

# RICE'S DERBY CHOICE JOURNAL

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A sad reality of our game as it pertains to the Kentucky Derby is the decline in the number of purple home-breds of the great families of racing (e.g. Phipps, Whitney, Vanderbilt, Mellon, Hancock, etc.). More and more we find the entrants comprised of expensive auction produce of fine pedigree and the odd freak of humble origin. The result is that the trainers who train owners as well as horses are represented totally out of proportion to the Derby Laws of Probability. That is why two trainers (Nick Zito and Todd Pletcher) account for 40% of the field. But in Lord Tennyson's words ours "is not to reason why." All we can say is deal 'em. We'll start with the 5 Zitoistas followed by the 3 Pletcherians

## THE ZITOISTAS:

**BELLAMY ROAD-** The Bosox fans' second worst nightmare is named for the historic 1824-built route from St. Augustine to Pensacola, Florida and is owned by Yankee Boss, George Steinbrenner. This colt will enjoy justified favoritism on Saturday. His Wood Memorial (equaled track record, set new stakes record) was as lopsided as it was effortless. Hard to forget his gallop out which required an outrider to pull him up nearly a half mile past the finish. Always had a lot of time for his sire, Concerto, (also owned by The Boss and Derby 9th in '97). Figure guys may fear a bounce after that huge effort, but he could bounce a lot and maybe still be best. Derbyless rider, Castellano, is budding star and this colt is sharpest arrow in Zito's quiver. Only a pair of 3yo starts may make this colt the Road less traveled, but he might be the most genuine Bronx Bomber the Boss has.

**HIGH FLY-** "Mmmm good" applies to this guy and his owner, the Campbell Soup heiress. "High fly ball, deep left field, way back, it might be outta here, it might be, it could be, it is... A home run!" That's the way the late Harry Caray would characterize forming home runs heading for the seats at Wrigley Field, usually by the visitors. With Calder origin and modest pedigree, this colt's professional wins in the Fountain of Youth and Florida Derby would have seemed unlikely as '05 commenced. But here he is with no less than Jerry Bailey as a partner. His sire Atticus was world record holder for a mile but won longer. This High Fly could turn into a walk-off four bagger on Derby Day.

**SUN KING-** Named for either King Louis XIV or a cut from the Beatles Abbey Road album, this guy is a son of '99 Derby King Charismatic and has had a cleverly managed program to end up in Louisville. Thought to be Zito's number one after strong third in the B.C. Juvenile and easy score in the Tampa Bay Derby (over not much), his Blue Grass performance (distant 4th) did not produce a Louis, Louis refrain from the barn where the colt is known as Elvis. Top rider, Prado, could have jumped to NOBLE CAUSEWAY but

stays. Is he "Nothin' But a Hound Dog" or will he rule on Derby Day? Very tough call.

NOBLE CAUSEWAY- Owner is chairman of Barnes and Noble so no problem booking a bet on this one. Son of Euro Champion, GIANT'S CAUSEWAY which went to the wire with TIZNOW in the B.C. Classic in '00. Mom (HURRY HOME HILLARY) was definitely not named by ex-Prez Bubba. Has progressed each race with last effort a sound placing in the Florida Derby though still without a stakes win. Bit of a Swami angle for your editor who traversed the New Orleans Causeway daily for over two decades. Could bridge the gap with one more jump up. Gets Gary Stevens as the pilot, a noble kinsman indeed!

ANDROMEDA'S HERO- ANDROMEDA's mythological HERO was Perseus who rescued her from the jaws of a sea monster. Son of '00 Derby winner FUSAICHI PEGASUS, this guy is regarded as Zito's weakest link. Will probably need a dose of Andro to hit the board in this one.

#### THE PLETCHERIANs:

BANDINI- Named for the Italian sculptor from the 16th century, but on talent and effort, this is no chiseler. Another son of FUSAICHI PEGASUS enjoyed a renaissance of interest after his stunning Blue Grass score. Pletcher-Velasquez combo has to be best trainer-rider tandem without a Derby win but Blue Grass winners bear a curse. In last 25 years, the only colt to make the Keeneland-Church parlay was STRIKE THE GOLD '91 . Molded like a winner from every angle and has to figure in your business on Derby Day.

FLOWER ALLEY- Same Dad as '03 winner FUNNY CIDE (DISTORTED HUMOR) is owned by Biovail (\$50 to \$14 Canadian generic drug maker with numerous S.E.C. beefs) c.e.o. who names all his horses after locales in the Barbados (good place to be when ducking subpoenas). Got up nicely in the Lane's End and was distant second to ALEX in the Ark Derby. Don't see any roses being strewn down this FLOWER ALLEY.

