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“It is principally at games of chance that a multitude of illusions support hope and sustain it against unfavorable chances.”

-Pierre-Simon, Marquis de Laplace
Essai philosophique sur la probabilités
1796

The equine canon teems with dreamy accounts of devotion between horse and human. However, racetrack reality can sometimes be more harsh than homey. Lapsers, fasties, scammers, and the prosecutable too often outnumber the ethical practitioners.

The virtuous horseman, toiling at his craft without deep pockets or an angel owner, often finds himself a long shot in a crowded field. Nonetheless, much like the occasional outsider that hits at the mutuel windows, so also do good guys prevail in the training ranks, if not with the desired prevalence.

In the latter stages of the Great Depression, a second year pre-vet student at the University of Pennsylvania abandoned his formal academic pursuits for the racetrack. An equestrian since childhood, he was an experienced hunt meet competitor by his teen years. His sixty-two year run as a trainer of thoroughbreds produced a Hall of Fame career marked by integrity and the seizing of serendipitous fortuity.

When he left this world on June 6, 2008 at age eighty-eight, his training legacy included four champions, a horse of the year, and likely the most influential sire of the twentieth century. The best of his charges, elected horse of the year in 1994, left him with exhilaration scarred by a hard-held conviction that his colt's Kentucky Derby had been lost through foul play.

That horse was Holy Bull and his trainer was Warren A. "Jimmy" Croll.

U.S. Army service in the Pacific Theater during World War II delayed Croll's copious career highlights, earned subsequent to his securing a trainer's license in 1940 at the Havre de Grace Racetrack in Maryland.

The first of his sixty stakes wins came in 1951 with War Phar. He turned a ten-thousand-dollar claim into 1965 Champion Turf Horse, Parka, and trained 1970 Champion Two-Year Old Filly, Forward Gal. Croll's first run at the roses came with Royal and Regal in 1973 which finished eighth of thirteen in Secretariat's record win.

Another three-year-old in Croll's barn that year earned regal status though that colt did not dispute a single Triple Crown race. His name was Mr. Prospector and he possessed Mercuric speed up to a mile. The fracture of a cannon bone in the Derby Trial ended his racing days prematurely. His record as a stallion is the stuff of legend and encompasses sires, broodmares, and runners of rare quality. Mr. Prospector appears in the pedigrees of thirty-four Triple Crown race winners with many more certain to follow.



MR. PROSPECTOR, SIRE OF SIRES, 1970-1999

In 1987, Croll sent Bet Twice to the Derby with the backing of our letter. We loved B.T.'s chances in opposition to our local wise-guy friends who almost unanimously backed Alysheba. They were right and we were wrong on that day and in the Preakness. In both races, Bet Twice was a narrowly beaten second to Alysheba. The results reversed in the Belmont when Bet Twice ran away from the field by fourteen lengths foiling Aly's Triple Crown bid.



BET TWICE ALL ALONE AT THE 1987 BELMONT FINISH

Croll's home base was Monmouth Park, New Jersey but he followed the game to Florida in the winter months. In 1956, a woman only slightly his senior, and a daily communicant at Gulfstream, watched the races alone from a box adjacent to his own. A friendship ensued and one day she asked him to acquire some inexpensive racing stock on her behalf. He later learned that his new owner, Rachel Carpenter, was heir to the A&P fortune. There once was such a thing when the largest retailer in the world was not Wal-Mart but the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company.

Carpenter possessed a few minor eccentricities but none of the narcissism so common today with owners of exceptional runners (see California Chrome and American Pharoah). So demure was her manner that she only watched her Pelican Stable runners in person when races were of the low-end variety. Her strong belief was that her presence at big events detracted from the attention that rightly belonged to horse and rider. For Jimmy Croll she was the ideal owner, never entering into any decision making, with one exception. Rachel Carpenter loved gray horses and a barn full of them would have been just fine.

The number may not have been fifty but Croll and Carpenter sorted through multiple shades of grays with unremarkable outcomes before they landed a gray colt by The Axe II foaled in 1966. Named Al Hattab, he became a multiple graded stakes winner of almost \$500k. His success continued as a stallion. Through his daughter, Hat Tab Girl, Al Hattab was broodmare sire of 1991 Horse of the Year, Black Tie Affair. Another daughter, Sharon Brown, a Pelican Stable homebred of another shade of gray, would achieve even greater success as a broodmare.

