



HOT TOPICS:

Many Take Belmont Disappointment in Stride

AP Associated Press

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At the King Umberto Italian restaurant, just steps from Belmont Park, owner Bietro Fuschetto was optimistic his place would be jammed with customers buying pizzas and heros Saturday.

"I think people already made their reservations and they will still be coming," Fuschetto said. "They'll be here. It's going to be a good day for us."

Disappointment at a racetrack is nothing new. So when the announcement came Friday that I'll Have Another suffered a career-ending injury and would not be able to contend for the elusive Triple Crown, many took the news in stride. The National Thoroughbred Racing Association said, "The health and safety of the horse must always be the paramount consideration."

Martin Cantor went to the Belmont Stakes in 2010 when there was no chance of a Triple Crown winner, and predicted Friday that I'll Have Another's removal from the field could actually create a spike in gambling.

"When you have a 4-5 favorite scratch, it just means people will be looking all over to try and figure out who to bet on. I think at the track, at OTBs, even in Las Vegas, you're likely to see increased betting handles."

NBC Sports, which was hopeful that ratings would soar with the prospect of a Triple Crown at stake, said it would deal with the disappointment accordingly.

The last time a Triple Crown prospect went to the starting gate, in 2008, ABC's broadcast of the race attracted 13.1 million viewers. Last year, with no Triple Crown at stake, NBC drew 6.8 million viewers.

"The Belmont Stakes is still an iconic event on the sports schedule, and the NBC Sports Group broadcasts will treat it as such," Adam Freifeld, vice president of communications said in a statement.

Tiffany Townsend, a spokeswoman for NYC & Co., the city's tourism arm, expected little impact. She noted the Mets and Yankees will be drawing capacity crowds at Yankee Stadium this weekend for their annual Subway Series.

"June is typically a very busy time of year within the five boroughs, and hotels are particularly full this weekend not just because of the Belmont Stakes, but also due to many other sporting events," she said.

The late timing of the announcement may also mean less of a crimp in track attendance — if any at all. A spokesman for the New York Racing Association, which operates the state's three thoroughbred tracks — Belmont, Aqueduct and Saratoga — did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

But Cantor, who heads the Long Island Center for Socio-Economic Policy, predicted that many of the expected 100,000 race fans would still head to Belmont Park for Saturday's race.

"I don't think it is going to be as bad as some people think," he said. "There should not be much of a fall in hotel reservations and the restaurants will still be crowded because most people are already here."

Martin Melkonian, an economics professor at Hofstra University, agreed.

"No impact as I see it," he said. "This is still the Belmont Stakes and people will be going out to enjoy the day."