

RICE'S DERBY CHOICE JOURNAL
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There's something heroic about the ability to accept defeat. It's a role people accept, and enjoy more willingly than they know themselves. For the price of a bet the horseplayer buys a pedestal for himself. Horseplayers are a great fraternity united not by victory but defeat. There is between them, something-some understanding of one another that you will never find among the members of any group that knows only success.

W.C. Heinz

New York Sun

Sept. 19, 1949

“To be Irish is to know, in the end, the world will break your heart.”

- U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927-2003)

Decades before the foaling of Mister Ed, an equally inane equine comedy setting introduced the 1950's in the form of a best forgotten film called Francis the Talking Mule. But that decade was no joke for thoroughbred horse racing.

If a man (and it was almost exclusively a male pursuit) were to have a bet in any state save Nevada, his choices were no more than two: a race track or an illegal bookmaker. This made horse racing America's dominant spectator sport almost by default.

That ten year span showcased some of the most esteemed names in the game: Citation, Tom Fool, Swaps, Nashua, Round Table, Gallant Man, and Bold Ruler.

Yet none of those Hall of Famers evoked the adulation and interest afforded a chestnut colt of modest pedigree whose running style caused his name to garner usage far outside the realm of his endeavor.

That style, if it could be called such, was to drop so far back in the early running as to appear certain to finish dead last. Then, after dawdling as the back marker through most of the race, he would unleash a furious rally that often resulted in victory.

The colt's winless dam was about to be euthanized after suffering a hoof injury at Santa Anita when she was rescued by a Pasadena dentist and his wife. The mare, Lady N Silk, was bred to a sire named Sullivan. The sire raced in Ireland initially but completed his career in California mostly as a sprinter.

On February 28, 1955, Lady N Silk produced a male foal. His alliterative and lyrical name was then foretold: Silky Sullivan.

As much as Kentucky Derby dreams accompany every newborn thoroughbred, the Powerball odds of realizing that goal added a couple of zeroes for California-breds in those days. At the time of Silky's birth only

Morvich, the 1922 Derby winner, had a California stamp on his foal certificate. Later in 1955 Swaps would become the second.

Whatever limitations existed in Silky's genetic provenance, there was little to find wanting in his physicality. His handsome head, complemented by kind eyes displaying intelligence, rested on a sinewy lower body.

The massive girth of Secretariat (75 inches) required a specially made surcingle to secure his saddle. Silky Sullivan's girth was an inch greater and at 16.3 hands stood a bit taller than Big Red at 16.2 hands.

When Silky was sold as a yearling at Del Mar, he brought \$10,700 which was four times the Keeneland September Yearling Sale average that year. He must have been quite a looker because his pedigree would not have produced a dog ear on his catalogue page.

His new owners dispatched their young prospect to the barn of established California trainer Reggie Cornell. The trainer was assisted by his wife's nephew, who had been adopted by the couple from a Kentucky orphanage. That youthful *aide de camp*, Ron McAnally, would later rise to Hall of Fame status as the trainer of John Henry and others of similar rank.

If there were a thoroughbred race horse phylum, it would likely host three classes: frontrunner, stalker, and closer. And there might be a genus in the closer class named deep closer. Within that genus would exist a species of one named Silky Sullivan.

Never in the chronicle of the thoroughbred did a horse routinely drop completely out of apparent contention only to produce the whirlwind closes that became Silky's trademark.

In his first start at five furlongs against two-year-old maidens, he dropped only eight lengths back before running down the field for a nose win. But by the Golden Gate Futurity at a mile that December, he was as many as twenty seven lengths back before inhaling the field with a move that garnered national attention.

Television news and sports coverage was a distant second in viewership and content to the cinema newsreels such as Movietone. But both those media as well as print seized on the story and the Legend of Silky Sullivan was born.

The roll of Silky Fan Club members permeated the then forty eight states and stacks of mail addressed to the horse arrived daily. Your then adolescent editor was a card carrying fan club member. The two dollar annual membership dues included a monthly newsletter, a photo of Silky, and a “suitable for framing” membership certificate.

Had social media existed Silky’s Facebook friends and Twitter followers would have been legion. His fleet ascent to folk hero status also placed him on the list of prospective contenders for the 1958 Kentucky Derby.

