



Tori Colvin comes in with two bullets: defending USHJA International Hunter Derby Champion Private Practice (pictured) and seasoned veteran El Primero. *KIMBERLY LOUSHIN PHOTO*

# Will Colvin Continue To Make Derby History?

While she comes back as the reigning champ, our handicapper, the three-time USHJA International Hunter Derby Championship judge, believes the caliber of combinations has risen such that it's anybody's game.

By Chris Wynne

What you have this year is what they've tried to make this event to be: true hunters. I don't think you have "derby horses." In the past a Brunello and even a Jersey Boy, even though he did the division some, were thought of as derby horses. The horses this year are thought of as hunters that do the derbies.

We went through a stage where the derby was so demanding that a really good hunter didn't always cross over. The high options and things like that just became so demanding for the "hunter" that the grand prix horse that's doing the derby had the advantage.

Now they're importing horses that have that scope and ability to jump those heights in very good form and have movement and looks. We haven't really had that in the past. We've had unbelievable horses but not necessarily movement and looks and unbelievable jump. That's a different package. This group of horses, I would say 95 percent of them are horses that win in the hunter division. As we go through the list, I don't think we'll come to one that wouldn't do the working hunters really well. The quality has gone up, and the style of horse has gone up, and the ability of the horses has gone up.

The other thing that's exciting is the new crop of riders have improved. You're going to have your old faithfuls in there, but there's a new crop of riders that are tough. The crop that you always thought were contenders I now think are past the point of contenders. They can win, and that's where we're different this year.

In the past, it was like, "Oh, it's going to be Liza Boyd. It's going to be Hunt Tosh. It's going to be this person."

You had three or four names. This year you go 10 or 12 deep in names of riders who could win, and they probably have one or two horses each who could win. It really takes you to 15 or 18 horses that if they won you'd be like, "Hmm, it's a little bit of a surprise but not really."

It's sort of wide open. I say "sort of" wide open because there's one person who is—I don't want to say unbeatable because everybody's beatable—but I think would be the odds-on favorite. But after that, there are a lot of people who are knocking at the door. It's a big event, and anything can happen. When I looked at the list, it was so easy to pick 10 horses that could win. This year you truly have the potential to have scores that could be 95, 98, maybe 100, which we haven't seen in a very long time.

It's like other sports: I think the medium level has now become a very good level. A very good level has now become a great level.

## THE COLVIN EQUATION

Tori Colvin should have to ride blindfolded—or at least cover one eye. She is the Tiger Woods, the Tom Brady, the LeBron James of our hunter show business at this point. She's deadly.

I won the stake class at Devon (Pennsylvania), and I had Tori Colvin behind me. I have to tell you I wanted a picture taken in the ring. Usually I have to squint my eyes to even see Tori in the line—and really any of the rest of my top 10—because I'm so far back, and she's so far up. I almost didn't want to leave the ring. I almost wanted to stand there so people could see that Tori Colvin was behind me because nobody's going to believe it.



Because of her calm demeanor, the big stages and the pressures she's been under since she was a child, I just don't think anything bothers her. I've watched and judged her many, many times, and I'm always amazed by her demeanor and her ability and how much horses want to perform for her—that's what gets me the most.

Unfortunately for the rest of us, she's only going to get better. But right now, she's at the top of her game. I don't think she has any weaknesses in her riding, and you're putting her on two spectacular horses: **Private Practice** and **El Primero**. And that's not good for the rest.

Private Practice is my favorite to win it all—not because he won last year; he can make a mistake. But Tori's confidence—and if it's not going perfectly, her ability to make it work out well enough—is enough to make her the winner. If you let her get to the second round, and she's in the top few, then it's over. The horse has a ton of ability, but most of it is Tori's ability.

Unfortunately for the competition, it's going to be a really long era. Other riders are able to beat her; there's no doubt about it. They ride great. They can beat her, and they have beaten her. But good luck, that's all I can say.