Like football coaches and baseball managers, horse trainers accept their hiring as a precursor to their firing. No owner ever fired Jimmy Croll. His thirty-seven-year association with Pelican Stable lasted until Rachel Carpenter's death on August 14, 1993. On that very day Croll had the lone two-year old in the Carpenter stable entered in a Monmouth maiden allowance. The gray first time starter was a homebred son of Great Above out of the aforementioned Sharon Brown.

Carpenter was a fan of the N.Y. Yankees and their Hall of Fame shortstop, Phil Rizzuto, who in retirement was the color man on Yankee broadcasts. Expecting a filly, Carpenter planned to name the foal after Rizzuto's favorite exclamation of Yankee success: "Holy Cow." Realizing that Holy Cow would not fit for her newborn colt, she switched the name nomination to Holy Bull.

Young stallions are often a behavioral challenge for trainers so prospects of modest pedigree are routinely gelded. Holy Bull's unremarkable parentage made him a prime candidate for alteration but Holy Steer offered far less panache than Holy Bull. Whatever the reason, the colt remained a full horse.

After condoling with the Carpenter family over Rachel's sudden passing, Croll said he would scratch the horse given the sad circumstances. Those closest to her all agreed Rachel would want business as usual. In true Hollywood scripting, Holy Bull made every

step a winning one. A few days later, Carpenter's lawyer informed Croll that she had bequeathed all of her horses to the trainer. Now as owner-trainer, Croll directed Holy Bull to three more starts at two including the Grade I Belmont Futurity, in which he was the second choice to the sweeper of the three Saratoga juvenile stakes, Dehere. The result was a clean sheet of four wins in four starts at two for the emerging inamorato of the racing set now known simply as The Bull.



HOLY BULL AND JIMMY CROLL AT MONMOUTH PARK

At year-end, The Jockey Club Experimental Handicap ranked Holy Bull third behind Brocco and Dehere. Albert Broccoli, the producer of the James Bond films, owned the former, which upset the heavily favored Dehere in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile. Dehere, named for Seton Hall and NBA star Terry Dehere, had as his owner the notorious Robert Brennan. Brennan was the founder of the penny stock scamming firm, First Jersey Securities, whose predations eventually placed him in cold irons bound for a nine-year stretch.

Over the winter months, the Derby Hot Stove League discussions centered on that threesome of coming three-year-olds. The West Coaster, Brocco, solidified his Derby cred with a convincing win in the Santa Anita Derby. Holy Bull extended his undefeated streak to five in the Hutcheson at Gulfstream thereby creating a much-anticipated match with Dehere in the Fountain of Youth Stakes, last prep for the Florida Derby.

Holy Bull was cruising on the lead into the far turn of the FOY when he stopped abruptly for no apparent reason and finished last while eased. Dehere was the winner. A post-race exam found that Holy Bull had suffered a displacement ("flip") of his soft palate, which briefly blocked his ability to breathe. Croll made a corrective change in the bridling of his colt and resumed training with confidence. Dehere would never race again. A fracture suffered in a workout prior to the Florida Derby put a full stop to his past performance line. He did subsequently enjoy a long and successful stallion career.

Redemption awaited Holy Bull in the Florida Derby. That race would be the second, and last time, in his career that he would not start as the betting favorite. The Bull at 5/2 was a shade longer than the chalk, Go for Gin.

Before a crowd of nearly 30,000 mostly Bull backers, the boy did not disappoint. After blazing through the first three quarters in 1:10 flat, he finished under a hand ride by Mike Smith to complete the mile and one eighth journey in the fastest time since Alydar in 1978. The margin, growing ever wider at the finish, was five and three-quarter lengths. In a post-race interview with Jim McKay, the "What's next for your horse?" question brought a typically laconic reply from Croll; "I guess we'll go to Kentucky."