After launching his three-year-old season by coming from the clouds to nail two front runners at a mile by a neck, he came up short by the same margin in the California Breeders’ Champion Stakes after spotting the field an astounding thirty two lengths.

His next effort in a six and one half furlong allowance event left mouths agape as he won going away after trailing by as much as forty one lengths. The impossibility of his late race acceleration was now a national front page news story and “pulling a Silky Sullivan” had entered the vernacular as synonymous with an accomplished feat bordering on impossibility.

Silky’s presence produced a paid gate of 61,123 for Santa Anita Derby Day at the storied Arcadia track where the crowd backed Silky into odds on favoritism The chart writer captured Silky in flawless chart-speak prose:

Silky Sullivan was badly outrun early, as usual, responded when called upon, came wide into the stretch, closed powerfully and was up in the final strides.

Following the Santa Anita Derby win, Silky was a justifiable part of the Kentucky Derby discussion and offers for all or part interest in him cascaded in.

And in spite of the old track axiom “time only counts when you’re in prison”, notice was paid to Silky’s winning time of 1:49:40 which slightly shaded the 1:50 posted by Swaps in that race three years prior.

One reliable report said the owners had rejected a \$350,000 offer. The magnitude of that tender can be gauged by the fact that a 1958 Cadillac El Dorado carried a sticker price of \$7500.

East Coast sharpies, habitual denigrators of California runners, were dismissive of Silky's Derby prospects. They classed his cyclonic closes as illusions owed to sub-standard competition.

And then there was the pedigree. Kentucky grandees cringed at the prospect of a blanket of roses over Silky's withers. A.B. "Bull" Hancock, the master of Claiborne Farm, said "If Silky wins the Derby, I'll hold a dispersal sale."

But Silky was the people's choice; his vast assemblage of fans whose own societal pedigrees lacked black type felt as one with him. And their money spoke as well; so much so that by post time Silky was co-favored at 2/1 with Tim Tam, the blue-blooded son of Tom Fool.

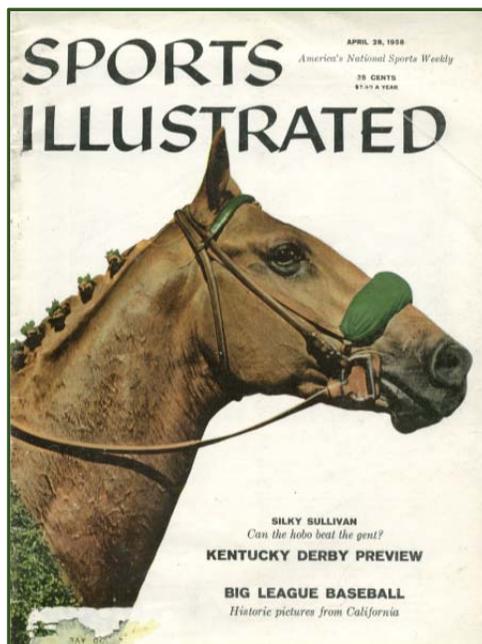


Silky's leg wraps being removed prior to 1958 Kentucky Derby

The CBS broadcast of the race featured a split screen to display the Derby peloton on the left and Silky on the right.

Silky languished in his accustomed spot while his fandom waited for the finishing kick that never arrived. Tim Tam collared the front running Lincoln Road to win the eighty fourth renewal. Silky sauntered home

beating only two horses leaving his supporters as deflated as a Patriots' game ball and the breeding establishment as smug as ever.



Sports Illustrated (April 28, 1958)

Silky might have been the first victim of the Sports Illustrated cover jinx. His profile had led the April 28, 1958 Kentucky Derby preview issue. The story contrasted Silky's roots with those of the favorite, Calumet's Tim Tam under the rubric "Can the Hobo Beat the Gent?" The answer had come in the negative: "No Hoboes Need Apply."

Trainer Cornell and rider Shoemaker both averred that Silky had difficulty with the muddy footing at Churchill. So the colt was shipped to Pimlico to take another shot at Tim Tam in the Preakness.

