

HORSE RACING

Mystik Dan looks like one to beat at Preakness

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**
AP Sports Writer

BALTIMORE – His father was a mudder. His mother was a mudder. Yes, this horse loves the slop.

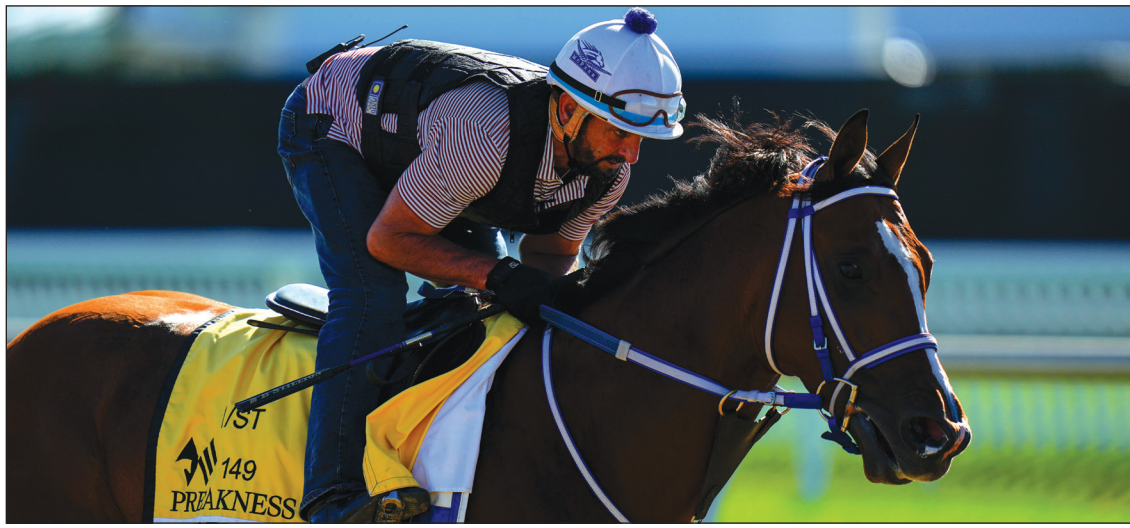
No, Mystik Dan doesn't need a sloppy track – or "Seinfeld" character Cosmo Kramer's comedic endorsement – in the Preakness on Saturday because the Kentucky Derby winner has raced and thrived in all kinds of conditions. But after initial favorite Muth was scratched mid-week and with rain in the forecast potentially mucking up the dirt, Mystik Dan looks like the horse to beat in the second leg of the Triple Crown.

To win, he'll have to contend with Bob Baffert-trained Imagination, Brad Cox's Catching Freedom and others in the field of eight.

"It's not a given: We've got to run a good race," Mystik Dan trainer Kenny McPeck said Thursday. "It's still not an easy race. There's no guarantees, and it's a very humbling sport, but right now we've got everything in line."

All eyes are on Mystik Dan after winning May 4 in the Derby's first three-way photo finish since 1947, back when horse racing was the sport of kings and captured national attention more than a few times a year.

A victory on Saturday would bring absurd hype if a Triple Crown is on the line June 8 in the Belmont Stakes, which is being held at historic Saratoga Race Course in upstate New York for the first time.



JULIO CORTEZ / AP

Kentucky Derby winner Mystik Dan works out ahead of the 149th running of the Preakness Stakes at Pimlico Race Course on Thursday in Baltimore.

MUD MADNESS

That's three weeks away and far from the minds of those around Mystik Dan, who are focused on putting all the pieces in place for another strong race in the Preakness. And while McPeck insists he is not worried about the weather because he cannot control it, exercise rider and two-time Preakness winner Robby Albarado is "doing a rain dance all this week" because Mystik Dan blew away the competition in the mud in the Southwest Stakes on Feb. 3.

"This colt, the only time he ran on an off track, he excelled," assistant trainer Ray Bryner said. "It takes other horses' races away from them. Usually if you've got a mudder, they don't get slowed

down much, whereas a lot of horses, they don't take to kickback that well. They don't feel as sure-footed in it, and they slip and slide a little bit."

NO MUTH

Mystik Dan slipped into the favorite role after Muth, also trained by Baffert, who is looking for his record-extending ninth Preakness victory, was ruled out Wednesday for spiking a fever. Baffert said Friday Imagination is "going to have to step it up" to win.

Muth was expected to go out to the lead and set the pace for the others to follow, and Cox acknowledged his absence doesn't necessarily help Catching Freedom, whose style is to come from behind

as a closer.

"(Muth) was going to be right there, if not on the lead," Brad's son and Catching Freedom assistant trainer Blake Cox said. "It changes the pace scenario, and we're going to need a setup to come running and hopefully some other people send out of (the gate quickly) and we can get a setup."

It might benefit Mystik Dan, with jockey Brian Hernandez Jr. looking to again stalk the leaders from the inside and get another ground-saving trip along the rail.

"Brian's a very talented, talented rider," said Albarado, who won the Preakness for McPeck in 2020 with filly Swiss Skydiver and anticipates Hernandez taking a similar path. "He'll have a cou-

ple audibles just in case something happens."

The 1 3/16-mile distance may be just what Mystik Dan needs after almost being caught at the wire by hard-charging Sierra Leone and Forever Young in the Kentucky Derby, which is another quarter of a mile longer.

