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## Two Straight Belmont Winners and Possibly Three

By BILL FINLEY

Casino Drive is listed at short odds for Saturday's [Belmont Stakes](#), but a victory by him would nonetheless represent one of the biggest winning long shots in horse racing history. The Japanese-based Casino Drive, who is 7-2 in the morning line, will be attempting to become the third straight Belmont winner out of the dam Better Than Honour, a proposition that is, depending on how you crunch the numbers, as high as 43 trillion to 1.

"To think a dam could produce three straight Belmont winners is unfathomable," said John Kimmel, who trained the 12-year-old mare during her racing career. "She's already produced two straight Belmont winners and now might have a third. Casino Drive could win this. That would be like Woody Stephens's five straight Belmont wins. It's something that will never happen again."

Thoroughbred sires have plenty of chances to produce good horses; the top stallions are bred to 100 mares or more each year. The sire Bull Lea produced three [Kentucky Derby](#) winners, including the 1948 Triple Crown champion Citation. Seattle Slew swept the 1977 Triple Crown, then produced the Belmont winners Swale (1984) and A. P. Indy (1992).

But a dam can be bred just once each year, making the odds astronomical that two or more of their offspring will win back-to-back Triple Crown races. Better Than Honour is the only mare to produce two Belmont winners.

There are about 35,000 horses bred each year in the United States. Giving every dam an equal chance of producing a Belmont winner, the chances of one mare turning out two straight Belmont winners is about 1.2 billion to 1. Using the same simple formula, the odds of a dam producing three straight Belmont winners is 1 in 42.875 trillion.

"You have to take into the account that certain mares have a much greater probability of producing a quality horse over others," said Rob Whiteley, the breeder of Better Than Honour. "There'll be a dam in Wyoming without a good pedigree or an opportunity to get to a top stallion. You have to drop one like that from consideration. But even if you say that there might be 15,000 dams who have a realistic chance of producing a top foal, the odds of this happening still come down to the billions."

Better Than Honour raced eight times, winning a maiden race and the 1998 Demoiselle Stakes after Tutorial was disqualified for causing interference. After her last career start, a third-place finish in the Grade I Mother Goose at Belmont, she was purchased by John Sikura of Hill 'n' Dale Farm in Lexington, Ky.

"I told John, 'this is a magnificent looking filly,' " Kimmel said. "She is going to be one stunning broodmare."

A well-bred stakes winner, Better Than Honour figured to be a good broodmare, but it does not always work out that way. Winning Colors, the last filly to win the Kentucky Derby, produced six foals that raced. None was a stakes winner, and the sextet combined to win 8 of 41 races.

After her first two foals did not win any major races, Better Than Honour went on a roll. Her third foal, Jazil, won the 2006 Belmont. Her fourth, Rags to Riches, captured the Belmont a year later.

Along the way, Sikura sold Better Than Honour for an undisclosed price to Skara Glen Stable. While carrying Casino Drive, Better Than Honour was sold at auction by Skara Glen in 2004 for \$2 million to European interests. She is probably worth six times that much today. Whiteley, her breeder, called her “the most valuable broodmare in the world today.”

Ira Gumberg, whose family operates Skara Glen Stable, said: “We did just fine financially with her. . To have had her for a time is very special to us.”

Sikura and Mike Moreno reacquired Better Than Honour in 2006, buying her privately from the European group.

Casino Drive was sold as a yearling for \$950,000 to the Japanese owner Hidetoshi Yamamoto. After Rags to Riches’s Belmont win, Yamamoto became intrigued by the idea of keeping Better Than Honour’s streak alive and brought the colt over from Japan.

[Big Brown](#) will be tough to beat, but this could be the horse to do it.

“To have two Belmont winners from this dam is unbelievable,” Gumberg said. “To have three in a row would truly be mythical.”

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