Holy Bull's Florida effort instantly restored his Derby favoritism. His next and final prep, the Blue Grass Stakes, produced odds of \$.60 on the dollar or three to five in track speak. His performance there left the impression that three to five was an overlay. In familiar fashion, Holy Bull went to the lead and was at the head of a procession to the finish under another Smith-directed hand ride.

Ex the FOY disaster, Holy Bull looked the goods for the Derby barring the perennial question of pedigree that shadowed his resume. His sire, Great Above, stood for the not so princely sum of \$4000 in Florida at the time of his mating with Sharon Brown. Neither the sire's own race record nor that of his progeny suggested a classic runner. Great Above's sire line had not produced a Derby winner since Plaudit in 1898. The distaff side was no more promising. As good as Sharon Brown's sire, Al Hattab, had been as a runner, Croll had passed on the Kentucky Derby with that one in 1969. He feared the distance was beyond Al Hattab's reach.

Croll and Carpenter would have considered the Al and Sharon assignation a success had it produced a useful sprinter. Instead, that foal was the Derby favorite and Jimmy Croll, the now sole proprietor, sought to be the first Owner-trainer of a Kentucky Derby champion. Without question the charismatic Holy Bull was an anomaly or in handicapping terms, a freak. He was outrunning his pedigree along with any three-year-old that lined up against him.... until the first Saturday in May.

The Daily Racing Form chart provided little more than a tease of what occurred that day:

HOLY BULL, in tight after failing to break alertly raced within easy striking distance to the far turn, then tired badly.

The fact is that Holy Bull was never in the race. He was listless and disinterested from the time Croll led him over to the saddling enclosure. The connections offered no excuses apart from track banalities.

The sloppy track did not figure in Holy Bull's misfortune but racing luck did. The run into the first turn was a typical Derby melee during which Holy Bull sustained multiple

bumps. Sandwiched between Powis Castle and Ulises, Holy Bull nearly went down when the former clobbered him triggering a bowling pin effect. A sharp Holy Bull would have been well clear of this congestion. The winner, Go for Gin, a badly beaten fourth place favorite in the Florida Derby, seized an early lead and splashed his way to the win.

Holy Bull's rider Mike Smith, who was up on every one of Holy Bull's lifetime starts save the first, was incredulous at his mount's lack of energy and drive but dismissed it all with a "just not our day" throwaway line.

One would think if the 2/1 favorite in the Kentucky Derby finished twelve of fourteen, the stewards would order post-race tests and examination. None was ordered and none was performed. Within three days, Holy Bull's unexplained onset of ennui departed with as much mystery as it had arrived.

Jimmy Croll decided to skip the Preakness and point to the Met Mile at Belmont against older horses. While he would be tackling a more formidable field in the Met, that race provided an extra nine days of rest and 3/16 of a mile less distance.

The New York smarts bet The Bull down to even money. He made that proposition a fair one as he wired a quality field, containing Breeders' Cup Sprint Champion Cherokee Run, by five and a half lengths under the familiar hand ride of Mike Smith. The effort was the third fastest in the then 101-year history of the race and earned a lofty Beyer figure of 122.

Croll and Holy Bull then returned to the friendly confines of Monmouth Park. The trainer's goal was the Travers Stakes at Saratoga in late August. Known as the Mid-Summer Derby because of its Grade I prestige and mile and one-quarter distance, the Travers would offer a test to Holy Bull that, if passed, would put his classic bona fides beyond reproach.

The Dwyer Stakes at Belmont and the Haskell Invitational at Monmouth fit the prep schedule perfectly with the latter providing home court comfort. Holy Bull performed as expected in both making all the pace and drawing away under hand rides.

The Travers Stakes, always a major event, held even greater promise than usual in 1994. The opponents included Concern, the Arkansas Derby winner, and double classic winner (Preakness and Belmont) Tabasco Cat.

Holy Bull's talent and fitness were not at issue. The giant question punctuating the discussion centered on the mile and one-quarter distance. Saratoga's reputation as "graveyard of favorites" is a hard-earned appellation with many burials Travers related.

