



What does it take to win the Belmont Stakes? A strong, stamina oriented pedigree, yet enough speed to still keep up with the field and to kick into gear in the stretch is a must. A jockey who is familiar with the track and who knows when to make his move is essential, as is a certain touch of racing luck. Ability to handle the deep tiring track also comes into play, as well as running style. Over the last twenty years, only two front runners have posted victories. Stalkers have won the most races, while pace pressers and mid-pack runners also win their fair share. With that in mind, let's review this year's Belmont field.

Distance:

Roughly fifty-five stakes races in the United States are carded at 1 ½ miles and most of them are run over turf. Thus, stamina-laden pedigrees aren't as popular here. In the Kentucky Derby, three year olds are requested to travel a Classic distance and many fail due to not having enough stamina in their pedigree. The same holds true for the Belmont Stakes entrants. Horses that can successfully win at 1 1/8 miles can sometimes continue on strongly at 1 ¼ miles, while traveling 1 ½ miles takes a totally different type of pedigree.

Stamina: Game On Dude, First Dude, Ice Box, Interactif, Spangled Star, Stately Victor, Stay Put

Borderline: Drosselmyer, Fly Down, Make Music for Me

Distance challenged: Dave in Dixie, Uptowncharlybrown

Surface:

There is a 50% chance of rain scheduled for Belmont Stakes day. Every contender has run over dirt tracks with varying success. A good horse player handicaps for every variable, so below are ratings for the off going, just in case. Those with an asterisk (*) after their names have very strong mud pedigrees.

Proven over off track: Drosselmeyer, Ice Box, Make Music For Me, Stay Put*

Unproven, but have good/superior pedigree for mud: Dave in Dixie First Dude* Interactif* Spangled Star*

Poor/average mud pedigree or off track performance: Game On Dude, Fly Down, Stately Victor, Uptowncharlybrown

How the track is playing:

There have been no races carded at this distance so far this year, but shorter races have been won by speed on the rail. The Belmont is a totally different type of race, most often won by a stalker or off the pace type of runner. Favorites are in the money 75% of the time in graded stakes races at Belmont, yet the average win payout is about \$18.00.

Contender notes:

First Dude, and **Interactif** appear to do their best running on or just off of the lead and Star Spangled could join them up front. First Dude led to the final jumps of the Preakness Stakes and can benefit from the conditioning. He has the pedigree to last 1 ½ miles and if his jockey can slow down the pace, then open up a lead in the stretch, we could be looking at the winner. However, **Ice Box** has a blazing turn of foot and could mow down First Dude in the shadow of the wire, much like Victory Gallop did to Real Quiet. Both have the pedigree and/or experience to handle the off going.

I'm not convinced that dirt is **Interactif's** best surface. He has one of the best pedigrees in the field, but winning a maiden race on the lead over the speed favoring dirt at Monmouth is a far cry from winning the Belmont Stakes. A word of caution – he has an excellent off track pedigree and as we saw with Paddy O' Prado in the Derby, a turf runner can transfer his form to the mud. If the track is sloppy, Interactif could be a serious contender.

Make Music For Me is another who may have benefitted from the sloppy Churchill track in the Derby. He made up ground to finish fourth at long odds. At one point, Make Music For Me was on even terms with Ice Box when both were making their runs, but Ice Box blew by him like he was standing still. He has a borderline pedigree for getting the distance, but could make up enough ground to finish in the money. Of concern is his trainer's decision to move him from the deep main track to the easier training track for his last work.

Stately Victor is the third contender who has shown better form over turf than dirt. He was the wise guy horse for many people in the Kentucky Derby, but couldn't deliver over the sloppy track. The jury is still out on how far his sire's offspring will want to run, but Stately Victor has a strong distaff family that could make up for his sire's distance deficits. A more pressing concern is his ability to handle a dirt track, something he's failed to do in three starts.

Game on Dude has the pedigree and showed remarkable improvement speed figure wise in his last race but what, exactly, did he beat? The two times he faced stakes horses he was trounced almost thirty lengths. His trainer Bob Baffert knows how to get a horse ready for the Belmont and of course, likes his chances, but in 2006, he liked Bob and John's chances too. (Bob and John finished last).

Spangled Star showed major improvement, speed figure wise, with a move to Richard Dutrow's barn. The chestnut colt has a good pedigree and should handle the off going, but has little else to recommend him. He can't even claim training in high altitudes as a wild card, like Mine That Bird did when winning the Derby. Dutrow is sneaky and often pulls off a win when least expected, but this is a tall order.

Stay Put has the pedigree and ability to run in mud, but has been slow to mature and been bested by lesser. He does have the strongest late pace speed figures in the field, so he could be an interesting long-shot.

Fly Down, convincing winner of the Dwyer last time out will draw a lot of attention. He should be sitting closer to the pace than his stablemate Ice Box, but Fly Down's pedigree for getting 1 ½ miles is borderline. He will be adding three furlongs off a career best race. Fly Down shows a bullet post-race breeze and could fill in exotics, but he is adding three furlongs after a career-best race.

Drosselmeyer is another with a borderline pedigree for the distance. He was beaten six lengths by Fly Down last time out. The little chestnut hung like a bad suit in his previous races, but he was down on the inside and that he has a preference to be away from the rail. Note the jockey switch to Mike Smith, who prefers to make his runs on the outside.

Dave In Dixie and **Uptowncharlybrown** both have pedigrees suited for shorter distances. Both horses are long-striding stalkers, yet neither has won beyond a sprint.

Selections:

The track condition will have a say in the complexion of the race. Below are race picks for fast and off tracks.

Fast Track

1st - Ice Box

2nd - First Dude

3rd - FlyDown

4th - Drosselmeyer

Stay Put – longshot

Off Track

1st - Ice Box

2nd - First Dude

3rd - Interactif

4th - Make Music For Me

Stay Put - longshot