LONG-SHOT CHALLENGERS

NBC Sports' Britney Eurton liked Mystik Dan's chances all along, seeing consistent improvement from him race to race. Her upset pick is Chad Brown-trained Tuscan Gold.

"He knows how to win with a horse that did not run in the Kentucky Derby, and I know this horse is lightly raced," Eurton said. "He really fits the profile."

Brown has won the Preakness twice – Cloud Computing in 2017 and Early Voting in 2022 – and finished second once over the past seven years with a non-Derby horse. Butch Reid has his first Triple Crown starter in Uncle Heavy, who also was not at Churchill Downs.

The last horse to win the Preakness after falling short in the Derby was War of Will in 2019. Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas will try to replicate that with Just Steel and is also saddling Seize the Grey and figures the latter would perform better if it's sloppy, while hoping it is not.

"I would prefer a dry track for both of them or at least a drying-out track," the 88-year-old Lukas said. "I don't care for the mud."

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EAST

her," Jennifer Brooks said. "When we first started out there, I noticed the girls were sort of a half a step behind on her speed. She's a good little pitcher. After that first round, they were able to step up and get their timing down."

Jones and Lawson finished with four hits each, with Jones driving in four runs. Jordan Brooks added two hits.

"Every day, we usually have someone new hitting the ball hard," Jones

said. "Tonight, it was a couple of us hitting it really good. The next night it could be somebody else. That is just how we work."

It was the fifth straight game the Lady Raiders have scored at least 12 runs, with East scoring 15 runs in three of those games.

"We are feeling pretty hot," Lydia Jones said. "Our bats are going good. We like where we are at there. We can hit one through nine in the lineup. We are all squaring it up pretty good and we hope to continue the momentum."

Keyara Hudson finished with two

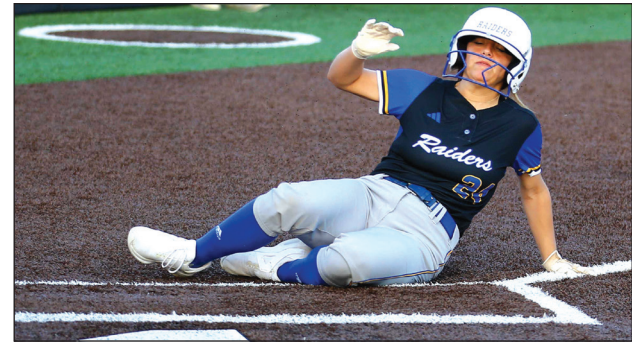
hits for Bowling Green.

Warren East is scheduled to wrap up the regular season hosting Monroe County on Friday before opening the District 15 tournament against Allen County-Scottsville at 7 p.m. Monday at ACSHS.

Bowling Green hosts the District 14 Tournament, facing Greenwood at 7:15 p.m. Tuesday.

WEHS 100 068 – 15 14 1
BGHS 101 010 – 35 2

WP: A. Brooks LP: Morrison
– Follow sports reporter Micheal Compton on Twitter @mcompton428 or visit bgdailynews.com



CALEB LOWNDES / caleb.lowndes@bgdailynews.com

Warren East junior Addison Lee slides into home plate during the Lady Raiders' 15-3 road win against Bowling Green on Thursday.

BGPR JUNIOR GOLF COMMITTEE MEMBERS; TOURNAMENT SPONSORS; SCOTT WASTE SERVICES EMPLOYEES; BG PARKS AND RECREATION REPRESENTATIVES AND AREA GOLF COACHES MET ON THURSDAY, MAY 2, AT SCOTT WASTE SERVICES TO MAKE PLANS FOR THEIR 2024 TOURNAMENTS. BELOW IS A GROUP PHOTO OF ATTENDEES.



L-R FRONT ROW: LOGAN STEENBURGEN; MALCOLM CHERRY; DORIAN LEE; SAM UPPERMAN; BRIAN LOWDER – ATTY; PAUL BURRELL; RONNIE MOORE AND BOB HOVIOUS.

2ND ROW: ERIC HOLMAN; TINA WITT; BRITTANY MERRITT; MAGISTRATE TOM LAWRENCE; SHERIFF BRETT HIGHTOWER; BG POLICE CHIEF MICHAEL DELANEY; WKU POLICE CHIEF MITCH WALKER; KAREN PEERCE - BGPR; DEE SAVAGE AND STAN ENGLAND.

BACK ROW: KYLE SIMMONS; ALEX ESPINOZA; OMAR ROGERS - BGPR; BRENT BELCHER - DIRECTOR OF BG PARKS AND RECREATION; JOHN RENFROW; OTIS SINGLETON AND DAVID W ANDERSON



BOYS CHAMPIONSHIPS
8 AM - MONDAY, JULY 15, 2024
AT PALL WALKER GOLF COURSE

PUTTING CHAMPIONSHIPS
6 TO 10 YRS OLD - BOYS & GIRLS
9:30AM - WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 2024
AT PAUL WALKER PUTTING GREEN



GIRLS CHAMPIONSHIPS
8 AM - WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 2024
AT PAUL WALKER GOLF COURSE

BOYS & GIRLS THROUGHOUT BOWLING GREEN/WARREN COUNTY ARE ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN BGPR CITY JUNIOR GOLF CHAMPIONSHIPS.

**THERE IS NO COST FOR ANY BOY OR GIRL TO PARTICIPATE.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION MAY BE FOUND AT WWW.BGKY.ORG/BGPR**