The principal Travers prep race is the Jim Dandy, named for the 100/1 winner of the 1930 Travers Stakes over that year's Triple Crown winner, Gallant Fox. Since that time, oodles of heavily backed bettor's choices have faded in the Saratoga stretch.

So veteran handicappers had every reason to consider fading the public's installation of

4/5 odds on Holy Bull. Tabasco Cat's trainer, the crafty D. Wayne Lukas, had added the speedy Commanche Trail and that entry was second choice at 8/5. Commanche Trail's sole purpose was to run as fast he could for as long as he could to soften up Holy Bull for Tabasco Cat's late charge. Concern at 5/1 and Jim Dandy winner, Unaccounted For, completed the field.

A relaxed and confident Bull was happy to track the hard-hustled Commanche Trail's early pace. At the half-mile pole, Holy Bull took over, turned back an early bid from Unaccounted For, and opened up a widening lead going into the turn. Tabasco Cat was making up no ground. Concern had been the distant back marker throughout and was now unleashing a furious rally.

The estimable Tom Durkin on the call:

Holy Bull's on top by five as they come to the quarter pole...but there is cause for Concern! Concern, now second on the outside.

Coming down to the final furlong, Mike Smith asking Holy Bull for everything he has. Concern is coming hard under Jerry Bailey. It's Holy Bull desperately trying to hold Concern's final bid but it is Holy Bull, game as a racehorse can be. Coming down to the wire, Holy Bull wins. What a hero!

The margin was a scant neck but Durkin was right in categorizing the effort as heroic. The race set up perfectly for Concern and Tabasco Cat as Commanche Trail, the designated rabbit, harassed Holy Bull for the first half of the race resulting in that one producing a 1:10 $\frac{3}{5}$ time for the six furlongs.

Tabasco Cat never threatened but the rate at which Concern was closing on the leader mid-stretch made Holy Bull's chances appear remote. Mike Smith, sensing the danger, struck his mount with the whip for the first and last time in their ten-start partnership. Concern reached equal terms with Holy Bull but could not get by him. The gallant gray had answered the question and silenced his doubters.



HOLY BULL HOLDS OFF CONCERN IN THE 1994 TRAVERS STAKES

Jimmy Croll announced with finality that the Woodward Stakes in the fall against older horses would be Holy Bull's last start of 1994. Due to clerical mishap, Holy Bull was not a Breeders' Cup nominee so the BC Classic was not in play.

The Woodward was a Holy Bull laugh. As he opened up five lengths on a field that included Derby Champ Go for Gin and the previous year's Belmont winner Colonial Affair, Tom Durkin summed up the finish:

Holy Bull is winning like a champion with devastating ease. He is toying with the best horses in training.

Croll was certain that his horse needed a rest after a year and a half in training. Said Croll, "This horse has been good for me, and now it's time for me to be good to him."

A few weeks later, the vanquished Concern and Tabasco Cat comprised the Breeders' Cup Classic exacta further bolstering Holy Bull's dominant image. The voters selected him America's Horse of the Year overwhelmingly.

Croll set an ambitious four-year-old campaign for Holy Bull. The trainer made it clear that he would be willing to supplement his horse for \$350k to the Breeders' Cup Classic in the fall. The first major challenge was the Grade I Donn Handicap at Gulfstream. The colt had looked fit and sharp in his 1995 debut and the Florida players installed him an even money chance in the Donn.

The race looked like a rerun of the Woodward as Holy Bull easily tracked the 4/1 second choice with the rest of the field far in arrears. When Mike Smith asked Holy Bull, the colt responded and appeared to be going by the leader when Smith abruptly rose from the saddle while pulling up his mount.

A collective gasp enveloped the Gulfstream faithful and Tom Durkin reported the balance of the race in an atypical monotone that bordered on funereal.

Holy Bull's racing career had ended. Tendon and ligament damage to his lower left leg was repairable but not to a level necessary for athletic performance. The second choice in the betting that Holy Bull was set to pass would soon capture his own crown of celebrity. Cigar's win in the Donn made it four in a row on his way to a record sixteen-race win streak. As good as Cigar was, the opinion here is that he would never have gotten the best of Holy Bull on the square.

