

# THE SPORTIER

## Controversy at Churchill Downs?

Unfortunate news has been revealed about the Kentucky Derby-winning horse Medina Spirit, who won the Derby on May 1. It has been recently revealed that the horse tested positive for 21 picograms of betamethasone in his system in a post-race drug test. This drug, which reduces inflammation in the joints of horses, is actually not a considered performance enhancing drug in horse racing. The rules regarding use of betamethasone is that a horse can only have the drug 14 days or more prior to the day of their race, ensuring that it is out of their system in time for their race. While betamethasone is not a performance enhancing drug, it is illegal for horses to use on the day of or close to the day of their race because other horses will not be able to feel the same relief as the ones using the steroid.

The trainer of this horse, Bob Baffert, is one of the most accomplished in history. An experienced trainer, excluding 2021's Kentucky Derby, Baffert is tied with the most Derby victories of all-time with Ben Jones at 6. Additionally, Baffert is tied for the all-time record for Preakness Stakes victories at 7, and he has also won the coveted Triple Crown twice (2015, 2018). Even though Baffert is a legend in the sport of horse racing, that does not exclude him from his fair share of issues, the main one being doping and steroids with his horses. In the 2020 Kentucky Oaks, one of Baffert's horses tested positive for betamethasone. The horse, named Gamine, placed third in the race, and was disqualified after testing positive. Baffert did not appeal this particular disqualification. Outside of this one drug, there are other recent instances of Baffert's horses caught with illegal substances in their systems. The same horse caught with betamethasone previously, Gamine, and another one of Baffert's horses, Charlatan, have tested positive for the drug lidocaine. This particular drug for horses is similar to betamethasone in the way that it is helpful for pain management and reduces inflammation. In the summer of 2020, Baffert-trained Merneith was found to have dextrophan in her system, which is a cough suppressant. Dating back to 2018, Justify, Baffert's horse who won the Triple Crown that same year, had tested positive for scopolamine after racing in the Santa Anita Derby, one of the crucial races leading up to the Kentucky Derby. This particular drug combats the side effects that some horses may experience when they consume jimsonweed, which is native to California. In the end, Justify was allowed to stay as the winner in this race. It is evident that while Baffert has a history of being a winner, he also has had trouble with using substances illegally.

When talking about the Kentucky Derby, it is impossible to avoid discussing the money. The Derby is one of the most bet-on sporting events in the world, with \$155.4 million being wagered for this year's edition of the event. For all of the bettors that placed their bets on Medina Spirit this year, they have nothing to worry about. According to Kentucky-based lawyer Bob Heleringer, results of the race in terms of the sports book can't be changed from what the reported outcome from the track is. That is, once the winner is officially announced by the track, while record books can change in terms of determining the true winner, sports books can't change. For Bob Baffert, things aren't looking as bright. He can possibly lose the \$1.8 million purse that was awarded to Medina Spirit for winning the race.

Much of the details of this case are still up in the air. Medina Spirit is currently undergoing a second round of testing, and if this comes back positive, the horse will officially be disqualified from the race and the winner of the Derby will be named Mandaloun, who finished second behind Medina Spirit. As for Baffert himself, he has already been suspended from entering horses at Churchill Downs, the site of the Kentucky Derby. While there is no indication as to how long this suspension will last for, the Hall of Fame trainer's legacy is certainly tarnished. A comparable situation to that of Baffert occurred with former Derby-winning trainer Rick Dutrow. While Dutrow won the Derby in 2008, in 2011, he faced punishment for a similar doping scandal to Baffert. Dutrow was banned from racing in the US for 10 years, which makes Baffert's current situation look less favorable.

If Medina Spirit is indeed disqualified from the race, it will be just the second time in Kentucky Derby history that a horse has been disqualified over medicine, the only previous horse being Dancer's Image in 1968. This horse was also the only winning horse to date who has been disqualified from the event, and Medina Spirit would be just the second horse to enter this unfortunate category as well.



MAY 1, 2021 - MEDINA SPIRIT (8) RACES IN THE KENTUCKY DERBY

Sources:

[ABC News](#), [American Association of Equine Practitioners](#), [NY Times](#), [CBS News](#), [Forbes](#), [Kentucky Derby](#), [Bleacher Report](#), [USA Today](#), [Washington Post](#)