### THE OPEN FIELD

I talk like Tori is so far ahead, but that's just because she has two bullets, and everybody else has one. These other riders are on horses that either have experience or are unbelievable in their abilities, and there are enough of them that they're going to be close.

In the past I would say **Samantha Schaefer** could be really competitive and make the cut, but I never thought she could be the winner. Her ability on **In The Know** and now her experience on that horse has made her someone who could win. She's now been in this spotlight enough times that I don't think the atmosphere means anything to her anymore. She's elevated her status as a derby rider and combination with that horse, so when she comes in the ring you say, "You know what? This one could win."

**Red Ryder** is capable of the highest scores in the

derby. He's an unbelievable jumper, goes like a hunter, ears pricked, cute and adorable, with **Hannah Isop**, a very, very good hunter style rider on him. Judges like that horse and that look. Sometimes he'll be a little playful and goof off, but when he's jumping and flowing and galloping around the course, he is what you would use as a video of: "This is a show hunter." It's the type of combination you find yourself rooting for because it's a little bit of a unique style. It's a little bit of the old-school hunter from back in the day, and I say that as a compliment. There's nothing manufactured about that horse.

I just saw **Liza Boyd's** name, and it doesn't matter who she's riding. She gets more out of any horse they're going to put her on. I don't know if she has the best horse she's ever had—**Tradition** went well there last year. Her father's going to have the horse ready to jump well. She's going to make the horse go well, and

she's going to be capable of scoring in the high 80s, low 90s, which is going to put the pressure on Tori and the other people who have maybe a little more horsepower. But you're going to have to outride her. Don't let her back in the handy. If you let her back in the handy, and you let her back in the handy near the top, you're going to be in trouble. Because she is going to go for it, and she's going to force you to go for it. And if it's not in your DNA to go for it, you're going to be behind her.

I would hate for her to think, "Nobody thinks I have a chance." If she has that mentality at all, watch out. It could be embarrassing for the rest of the people because she will go for it, every jump, every day. I'll never forget when she was way ahead on **Brunello** in 2015, and there are two jumps sitting there. There's a 3'9" option and 4'11" option. She's so far ahead there was no reason to head to that oxer, and there was not one ounce of her that backed off. She knew she had already won the class. She didn't back off one bit and headed to that high oxer. You're just like, "OK. What can you say?" That's a different DNA.

*I'm always amazed by her demeanor and her ability and how much horses want to perform for her."*

—Chris Wynne

I'm giving **Hunt Tosh** another shot. Hunt is obviously one of the best hunter riders that's ever been. You have a horse extremely capable of doing it in **Flamingo-K**. He blamed me because I put him on the cover of the 2017 Hunter Derby Preview issue. He said it was like the Madden jinx—that if you're on the cover of the Madden [football video] game, the next year usually those players get hurt or have an awful season because they're on the cover of Madden. But I think Hunt's more dangerous coming in as not the favorite than as the favorite. And he'll have that horse ready, and he'll ride really well.

**Amanda Steege** is just one of the nicest people you ever talk to. And Amanda goes into that category of not wanting to lose. She's like a NASCAR driver; she's got sponsorships, ProElite and this stuff, and I'm like, "I use the same feed, but they've never called me for anything. I'm not in any commercials." She's in commercials. You know you've made it when you're in a commercial. You know you're famous then. She and **Lafitte De Muze** are tied at the hip. She knows that horse so well, and that horse knows her so well. That is a great horse. Everybody knows that horse's jumping ability is through the roof. My only concern is that he's a little bit green, and that may show up. But if it doesn't show up, she's going to be right there.