COIN SILVER- This year's late arrival to the party minted a win in the Lexington over one-time Derby fave, ROCKPORT HARBOR. Son of the prematurely deceased ANEES, is bred to go as far as they want. Gains even more currency with the passing of the reins to P-Val who moves everything up a couple of lengths. Silver or bronze award more likely than gold largely due to experience factor.

## THE ONE TRAINER ONE HORSE BUNCH-

GOING WILD- Owners (Bob, and Bev Lewis) are genuine nice guys in the business who have a pair of Derby skins already (SILVER CHARM, '97 and CHARISMATIC, '99). Definite second stringer (only cost \$600k as a yearling) to defected CONSOLIDATOR (fracture) has been ghastly in last two starts. Expect him to force a pace that will be plenty hot without this guy GOING WILD. Coach Lukas says he is training great at Churchill. He better be.

BUZZARDS BAY- Every Derby needs a villain and Buzz's trainer Jeff Mullins is as close to Snidely Whiplash as we can get. Not only were Mullins' horses put in a detention barn for 30 days due to excess presence of sodium bicarbonate ("milkshakes" designed to reduce fatigue) but he then attributed racing's problems to "all the addicts and idiots crying because they lost a \$2 bet." Fact is, however, Ole Jeff has won the Santa Anita Derby 3 years running including '05 with Buzz. Time did not impress the figure guys and pedigree is modest, but Buzz is inbred in 3 generations to RIBOT, one of the most substantial stamina influences in the breed. He won't need a milkshake to get the mile and a quarter.

GIACOMO- Remember A&M Records? Herb Alpert, The Police, Joe Cocker? GIACO's owners punched that ticket into the racing game with those artists. Never been to the Derby but won the Oaks with a filly we loved (SARDULA). Very impressed with the colt's second to DECLAN'S MOON in the Holly Futurity, but so far hasn't fired the big one at three. Trainer Shirreffs is a personal fave and doubt he would make the trip east unless he expected big improvement. The price will be generous; if you back him you will feel like the Lonely Bull.

WILKO- If you are annoyed by those "Just lost another loan to Ditech" commercials, this is not your horse. Owned by Canadian loan shark J. Paul Reddam, the gutsy colt deserves better. Got up in last jump to nail AFLEET ALEX in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile, but foot problems hampered progress at three. Was probably best in S.A. Derby in wide trip. Undersized colt is all try and had sizzling work at Santa Anita before jetting east. Most experienced competitor with 14 starts but only 3 wins. If the race falls apart on the front end, it could be Roger, WILKO, over and out.

AFLEET ALEX- Certainly fits the recent winning pedigree model (speed sire with damside stamina). Looked like the juvenile winner til WILKO came out of the clouds. No worse than second careerwise save a throwout Ark Derby prep caused by an undiagnosed lung infection. Maiden Derby trip for connections but they are coming with the goods. If you like those Swami plays, jock is named Rose. No reason why this Alexander cannot be Great.

**GREATER GOOD-** The Jesuits loved to roll this term out in ethics discussions but the GREATER GOOD here would probably be a shorter, less contentious race for this colt. Has shown a reluctance to relax and blew up in the Ark Derby. Adding an eighth of a mile will create a greater gap from which no good can come.

**SORT IT OUT-** Medical update: Bob Baffert's Derby fever has not broken. What other reason to send this horse in this spot? Houston Texans' owner McNair paid a tidy signing bonus for this guy after his February score in the Whirlaway during the bleak winter meet at the Big A. Winless since and was losing sight of COIN SILVER though best of the rest in the Lexington. When it comes to the Derby, this SORT should be left OUT.

**SPANISH CHESTNUT-** We had a small chance on this one in the first Derby Future Pool, but his 3yo starts are unhappily consistent: speed and fade. This is not a happy sight when the next tilt is an extra 220 yards. At the least his presence will allay any concern that the pace will be honest Trainer Biancone stretched speedy LION HEART out to a game second last year, but he would be better off pulling this CHESTNUT out of the fire.

**CLOSING ARGUMENT-** His pedigree is speed on the top, speed on the bottom. But carried it well in the Holy Bull at Gulf while besting eventual Florida Derby winner HIGH FLY. Went over two months without a start before his distant third to BANDINI in the Blue Grass which surely he needed from a conditioning angle. Back end of the superfecta is most optimistic verdict we foresee for this guy.