Silky's followers remained largely loyal and sent him off as third choice at 6.40/1. Once again Tim Tam caught Lincoln Road late and Silky could do no better than eighth of twelve. Silky's connections had seen enough and brought him home to California.

The great Jim Murray writing in the L.A. Times said that *Silky was like a small-town hustler who couldn't fade the big city boys*. Others were less charitable but the derision in the press made no impact on Silky's worshipful status with his loyalists. Fan mail increased following his Derby and Preakness flops while his backers hungered for any news of his well-being.

Though he would never leave California again, Silky returned to the races there with success both at three and four. He completed his career with twelve wins, one second, and five thirds from twenty seven starts comprising a bankroll of \$157,700.

Churchill once said that "Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts." On Sir Winston's scale Silky left the game a winner with every right to hold his handsome head high.. And nothing confirmed that more than the intensity of his unending popular appeal.

While his stats were shy of Hall of Fame compilations, you would have never known it from the non-stop adoration he drew for the rest of his life. He was paraded annually at Golden Gate on St. Patrick's Day and at Santa Anita on its Derby Day. At the end of those performances, he would deliver a two-legged mule kick on cue to the crowd's delight.

At stud Silky sired some decent runners from limited opportunity. Visitors to his Napa Valley home found there a stallion with the personality of a settled gelding amenable to children's pony rides. But his legacy rests on his unique qualities on the track. More from Jim Murray:

The moral of the story? You can't spot a field of great runners 40 lengths forever.

But it's not likely we'll see again a horse that can spot the field 49 lengths and overtake it. That's like spotting Mike Tyson the first 30 punches undefended and winning a decision, giving Mark McGwire 20 straight fastballs, promising not to return the first 20 Pete Sampras serves, or letting Billy the Kid draw first.

Silky Sullivan is still the only horse in the game who could go from "Where is everybody?" to "Where is everybody?" in 10 furlongs. He was kind of like a pitcher with a 100-mph fastball but no control, a fighter who had a great punch but a glass chin, a golfer who had a 320-yard drive but couldn't putt. But he was more exciting than any of those who could.



The thoroughbred register teems with horse names taken from human names but the reverse is news indeed. The latter was the case of a college mate of mine at L.S.U., Tommy Sullivan, who got the nickname “Silky” at Christian Brothers High School in Memphis and later legally replaced Thomas with Silky.

Silky was born to be a publican and in fact was doing part time work as a barkeep when we met at L.S.U. Academic headwinds cut his matriculation somewhat short of graduation. He then briefly owned a local, the Southdowns Lounge, which became a template for his Irish pub in Memphis opened in 1972. He humbly named his barbecue and entertainment venue Silky Sullivan’s. Success dictated a move to a high profile location on Beale Street. There he adopted the Gaelic “O” prefix to his surname (which translates “descended from”) to produce the name of his new venue Silky O’Sullivan’s.

His persona was a compelling composite of Deep South good ole boy and garrulous Irish barman. And while his tales sometimes grew beyond fact, that was the exception.

“Eighty per cent of what I tell you is true. The other twenty per cent is just stuff I don’t remember right” was Silky’s favorite response to rolling eyes during his story telling.

But Silky did live large and when he met strangers, they didn’t stay that way long. For example:

In 1976 Silky’s orotund voice boomed in a phone call from Memphis:

“I got two tickets on the fifty for L.S.U. –Ole Miss. I’m comin’ down next week on the Panama Limited. You and me are goin’ to the game.”

When I met him at the train station, he inquired as to where we might find two game tickets.

“I thought you had two, Silky. It’s a hard sellout. No shot.” I said.

“Yeah I did. Met a couple from Oxford on the train. Real nice folks... for Ole Miss people. They didn’t have tickets so I gave ‘em ours.”

Pure Silky. We watched the game in my apartment with a keg from the Dixie Brewery and some Sullivan signature ribs (n.b. the Tigers shutout the Rebels).

His “eighty per cent true” included some gems. He really did roll out grills in Moscow’s Red Square and Havana’s Plaza Vieja to demo his barbecue cuisine. He really did keep beer-swilling pet goats in his establishment’s patio. His claim of an honorary culinary science degree from Oxford was true as was his election to Chieftain of Ireland’s Sullivan Clan. And while his claim of holding the record of being King of the most Mardi Gras Krewes was an exaggeration, he was probably a close second.