Holy Bull		Gr. h. 25 (Jan)		Life		D.Fst												
Own: W. A. Croll Jr		Sire: Great Above (Minnesota Mac) \$10,000		16	13	0	0	\$2,481,760	122	13	12	0	0	\$2,412,400	122			
		Dam: Sharon Brown (Al Hattab)		1995	2	1	0	0	\$51,000	117	3	1	0	0	\$69,360	103		
		Br: Pelican Stable (Fla)		1994	10	8	0	0	\$2,095,000	122	Synth	0	0	0	\$0	-		
		Tr: Croll W A Jr									Turf(302)	0	0	0	\$0	-		
11Feb95-9GP	fst	1 1/8	:462 1:103 1:363 1:493	3+	DonnH-G1	-	9	2 ¹	2 ²	-	922	-	Smith M E	127	*.30	-	-	Cigar1155; Primitive Hall1122; Bonus Money1123; Pulled up in distress 9
22Jan95-9GP	fst	7f	:223 :451 1:093 1:22	3+	OlympicH100k	117	5	3	2 ¹	2 ¹	1 nd	12 ¹	Smith M E	126	*.40	93-15	Holy Bull1262; Birdonthewire1192; Patton115; Fast pace, handily 6	
17Sep94-8Bel	fst	1 1/8	:462 1:102 1:349 1:464	3+	Woodward-G1	116	5	2 ¹	2 ¹	1 ¹	12 ¹	15	Smith M E	121	*.90	97-10	Holy Bull1215; Devil His Due1261; Colonial Affair1263; Drew off, ridden out 8	
20Aug94-7Sar	fst	1 1/4	:461 1:102 1:354 2:02		Travers-G1	115	1	2 ¹	2 nd	14	1 ¹	1 ^{nk}	Smith M E	126	*.80	-	Holy Bull126; Concern1261; Tabasco Cat1261; Dueled gamely, drvn 5	
31Jly94-10Mth	fst	1 1/8	:472 1:112 1:354 1:481		HskIlmvH-G1	115	3	1 ¹	1 ²	12	11 ¹	11 ¹	Smith M E	126	*.20	93-07	Holy Bull1261; Meadow Flight1181; Concern1181; Repell foe, confidently 6	
31Jly94-8Bel	fst	1 1/8	:222 :451 1:092 1:41		Dwyer-G2	119	1	1 ¹	1 ¹	11 ¹	13	16 ¹	Smith M E	124	*.30	-	Holy Bull1249; Twining1225; Bay Street Star1199; Pace, ridden out 4	
30May94-8Bel	fst	1	:224 :45 1:092 1:334	3+	MtrophH-G1	122	6	1 ¹	1 ¹	11 ¹	12	15 ¹	Smith M E	112	*1.00	-	Holy Bull1125; Cherokee Run1180; Devil His Due1222; Drew off, drivin 0	
7May94-8CD	sly	1 1/4	:471 1:114 1:373 2:033		KyDerby-G1	85	4	6 ⁵	5 ³	9 ⁹	10 ¹⁹	12 ¹⁸	Smith M E	126	*2.20	-	Go for Gin1262; Strodes Creek1264; Blumin Affair1262; Off slow, gave way 14	
16Apr94-9Kee	fst	1 1/8	:474 1:129 1:374 1:50		BlueGras-G2	113	1	12	12 ¹	12 ¹	12	13 ¹	Smith M E	121	*.60	-	Holy Bull1213; ValiantNature1215; Mahogany Hill1212; Drew off, hand ride 7	
12Mar94-10GP	fst	1 1/8	:46 1:10 1:344 1:473		FlaDerby-G1	115	6	12	12	12 ¹	13	15 ¹	Smith M E	122	2.70	92-09	Holy Bull1225; Ride the Rails1220; Halo's Image1221; Led, handily 14	
19Feb94-9GP	gd	1 1/8	:224 :453 1:102 1:443		FntnOYth-G2	57	4	1 nd	1 nd	2 ¹	6 ¹	62 ¹	Smith M E	119	*1.30	-	Dehere119; Go for Gin1191; Ride the Rails1173; Vied for lead, tired 6	
30Jan94-9GP	fst	7f	:213 :44 1:081 1:211		Hutchesn-G2	108	1	3	1 ¹	1 ¹	2 nd	12	Smith M E	122	*.50	-	Holy Bull122; Patton1139; You and 1119; Came again, impressive 5	
23Oct93-11Crc	fst	1 1/8	:23 :462 1:119 1:461		@FSInRealty400k	93	9	11 ¹	11 ¹	12	14	17 ¹	Smith M E	120	*.50	-	Holy Bull1207; Rustic Light1201; Forward to Lead1201; Handily, convincing 12	
18Sep93-6Bel	sly	7f	:222 :453 1:101 1:231		Futurity-G1	103	2	1	1 ¹	1 ¹	13	11 ¹	Smith M E	122	3.10	-	Holy Bull122; Dehere1225; Prenup1228; Set pace, driving 6	
25ep93-7Bel	fst	6 1/2f	:22 :441 1:094 1:17		Alw 2000n1x	91	3	1	1 ¹	1 nd	13 ¹	17	Smith M E	119	*.90	-	Holy Bull119; Goodbye Doeny1179; End Sweep119; Set pace, handily 6	
14Aug93-7Mth	fst	5 1/2f	:213 :444 :571 1:034		Mid Sp Wt 16k	101	1	3	1 ¹	1 ¹	11 ¹	12 ¹	Rivera L Jr	118	*1.10	-	Holy Bull1182; Palance1187; Hold My Tongue1189; Super speed, green, drvn 6	