**GREELEY'S GALAXY-** Tries to follow the WAR EMBLEM, '02 path to the roses through the Illinois Derby. Owner is Wayne Hughes, the mini-storage king; octogenarian trainer has only recently ceased working his stock personally. No 2yo form is a worry. His margins of victory have grown with distance though pedigree doesn't cry mile and a quarter. Admit to being lost in space on this one and if bet, suggest a Little Dipper not a Big one.

**DON'T GET MAD-** This cleverly named son of STEPHEN GOT EVEN first attracted attention with a stunning rush to be second in the first Santa Anita Derby prep. Subsequent dull performance in the derby itself seemed to knock him off the list. Turned up last Saturday for the Derby Trial in Louisville and destroyed the field. Also owned by Wayne Hughes, this colt is a classic closer and has 3 wins over the Church surface. Pick it whether a bet on this guy gets you MAD or EVEN.

HIGH LIMIT- Lightly raced son of MARIA´S MON (sire of MONARCHOS ´01) wired a weak Louisiana Derby field in his first start at three. Frankel has taken the minimalist school of training to the max with only two starts at two and two at three for this runner-up to BANDINI in the Blue Grass. Hard to fault Master Bobby´s methods but he may find the stakes in the Derby game too lofty for this level of experience.

So "thar she blows," as the whalers used to say and as usual there are all the great questions: Will BELLAMY ROAD bounce? Can AFLEET ALEX and HIGH FLY get a mile and a quarter? Will the Blue Grass jinx undo BANDINI? Are two preps enough for HIGH LIMIT? Should you throw out SUN KING´S last race? Can NOBLE CAUSEWAY and COIN SILVER make another forward move from their last? Was the Santa Anita Derby so slow that BUZZARDS BAY, WILKO, and GIACOMO are throwouts? As much as we hate to say it dear reader, your guess is as good as (probably better than) ours. Noted professional horse player Sammy "The Hat" Allard was quoted in a documentary on ESPN saying: "People don´t want to admit it but horse racing is just like the stock market." To which we can only reply: now they tell me. At least we now know why our hand has been so cold.

#### THIS YEAR´S PICK-

As usual we are conflicted. The belief here is that BELLAMY ROAD is a vulnerable favorite. His two ´05 wins, though impressive, were in an environment where he was able to control the front end. Last year in the Breeders´ Futurity, when the pace was contentious, he folded to seventh. The ´05 Derby will not lack pace, believe us. AFLEET ALEX is a stone runner but may come up short as we fear the HIGHS, LIMIT and FLY will. We love NOBLE CAUSEWAY´s pedigree but question his turn of foot. We can forgive SUN KING´S Blue Grass but Tampa Bay has never been the road to the roses. Late arrivals like GREELEY´S GALAXY and COIN SILVER are historically high risk props. When we combine the attributes of athleticism, pedigree, trainer, jockey, and performance, we conclude that the winner of the 131st Kentucky Derby will be BANDINI. We wish he had won at two and that there was a bit more stamina influence in the pedigree, but as a total package, we find it impossible to throw him out. He was three wide in the Blue Grass, never benefiting from the Keeneland "golden rail." Knockers point out the crawling 39 second closing 3/8. But no less an authority than Bobby Frankel characterized the track surface that day as "peanut butter." The clincher for us was when BANDINI rolled by stable mate LION TAMER, a five-year-old Grade I winner we have always admired, during a work earlier this week. Trainer Todd Pletcher and jockey John Velasquez were deserving winners of last year´s Eclipse Awards for excellence in their categories. They might well repeat.

### LONG SHOT THOUGHTS-

A little California Dreamin' here. Even though we had a losing ticket, we liked WILKO'S Santa Anita Derby where he was four wide the whole race and just missed. We think reuniting with Nakatani in the Big One will help. B.C. Juvenile jinx is even bigger than Blue Grass as no Juvenile winner has ever won the Kentucky Derby. Still he's worth a shot. And for the ultra, mega, moon shot play save a couple bucks for GIACOMO. Keep waiting for him to have that breakout race and Saturday could be it.

### BETS-

Win only on BANDINI, win-place on WILKO, and across the board on GIACOMO will be our plays. We'll throw in AFLEET ALEX and SUN KING for exactas, trifectas, and superfectas. Here's hoping we won't need a loan from Di-Tech.