Silky and pet goats

Silky’s base of carnival celebrants afforded him a nucleus of Louisiana followers that grew further with the opening of another Silky joint in the French Quarter in 2000.

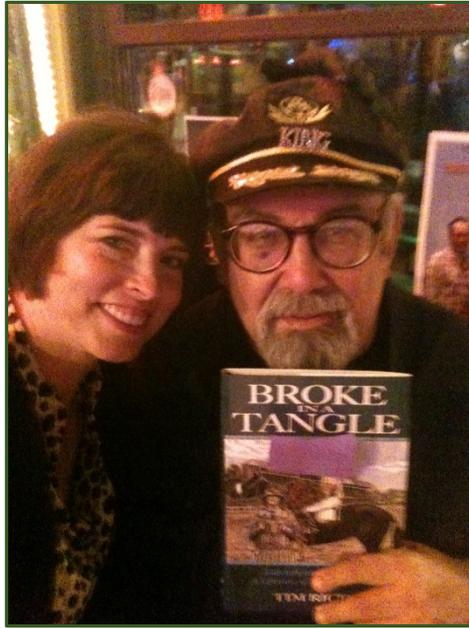


King Silky

He then felt inspired to pursue politics and recruited your editor to provide counsel and fundraising for his candidacy for Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana. The early momentum of the campaign was cut off at the knees when Silky was DQ'd by a steward's inquiry. Eligibility for holding state offices in Louisiana did not extend to residents of Tennessee of which he was one.

Silky was a loyal reader of our annual letter and Kentucky Derby Day at his pub was only a head bob behind St. Patrick's Day for the intensity of revelry.

He loved longshots and would likely have bet the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox at a price.



The Well-Read Silky with a Memphis Belle

Like most old country Irish males, Silky remained a bachelor until well into middle-age. He was fifty when he and his beloved Joellyn (his co-proprietor and fellow barbecue artisan) were wed after a decade long courtship.

When Silky joined the choir invisible on May 31, 2013 from complications following surgery, his obituary declared that “he had a talent for making the ordinary extraordinary.” True words.

In 1963 Silky the horse was acquired by Norwegian-American Kjell Qvale, an importer of Jaguars and MG’s, who stood the stallion at his Green Oak Stud in Napa Valley. Qvale held a deep affection for his horse and always accompanied him on the appearances at Santa Anita and Golden Gate.



Silky and Kjell Qvale on St. Patrick's Day

On November 18, 1977, Silky died in his sleep of heart failure while his owner was undergoing heart surgery. Qvale survived to age ninety four passing away in 2013. His beloved Silky lies buried in the infield at Golden Gate Fields Racetrack. The Silky Sullivan Handicap is a fixture there to this day.

Among the factors that unified the Silkies in my life, one is paramount. They were both *sui generis*. Neither had markers in his pedigree suggesting what eventuated as each life went forth. Defined by the old boxing metaphor, the Silkies both punched above their weight. Way above.



King Silky's last ride

The apparent flamboyance and *leger de main* displayed by the equine and human Silkies were in the end a put on. Beneath the bombast and overwrought images, both were steeped in the ordinary. That was what made their identities so easy to share and their personalities so lovable. The memorialization of their name is a fitting bequest of their sunlit lives. There went two Silkies, as smooth as their name, that were truly one of a kind.

LAST YEAR'S RACE-

We can't fault our pick's fourth place finish. After stumbling at the start, WICKED STRONG was bounced around early but steadily weaved through traffic and closed well. He bounced back to win the Jim Dandy and lost by a whisker in the Travers. Our ultra-long shot COMMANDING CURVE got the place at 37/1. We backed into the exacta as our other horse HOPPERTUNITY was scratched leaving the favorite and winner, CALIFORNIA CHROME, as the default third number in our box.