THE CAREER PAST PERFORMANCE LINES OF THE REMARKABLE HOLY BULL

Holy Bull went to the stud with a fee of \$25k live foal. His confirmation and racing talents would have justified three or four times that number had he owned a pedigree possessing even moderate commercial appeal. Even without the choicest mares as partners, Holy Bull still led first year sires. He became a popular choice, notably of breeders seeking runners rather than cash outs in the sales ring.

Holy Bull's lone unexplainable failure had faded into racing's archived unknowables until Derby week in 1997 when the L.A. Times' Bill Christine interviewed Jimmy Croll at Churchill Downs. Croll told Christine: "They got to my horse. I know more than ever that Holy Bull was drugged."

Croll discussed the lax security around his barn at the time and an unnamed character of ill repute that he spotted repeatedly there during the days before the Derby. Authorities later investigated that individual for being in possession of large quantities of the sedative Halcion for which he had no prescription. No charges resulted from the inquiry.

"If I had to do it all over, I would have scratched Holy Bull from the Derby. He was sluggish a couple of days before the race, and he was sluggish the day of the race. Looking back now, I can see where there was a reason for that." Croll added that several months after the Derby, he received an unsolicited visit from the F.B.I. regarding the circumstances around the race and his horse's performance. Whatever trail existed went cold at that point.

Of particular interest to this observer are a few gambling aspects in that 1994 Kentucky Derby.

The winner, Go for Gin, went off at 9/1, and provided the front end of a \$184.80 exacta and a \$2351.40 trifecta. He never won another race in nine subsequent career starts.

Despite being installed morning line favorite at 8/5, Holy Bull's odds drifted to nearly 2/1 at post time. Given his worshipful status with the betting public and casual fan, that

is noteworthy. The Kentucky Derby betting pool is the most liquid in American sport apart from the Super Bowl. Eliminating the favorite from possible outcomes provides a garden of opportunity for a large bettor in possession of that intelligence.

The disinterest of the stewards and the inaction of law enforcement made the Holy Bull fix allegation a shibboleth of Jimmy Croll and a minute band of Derby Truthers. Cover-up may be too strong a term but negligence is not.

Seven years later, there would be a measure of justice dispensed *In Re Holy Bull*. In 2005, our letter commented on a prospect with unusual payoff potential:

And for the ultra, mega, moon shot play save a couple bucks for GIACOMO. Been waiting for him to have that breakout race and Saturday could be it.

Well that Saturday was it. The price was generous for the striking gray at 50/1 and strike he did getting up late for the roses. Revenge is a dish best served cold goes the adage. For one octogenarian, one veteran jockey, and one fourteen-year-old stallion that dish had chilled for eleven years but was tasty nonetheless.

