

N.O.'s Amoss has filly ready for Preakness

Calvin Borel to ride longshot Ria Antonia

BY ANNE LANG
Special to The Advocate

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

Especially when an entry into the Preakness comes with it, albeit with the longest shot in the field.

New Orleanian Tom Amoss will be saddling filly Ria Antonia in the second jewel of the Triple Crown on Saturday after owners Ron Paolucci and Christopher Dunn transferred her from Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert — an idea which Amoss

originally had his doubts about.

"When Ron was moving the horse over to me, he had indicated that (the Preakness) was an idea that he'd had," said Amoss, whose Mylute finished third in last year's Preakness. "I told him I'd be interested in it only if the horse demonstrated that she was healthy, ready to go and on her game.

"Ron deferred to me on that, and Ria has trained very well. She's doing all the things you want a horse to be doing going into a race. She's energetic on the track, her breeze was very good and she came out of it in

good shape physically."

And for a jockey Amoss turned to a familiar name — Hall of Famer and St. Martin Parish native Calvin Borel who rode the last distaff Preakness winner — Rachel Alexandra in 2009.

Preakness Stakes

POST TIME:
5 p.m. Saturday
TV: NBC

Borel was taken off Ride on Curlin after what trainer Billy Gowan adjudged a poor ride in the Kentucky Derby for the seventh-place finisher. Borel worked Ria Antonia at Churchill Downs on Sunday before the final decision was made to ship her to Pimlico.

"I was very, very impressed with the work," Borel said. "I

knew Tom had only had this horse for a week or two, and I don't know how she'd been working before, but I was very satisfied with the work and especially with the gallop-out.

"I didn't push her; it was a very easy maintenance work, but she galloped out so beautifully. I think that's what made Tom and the owners decide to run her."

Ria Antonia is coming off a disappointing sixth-place finish in the Kentucky Oaks.

It was her first race since winning the Breeders' Cup Fillies Juvenile in November. She had been shipped to the Fair Grounds in December with the

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Advocate file photo by JOHN McCUSKER

Ria Antonia works out at the Fair Grounds in February.

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intention of entering her in the Louisiana Derby prep races, but her connections never felt she was up to it.

For that reason, and because fillies rarely do well against their male counterparts (she's the first filly in the Preakness since Rachel Alexandra), Ria Antonia is 30-1 on the morning line. Kentucky Derby champion California Chrome is an early 3-5 favorite.

Baffert's Bayern — with Rosie Napravnik, who rode Mylute in 2013, aboard — is a co-third choice at 10-1 and will be in the No. 5 slot.

Amoss and Borel acknowledged that California Chrome will be hard to beat, but are confident that their horse has a chance.

"I think one of her greatest strengths is stamina," Amoss said. "She has great length of stride, so she has a high cruising speed. Anytime you're talking about a race with a lot of distance, which this one is, that's important."

Borel agreed.

Preakness odds

The field for Saturday's 139th Preakness Stakes, with post position, horse's name, jockey's name and odds:

1. Dynamic Impact	Miguel Menna	12-1
2. General a Rod	Javier Castellano	15-1
3. California Chrome	Victor Espinoza	3-5
4. Ring Weekend	Alan Garcia	20-1
5. Bayern	Rosie Napravnik	10-1
6. Ria Antonia	Calvin Borel	30-1
7. Kid Cruz	Julian Pimentel	20-1
8. Social Inclusion	Luis Contreras	5-1
9. Pablo Del Monte	Jeffrey Sanchez	20-1
10. Ride On Curlin	Joel Rosario	10-1

Trainers (by post position): 1, Mark Casse. 2, Mike Maker. 3, Art Sherman. 4, Graham Motion. 5, Bob Baffert. 6, Tom Amoss. 7, Linda Rice. 8, Manny Azpurua. 9, Wesley Ward. 10, William Gowan.

Owners (by post position): 1, St. Elias Stable. 2, Starlight Racing & Skychai Racing, LLC. 3, Steve and Carolyn Coburn & Perry and Denise Martin. 4, Loooch Racing Stable. 5, John Oxley. 6, Kaleem Shah, Inc. 7, Black Swan Stable & Vina Del Mar. 8, Rontos Racing Stable Corp. 9, Mrs. John Magnier, Derrick Smith, Michael B. Tabor, Wesley A. Ward. 10, Daniel J. Dougherty.

Weights: 126 each. **Distance:** 1 3/16 miles. **Purse:** \$1 million.

"I think Ria Antonia fits this race, and anything can happen," he said.

"Anytime you get a hole (in the pack), you've got a shot. So I'm going to go out there and ride her with a lot of confidence. Really and truly, if everything follows like it's supposed to, maybe we'll get lucky."

At the least, it reunites the two Louisianians together in a Triple Crown race for the first time.

"I've won a lot of races for Tom," Borel said. "We get along good, and he always finds horses for me, especially in the big races, because he knows I ride with a lot of confidence.

"When Tom puts a horse in a race, you can ride with confidence because he has his horses in the right spots and he knows what he has. He's a good trainer who does a good job and I'm glad he's giving me this chance."

Amoss returned the compliment. "We wanted someone who could be confident on her," he said. "When he worked her on Sunday, he was very excited about her afterward.

That's what I want — someone who can get on her back this Saturday and think to themselves: 'I'm going to win this race.'"

Even if conventional wisdom is against them,

"This is horse racing, and horses have peaks and valleys," Amoss said. "So the gamble is that California Chrome doesn't run his best race on Saturday.

If so, where does that leave us? So it's certainly one of the possible outcomes is that our horse will win the race."