**Diamante's** green for this—he doesn't have the miles that these other horses have, so it's a little bit of a stretch. But when he canters down to a big oxer, he jumps it easily. When he canters to a 3'6" jump, he jumps it easily. And **Patricia Griffith's** another rider who, again, is certainly not an up-and-comer. She's been around forever, and as to winning this, she's right there. For this horse the course will not be too big, and the course will not be too hard. It will all be environment—and that we'll have to see. She has to feel like she's got all the horsepower she needs to win. If the bright lights don't bother him, the ability is there to be in the top 10. I don't know if it's ready to be the winner this year, but the ability is there to be in the top 10.



Samantha Schaefer has been a strong contender in years past, but this year Chris Wynne picks her as a top 10 rider and possibly the winner of it all with **In The Know**.

KIMBERLY LOUSHIN PHOTO

**Holly Shepherd** is Evel Knievel, a motorcycle stunt guy who jumped over the Grand Canyon in some rocket ship that he used like a motorcycle. Somebody said he couldn't do it, so he does it. She's that stunt guy. She has no fear. She doesn't think anyone can't do anything, including herself, and she has a good horse in **High Society** that has the capability of jumping the high options, doing all the parts. She isn't going to pull on



No matter what Liza Boyd rides, our columnist believes she'll be in the running. This year she's aboard the 2018 third-placed finisher Tradition. **KIMBERLY LOUSHIN PHOTO**

the reins, and she's going to go for it—those two things I can promise you. What she's also going to do is ratchet it up a notch more if she makes it to the next round, and she's going to go for it even more. She doesn't even need reins in the next round except to turn. Whether it goes perfectly or not, I don't know. But when Holly walks in, she's going to go for it, and if the horse is capable of performing its job, it's going to be a pretty good ending.

**Jennifer Hannan** is one of the more beautiful riders we have in the field as far as her hunter style. She creates a beautiful picture going around the ring, which takes us back to the hunter style of horses going around. You get caught up in the whole course that the horse is doing and not caught up in the "Are they jumping the high options?" and "How did they handle that type of stuff?" **Olympic Fire** has shown a lot of talent, but that talent seems to be rising to the top. If the two can mesh on that day at that event, both of them are more than capable of winning.

### SAVING THE BEST FOR THE ANNIVERSARY

Those riders are going to apply so much pressure I don't think anybody's going to be able to win this thing and have a little mistake. If you have a little mistake they're right at your heels, and if you look behind you every one of them would rather be in front of you. There's a favorite, but those guys you've got as underdogs, that's a bad group to have shooting at you.

This is going to be as good as it gets. It's the one time in our industry that the riders are put to that pressure and under that microscope. And in my opinion, they always perform better than even they think they could have performed. As good as Tori was last year, I bet she was better than she thought she was going to be. And I would say that about everybody who's ever won it. But that's what's exciting about it—we have these hunter riders



who are amazing, and you think they're just machines. They clock around, and then all of a sudden, their game is brought to another level.

The best thing about this event when you're judging it is the countdown. It starts to get dark. The lights come on brighter. You judge, and you get to that top 15 and you're like, "Wow, these are some good trips." I've said to myself every time I've judged it, "I don't think anybody can go better than that," and then the next one comes in. When you get to those top three, a lot of times I don't write, I just watch. I don't need to write. Nothing's going to happen. This year it could be the best derby ever because it's going to be close. **🕒**



Red Ryder is "a little bit of the old-school hunter from back in the day," writes Chris Wynne, tapping him as a potential winner with rider Hannah Isop. **LAURA LEMON PHOTO**



SHAWN McMILLEN PHOTO

### CHRIS WYNNE

Chris Wynne owns and operates Breckenridge Manor in Virginia Beach. He's been named the Virginia Horse Shows Association Horseman of the Year and is an R-rated U.S. Equestrian Federation judge in the hunters, jumpers and equitation. He's judged many major hunter championships, including the USHJA International Hunter Derby Championship (Kentucky), the Pennsylvania National Horse Show, the Washington International Horse Show (District of Columbia), the Royal Winter Fair (Ontario) and the Devon Horse Show (Pennsylvania).