This was the Daily Racing Form chart comment:

GIACOMO, unhurried and four or five wide between rivals during the early stages, continued four wide along the backstretch, worked his way forward between horses six wide on the far turn, was in behind a wall of horses entering the upper stretch, was alertly angled eight abreast to secure racing room at the furlong grounds, then closed determinedly under extreme left-handed urging to prevail.

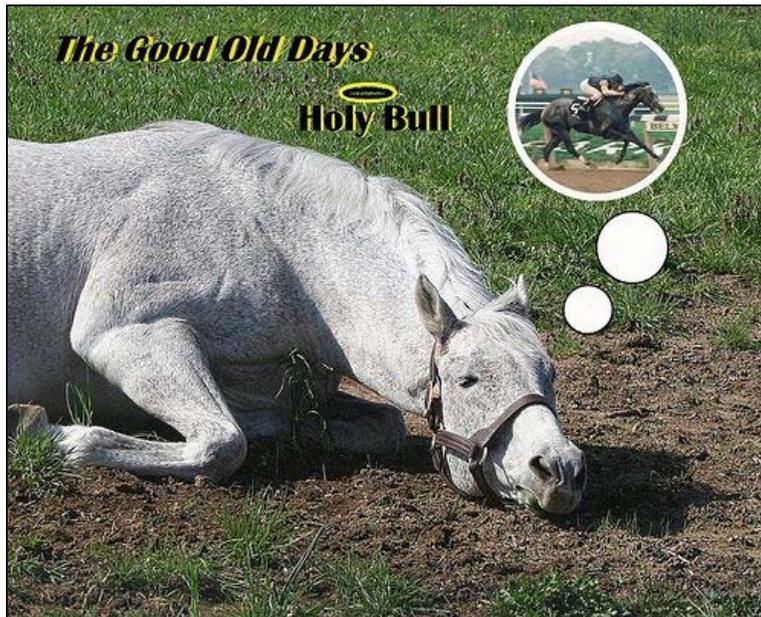
The Derby chart also reported that Giacomo was a son of Holy Bull and ridden by Mike Smith. For the long retired, then eighty-five-year-old Jimmy Croll, the moment was dear. "I was really excited, watching that," Croll said. "I had tears coming out of my eyes."



MIKE SMITH AND GIACOMO

For the rider of both Giacomo and Holy Bull, the thrill was equally intense. "I'm so numb I can't even tell you how it feels," he said after the race. "I stood up at the finish, and it's like all the strength just left my body. My legs buckled, and I was hanging on for dear life."

The once gray Holy Bull now has a coat that would render him invisible on a ski slope. Although pensioned from stud duty since 2012, the twenty-five-year-old still moves with purpose and elan at his Kentucky home. There, his still devoted fans regularly seek an audience with their longtime friend. The Bull patiently accommodates his supplicants with endless selfies.



HOLY BULL REMINISCING

Holy Bull's partner, Michael Earl Smith, now fifty years of age, has no gray hair issues. His dome is solid California chrome. Still he remains at the elite level of his profession and is a Hall of Fame inductee. Smith has won a Preakness and two Belmonts as well as his Derby. He also holds the record for most Breeders' Cup wins by a jockey (seventeen).

Whether the drugging allegations were wholly bull or a valid alibi for that woeful Derby performance in 1994, we may never know. What we can say with total conviction is that

the Kentucky Derby of 1994 was the only race that Holy Bull came up short without a documentable medical excuse.

Holy Bull's race record provides the *sine qua non* of a champion. He also possessed the *je ne sais quoi* of personality and charisma that separates a Secretariat and a Zenyatta from other gallant and fast horses. For this observer Holy Bull completes a personal thoroughbred racing Holy Trinity with those two aforementioned greats. Long may he *rein*.



THE RACE



“But he who dares not grasp the thorn
Should never crave the rose.”

ANNE BRONTE (1820-1849)

The youngest and least celebrated of the Bronte sisters, Anne was no slacker with the quill herself. Sadly, she felt the scythe of The Grim Reaper before her thirtieth birthday. The complaint was tuberculosis. Her passing preceded by twenty-six years the first Kentucky Derby. Still her quote above is a concise description of the race's challenge.

