------|-------------|--------|------------------|------------|-----|
| 2 | Max Player | Honor Code | 6.57 | S. Asmussen R. Santana, Jr. | 3rd, 2020 Travers Stakes (G1) | 30-1 |
| 3 | Enforceable | Tapit | 6.74 | M. Casse A. Beschizza | 4th, 2020 Blue Grass Stakes (G2) | 30-1 |
| 4 | Storm The Court | Court Vision | 6.56 | P. Eurton J. Leparoux | 2nd, 2020 La Jolla Handicap (G3) | 50-1 |
| 5 | Major Fed | Ghostzapper | 6.19 | G. Foley J. Graham | 2nd, 2020 Indiana Derby (G3) | 50-1 |
| 7 | Money Moves | Candy Ride | 4.88 | T. Pletcher J. Castellano | 2nd, Sar AOC (7/25/2020-R8) | 30-1 |
| 8 | South Bend | Algorithms | 5.74 | W. Mott T. Gaffalione | 4th, 2020 Travers Stakes (G1) | 50-1 |
| 9 | Mr. Big News | Giant's Causeway | 6.31 | W. Calhoun G. Saez | 6th, 2020 Blue Grass Stakes (G2) | 50-1 |
| 10 | Thousand Words | Pioneerof the Nile | 6.05 | B. Baffert F. Geroux | 1st, 2020 Shared Belief Stakes (LS) | 15-1 |
| 11 | Necker Island | Hard Spun | 6.17 | S. Hough M. Mena | 3rd, 2020 Ellis Park Derby (LS) | 50-1 |
| 12 | Sole Volante | Karakontie | 6.93 | P. Biancone L. Panici | 6th, 2020 Belmont Stakes (G1) | 30-1 |
| 13 | Attachment Rate | Hard Spun | 6.03 | D. Romans J. Telamo | 2nd, 2020 Ellis Park Derby (LS) | 50-1 |
| 14 | Winning Impression | Paynter | 4.09 | D. Stewart J. Rocco, Jr. | 7th, 2020 Ellis Park Derby (LS) | 50-1 |
| 15 | Ny Traffic | Cross Traffic | 6.53 | S. Joseph, Jr. P. Lopez | 2nd, 2020 Haskell Stakes (G1) | 20-1 |
| 16 | Honor A. P. | Honor Code | 7.28 | J. Shirreffs M. Smith | 2nd, 2020 Shared Belief Stakes (LS) | 5-1 |
| 17 | Tiz the Law | Constitution | 8.01 | B. Tagg M. Franco | 1st, 2020 Travers Stakes (G1) | 3-5 |
| 18 | Authentic | Into Mischief | 6.79 | B. Baffert J. Velazquez | 1st, 2020 Haskell Stakes (G1) | 8-1 |
The super fast track had 13 of 14 favorites not winning. John Velasquez won his 100th G1 race, a major feat. Bob Baffert won his 6th Kentucky Derby tying Ben Jones’s record. Baffert’s other horse, Thousand Words, jumped up in his stall flipped over and injured assistant trainer Jimmy Barnes, so was scratched. Authentic’s -54 PF is about 4 lengths below par. Mr Big News, who was 3rd, got a -41 PF, was beaten by only 3\frac{1}{4} lengths despite never earning a Beyer speed figure above 96.

The $2 win, place, and show payoffs were as follows:

18 18.80 6 5
17 3.40 3.20
9 16.80
50 cents trifecta 18-17-9 $655.90
$1 superfecta 18-17-9-12 $7925.80

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The Ragson Sheets are shown in Table 7.
Table 7: Ragozin Sheets (lower ratings are better), last race on left

| Horse | Rating | Comment       |
|-------|--------|---------------|
| 17    | 3,5,7,5| legimate favorite |
| 16    | 4,5,8  |               |
| 15    | 4,8,9  |               |
| 18    | 5,5,5,8,9| front runner, Baffart |
| 2     | 7,8,9  |               |
| 3     | 10,10,10,8|              |
| 10    | 7,9,26,15,10| other Baffart |
| 7     | 6,9,17 | trending lower |
| 13    | 6,12,8,12|              |
| 9     | 12,11,15,14| Giant's Causway/Galilleo |
| 4     | 9,7,12,10|              |

Preakness
The final Triple Crown extended three-year-old racing season ended with the Preakness. There were 11 starters in race 11, these are listed in Table 8 along with the morning line odds. Table 9 gives the handicappers picks. The favorite at 9–5 was Number 9-Authentic who won the Kentucky Derby. He and 5-Thousand Words were trained by Bob Baffert who has won the Preakness 7 times.

The race in good weather looked ideal for Authentic's front running style. But there was lots of tough competition. Number 3-Art Collector at 5–2 was the second choice. Art Collector had won the Blue Grass and the Ellis Park Derby and was undefeated in four races in 2020. Number 4-Swiss Skydiver at 6–1 was a top filly, running against the males. Six times the Preakness had been won by a filly including Rachel Alexandra in 2009. Other contenders included number 5-Thousand Words at 6–1 who had been scratched from the Kentucky Derby after flipping over in his stall. Number 2-Mr Big News at 12–1 was third in the Kentucky Derby at 46–1. He had super breeding being sired by Giant's Causeway with dam sire the great Galilleo. 7-New York Traffic and 8-Max Player were jointly bumped in the Derby and had finished out of the money. They were both 15–1 in the Preakness morning line. Some handicappers including Horsacenation rated number 10-Pneumatic (20–1) close to the top.