THIS YEAR'S RACE-

The winners of the Santa Anita and Arkansas Derbies are trained by Bob Baffert while the winners of the Florida Derby and Blue Grass Stakes are trained by Todd Pletcher. The Baffertistas and the Pletcherites will likely dominate the wagering. A single owner, Egyptian beer mogul Ahmed Zayat, has three entries with three different trainers. Sounds like a pyramid scheme. As always we'll search for value in what looks to be one of the deepest fields, talent wise, in years. We trust in this Yeats' quote from *The Second Coming*: *Surely some revelation is at hand.*

OCHO OCHO OCHO- Being a son of '07 Derby winner STREET SENSE and from a dam whose family includes Hall of Fame inductee PERSONAL ENSIGN sets a pretty high bar. But OCHO looked to be clearing it when he won his first three starts at two including the Delta Jackpot. After a three and a half month layoff, he was understandably dull in the San Felipe vs. DORTMUND in which he finished OCHO of *dies*. He pressed the pace in the Blue Grass before fading to third. Old school trainer Cassidy will likely

bring a dead fit OCHO to Churchill. He better if he has any hope for *uno, dos, or tres*.

CARPE DIEM- The poet Horace's aphorism translates from Latin as Seize the Day. Often ignored is the rest of Horace's advice (*quam minimum credula postero*) which is to trust little in tomorrow. This guy brought \$1.6 million as a 2 YO and has been favored in every one of his five well-spaced starts. Lone blemish was a second in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile which is certainly nothing to CARP about. Looks to be Pletcher's best shot as rider Velasquez opts to ride here over Florida Derby winner. No *caveat* is necessary for the *emptor* here.

MATERIALITY- Best chance we have seen in decades to break the Apollo Curse of unraced at two entrants. Only starts, all wins, including the upset of the seasoned UPSTART in the Florida Derby. Pedigree supports the Derby distance so if you are willing to dismiss the MATERIALITY of a 133 year-old indicator, this could be your guy. Rider switch to Castellano is at worst neutral.

TENCENDUR- Named for the gallant steed that bore Charlemagne into battle. From first crop of WARRIOR'S REWARD who never won beyond a mile despite route pedigree. Female family also speaks distance limitations. Owner is CEO of *Playbill* but this looks like an off-Broadway production. Feisty NY-bred hung around late to get the place in the Wood but doubt he can do that again here.

DANZIG MOON- Late blooming son of MALIBU MOON, sire of '13 Derby Champ ORB (picked here) was still a maiden until February. Went straight from that win to the Tampa Derby where he finished fourth, twelve lengths behind CARPE DIEM. He was found to have a fever which certainly compromised his performance there. He recovered in time for the Blue Grass where he finished second closing the gap with CARPE to three lengths. His classic female family features Champion fillies INSIDE INFORMATION and SMUGGLER. Owner Oxley seeks repeat of '01 experience with MONARCHOS. A win here will likely provide a MOON shot.

MUBTAAHIJ- His name is variously translated from Arabic as cheery, happy, or elated. All of which would have well-described his backers in the U.A.E. Derby. Winners of that race have not fared well in the Dubai-Louisville parlay but this could be a different story. The trainer is the South African master Michael De Kock who doesn't travel to the U.S. unless he means business. Seems likely to inherit the wise-guy horse mantle for this year. If they are right, it could turn Churchill into the Sheik Shack.

EL KABEIR- According to owner Zayat, the name means "boss" which he has certainly lived up to in many of his starts. But his move from last to an unthreatening third in the Wood relegates him to the second tier of prospects here. Does own a win over the Churchill strip in the Kentucky Jockey Club at two and reunites with the winning rider from that race, three time Derby winner, Calvin Borel.

DORTMUND- Named for the Westphalian City's famous soccer club, Borussia Dortmund. Son of Derby '08 champ BIG BROWN is inbred 3x3 to the revered DANZIG. In soccer-speak, this colt owns a clean sheet with six aces from six starts. While he likes the front end, he has proven to be ratable. Would like him more if he had a loss somewhere (thinking '07 N.E. Pats, '11 LSU Tigers, and '15 Kentucky Hoops) but maybe no one has told him he's undefeated. Major player and likely second choice but could still provide value in the odds department.

BOLO- Named for a popular internet acronym: *be on the lookout* which seems appropriate for this outsider. His pedigree speaks grass and his two wins have come on the greensward. Connections have taken two shots at DORTMUND which produced non-threatening thirds. Sire won as far as a mile and a half and female family includes Derby '09 winner MINE THAT BIRD and Derby '12 third place finisher DULLAHAN. We were warming up to his chances but cooled a bit after his S.A. Derby and trainer's preference to return to grass races. Owner spiked a Derby fever so BOLO is in apparently on the premise of YOLO.