The pedigree for Swiss Skydiver is shown in Table 8: Field for the Preakness.
The race was fast with Swiss Skydiver running the second fastest Preakness ever at 1:53:28

Figure 5: Pedigree for Swiss Skydiver

Table 10: Payoffs for the Preakness

The race was fast with Swiss Skydiver running the second fastest Preakness ever at 1:53:28.
race but consistently failed in most races despite being the top choice, was there at 20-1.

Table 11 gives the handicappers picks. Table 12 shows the betfair odds.

The race had five horses that seemed best, namely, 2, 4, 8, 9, and 10, see the PSR and HTR in Table 11. It was a speed favoring track with Jerry Bailey pointed out how fast the track was all day with the advantage going to early speed. So I favored 9-Authentic who had the best early speed. The finish was 9-8-7-1. Tom’s D’Etat and Tiz the Law failed, perhaps worn out from previous races. The payoffs of the Breeders’ Cup Classic are in the chart of the race in Table 13.

Table 12: Betfair Odds for the Breeders’ Cup Classic and My Betfair Bets

| 10 selections | 102.5% | Back all | Lay all | 99.7% |
|---------------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Tacitus       | 28    | £6      | £29     | £30   |
|                | £32   | £34     | £36     |       |
| Tiz The Law   | 4.3   | £260    | £4.4    | £538  |
|                | £423  | £46     | £1590   |       |
| By My Standards | 28    | £52     | £39     | £30   |
|                | £32   | £34     | £36     |       |
| Tiz Detat     | 4.5   | £58     | £4.6    | £582  |
|                | £482  | £48     | £1014   |       |
| Title Ready   | 150   | £12     | £170   | £180  |
|                | £220  | £320    | £330    |       |
| Higher Power  | 55    | £9      | £60     | £65   |
|                | £70   | £75     | £80     |       |
| Global Campaign | 30    | £20     | £32    | £34   |
|                | £36   | £38     | £40     |       |
| Impregnable   | 4.5   | £183    | £4.7    | £508  |
|                | £481  | £48     | £554    |       |
| Authentic     | 6     | £181    | £6.2    | £244  |
|                | £9.4  | £9.6    | £9.8    |       |
| Maximum Security | 8.8    | £74    | £9.1    | £9.2  |
|                | £9.4  | £9.6    | £9.8    |       |

My bets on Betfair are shown in Figure 12.

Figure 7: Field for the Breeders’ Cup Classic
Table 13: The chart of the Breeders’ Cup

| Last Raced | Pgm | Horse Name (Jockey) | Wgt M/E | PP | 1/4 | 1/2 | 3/4 | 1m | Str | Fin | Odds | Comments |
|------------|-----|---------------------|---------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|---------|
| 30Aug20 | 7   | Authentic (Velazquez, John) | 122 L | 8 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 | 1 1/2 | 1 | 1 1/2 | 4.20 | Kicked off |
| 26Sep20 | 8   | Improbable (Ortiz, Jr., Mike) | 136 L | 8 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 | 1 1/2 | 3.70 | Blinkers off |
| 05Oct20 | 7   | Global Campaign (Castellano, Javier) | 138 L | 1 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 | 1 1/2 | 2.50 | Blinkers off |
| 10Oct20 | 6   | Tiz the Law ( Franco, Manuel) | 126 L | 1 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 | 1 1/2 | 3.20 | Blinkers off |
| 10Oct20 | 7   | Title Ready (Ceravolo, Corey) | 126 L | 8 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 | 1 1/2 | 1.40 | Blinkers off |
| 10Oct20 | 8   | By My Standards (Garcia, Gabriel) | 136 L | 8 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 | 1 1/2 | 1.40 | Blinkers off |
| 11Nov20 | 7   | Tiz the Law ( Franco, Manuel) | 126 L | 8 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 1 | 1 1/2 | 1.40 | Blinkers off |
| 22Nov20 | 6   | Higher Power (Flavien) | 136 L | 6 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 43.40 | Unplaced at start |

Fractional Times: N/A, N/A, N/A, N/A, N/A, N/A, N/A

Winner: Authentic. Bay Colt by Curlin out of Flawless, by Mr. Greeley. Foaled May 05, 2017 in Kentucky.

Acknowledgments
Thanks to Richard Diamond, David McKenzie, Steve Roman, and Mick Thomason for helpful data and discussions.

Authentic broke the track record with a 1.59:19 time on the fast track. He now has won six of eight races and $6,371,200.

Other good runners, his stud fee was raised to $200,000 from $175,000 for the 2020 breeding season. His sire, Harlan’s Holiday, won three of his six starts. Authentic’s ownership includes Starlight Racing Stables, Spendthrift Farm LLC, Madaket Stables LLC and the syndicate Myracemorse Vault which includes some 5,214 micro share owners.

Steve Roman calculated Authentic’s speed as -86 PF which is two lengths better than par and the same as two times horse of the year and top stallion Curlin. This is consistent with Beyer’s 109 speed rating. So it was a super performance. Authentic is now retired to Gainseway Farm for stud duties.

Thousand Words and Tiz the Law were also retired to stud duties.

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