FIRING LINE- Has lost two heartbreakers by a head to DORTMUND so connections wisely skipped the S.A. Derby for the Sunland Derby where he had enough ammo for a fourteen length win as the 1/5 choice. Son of undervalued sire LINE OF DAVID who is off to a surprisingly good start. HOF rider Gary Stevens goes for his fourth Derby here and possesses live ammo. Might be worth taking a bullet for this guy if he is ignored at the betting windows.

STANFORD- This son of MALIBU MOON was no match for stable mate MATERIALITY in a stakes in Florida but did not give up the lead in the Louisiana Derby until the final strides. Likes the front end and that could be a problem because he will not lack company. There is a CARDINAL rule of handicapping: Do not bet front runners in the company of other front runners at a distance.

INTERNATIONAL STAR- If you thought the son of a Derby winner (FUSAICHI PEGASUS '00) who swept three Derby preps at Fair Grounds including the Louisiana Derby would be on most short lists for the Roses, you would be mistaken. The perception of sub-par competition and the lack of triple digit speed figures have reduced his STAR appeal in area code 502, forget INTERNATIONAL This guy is one of the few pure closers in the field and should love the extra furlong. The workingman's horse.

ITSAKNOCKOUT- Son of Belmont winner, LEMON DROP KID, finished second in the Fountain of Youth but ko'd UPSTART with a claim of foul. Had considerable support in the mutuels in the Florida Derby but was twenty lengths back of the top pair. Owners are co-promoting the horse with the upcoming Middleweight Championship fight on Derby night. Hope they enjoy the MAY WEATHER since their colt is likely to PACQ it in early here.

KEEN ICE- Sneaks in from the twenty first spot on defection of MADEFROM LUCKY. Sole win came in maiden event at Churchill. Has seven starts at six different tracks with minimal success. Sire CURLIN adds some credibility as does owner/trainer combo with Derby third in '13 with the late DULLAHAN. Rider Desormeaux has two Derby scores with REAL

QUIET '98 and BIG BROWN '08. There will be a lot of frozen expressions if this guy brings home the roses.

FROSTED- His solid 2 YO campaign culminated with a narrow loss in the Remsen. After a distant second to UPSTART in the Holy Bull, he looked a sure thing turning for home in the Fountain of Youth when he stopped abruptly leaving his supporters (including me) FROSTED. Minor throat surgery, a blinker adjustment, and a switch to top rider Rosario produced a dominant score in the Grade I Wood Memorial. Dad TAPIT (sire of '14 Belmont champ TONALIST) gets a \$300k stud fee and Mom, FAST COOKIE, was a half million dollar graded stakes winner. That should put a glaze on his chances.

WAR STORY- This NORTHEN AFLEET gelding jumped on our Derby screen after winning at Churchill at first asking at two. His two seconds and a third in the Fair Grounds preps justify his connections taking a shot here but he hasn't taken that big step forward we like to see coming up to the big one. Likely faces an uphill battle to hit the board.

MISTER Z- Feeling a touch of nostalgia here as a late bookmaker friend of mine was known as Mister Z. If experience matters, the Z-man gets the roses. Since breaking his maiden in his first start at two at Churchill, he has had eleven starts and all but one a graded stakes. The bad news is he is still eligible for a non-winners of two allowance. Compilers are not prototypical modern-day Derby winners (CHARISMATIC '99 with fourteen starts being an exception). Doubt that Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas will duplicate his CHARISMATIC miracle here.

AMERICAN PHARAOH- No, Tea Partiers, this guy is not named for Barack Obama. His owner is an Egyptian ex-pat whose Derby near misses must make him think there is a Sphynx Jinx. His horses have run second in three Derbies. The Pharaoh was 2YO Champion and has not taken a deep breath in his domination at three most recently in the Arkansas Derby. His sire and grand sire ran second in this race but his dam side is light on classic influences. Most pros give A.P. an edge over the other Baffert-trained monster. Deserving favorite.

UPSTART- The days of “only a” preceding New York-bred are long gone and this year three Empire Staters made the cut. This one has not been out of the money in any of his starts. He followed a respectable third in last year’s BC Juvenile with a convincing and drawing off win in the Holy Bull in January. Finished first in the Fountain of Youth but suffered a DQ and was placed second when he failed to keep the puck on the rails. Then found himself a victim of an UPSTART, when he was outdueled in the Florida Derby by a newcomer named MATERIALITY. Totally legit colt looks to be another worthy second tier player.

FAR RIGHT- May have the highest return on investment in the field as he was a \$2500 purchase and has earned over a half million. Won both Ark Derby preps before getting steamrolled by the PHARAOH in the big one at Oaklawn but beat the rest of the field. Should get plenty of support from the Concealed Carry Association but doubt he will be CRUZing to a win in Louisville.

OUR PICK-

The almost certain favoritism of AMERICAN PHARAOH will be well deserved and his final work over the Churchill strip produced awe in those who watched it. There is little to separate him from DORTMUND and CARPE DIEM. And if MATERIALITY had a single start at two, he would likely be priced the same as those. A Baffert/Pletcher four horse exacta box with those would cover a lot of likely outcomes but we want to do more than just cash a ticket. So we will follow Lady Macbeth's advice to the husband to *screw your courage to the sticking-place, and we'll not fail.*

Our pick brings a perfect record to the Derby. His second start at two was an allowance win at Churchill in which he came from off the pace to win going away. He proved his toughness with two narrow wins against the talented FIRING LINE in the Los Alamitos Futurity and the Robert B. Lewis Stakes. In the Lewis he came back after surrendering the lead mid-stretch. In the San Felipe and Santa Anita Derby he led at every call.

Our ranking of the Derby prep competition produced a California, Florida/N.Y., Kentucky, Arkansas/Louisiana, order with little between top and bottom.

Having watched those replays far too many times, our view is the key race was the Santa Anita Derby where the winner stumbled at the start, lost a shoe, and still won with plenty left. We have weighed the pedigree factors, trainer/jockey influences, and the visuals.

Our pick's sire, BIG BROWN was a racehorse of superior ability but has had a slow start at the stud until now. Trainer Bob Baffert has three Derbies under his belt. Owner Kaleem Shah and Baffert teamed with jockey Martin Garcia on BAYERN to take the '14 Breeders' Cup Classic. Garcia also won the '10 Preakness for Baffert aboard LOOKIN AT LUCKY.

Naysayers of our pick have cited his immense stature (over seventeen hands) as an impediment to negotiating a clear path in a twenty horse field but his agility belies his size in our view.

While our pick may well be the second betting choice, we expect a square price. An offshore accommodation that we frequent is currently offering 5/1 with a guaranteed run. As the late Notorious B.I.G used to rap: "If you didn't know, now you know."

THIS YEAR'S KENTUCKY DERBY PICK IS

DORTMUND



Our long shot play will be FROSTED. We love his pedigree, trainer, and rider. While the Wood Memorial has not been a successful route to the roses of late, his performance dictates that “attention must be paid” to quote Willy Loman’s wife, Linda. After his disappointing Fountain of Youth, Kiaran McLaughlin said “I had to pull out all my trainer tricks” which sure worked well in the Wood. We came very close to picking FROSTED outright here but gave DORTMUND a narrow nod in the end. We expect him to be in the 20/1 territory and if the big four have a pace meltdown, he could well emerge on top.

Our ultra-long shot play will be DANZIG MOON. His second to CARPE DIEM in the Blue Grass was the kind of major step forward you look for in a Derby prospect. His pedigree and running style suggest he will be passing horses late which is all we can ask for in an ultra-candidate who will likely be 40/1.

We will bet DORTMUND win only, FROSTED to win and place, and DANZIG MOON across the board.

DORTMUND, FROSTED, DANZIG MOON will be the foundation horses in our exotics but we’ll include AMERICAN PHARAOH and INTERNATIONAL STAR in tris and supers.

-JTR

4/29/15

Many thanks to all readers for your interest. We welcome comments, criticisms, and suggestions. Please e-mail to tim@innisfree.org.