Last year (apart from our woeful underestimation of American Pharaoh), we handicapped the race decently. Our pick ran third, our long shot ran fourth, and our ultra-long shot ran fifth in the eighteen horse field. The self-imposed exclusion of picking the favorite periodically weighs heavily on our readers' and our own estates.

With the duration of our letter closing in on four decades, the thought occurred that the archives might someday serve as an exemplar of the cognitive bias known as the Dunning-Kruger effect. Simply stated that is the inability of unskilled persons to recognize their own ineptitude. This illusory superiority is commonly found at thoroughbred racetracks.

Following is our annual disquisition on the Kentucky Derby contenders:

As pedigree always enters into our appraisal of the competitors, we begin with a brief discussion of the sire of the moment, UNCLE MO. From his first crop of now three-year-olds, Unc will have no fewer than three sons (NYQUIST, OUTWORK, and MO TOM) in the starting gate for the Derby.

The issue for this race is that UNCLE MO never won beyond a mile and a sixteenth and his sire, the late INDIAN CHARLIE, was a well beaten third as favorite in the '98 Derby

won by our pick REAL QUIET. The Uncle does get some stamina on the distaff side through ARCH, his routing broodmare sire.

The staying power question will be answered MO or less on Saturday. We lean to the No Mo side and cite erstwhile New York Yankee outfielder, Oscar Gamble, who commented on his team's issues thusly:

"They don't think it be like it is, but it do."

To insure against the all too likely possibility that we know nothing and UNCLE MO is the next revolutionary genetic influence of *equus caballus*, maybe consider boxing the three MO's in an exacta.

BRODY'S CAUSE- Captured this year's Blue Grass with game late move in a slow-mo race. Last B.G.-Derby winner was a quarter century ago which does not inspire. Lots of turf runners in the pedigree but no lack of stamina. May not be equal to the cause but Brody will pass a lot of tired ones in the late stages.

CREATOR- Arkansas Derby winner owns a pedigree created for this race. Son of TAPIT, sire of a Belmont winner, and a Peruvian mare with multiple Derby-distance stakes wins. Has followed an old school prep schedule of intelligent design with four starts at two and three respectively. Took his time getting his first win (February 27) but that proved to be the genesis of his evolution into a short-lister for the roses. Only three weeks between big Oaklawn effort and Derby Day presents some concern but otherwise all go.

DANZING CANDY- Almost certain to be the controlling speed in this one. Earned a triple digit Beyer Figure in the mile and a sixteenth San Felipe. He stopped early in the muddy S.A. Derby after rearing in the gate and subsequent unrealistic pace. Pedigree passable for the distance if not ideal. Running style suggests that wiring the field in a lone speed scenario is the only plausible case for a sweet outcome but he may stick around a lot longer than expected. Pilot Mike Smith's clock sense is as good as any.

DESTIN- The other Pletcher trainee whose only dull effort was in the LeCompte at Fair Grounds. Hit the Tampa double in Sam Davis and Derby after which he was shut down from competition due to bounce concerns from Fig Guys. In brief the figs are the sport's rough equivalent to baseball's sabermetrics. As applied here, the theory holds that when a racehorse makes a giant step forward (i.e. "runs a big fig"), it portends a likely regression in the next start. To counter that influence, connections extend the interval between starts. This means this colt is DESTINED to be beached for eight weeks between his TB Derby and KY Derby starts. Solid pedigree, top rider and trainer, but layoff looms over the positives.

EXAGGERATOR- This son of Classic winner CURLIN has a solid resume although finishing on the short end in three dukes with favorite NYQUIST. Boasts four career wins at four different tracks including the all-important Santa Anita Derby. In that one, the colt went EX the field of competitors on the far turn in a NASCAR-like slingshot move. Controversy over conditions that day owing to a rare So Cal tsunami that distorted the accustomed track surface. Brothers Keith and Kent Desormeaux comprise the Cajun trainer-jock combo here. No need to stretch the truth for their chances.

GUN RUNNER- Has answered every question so far while racking up the most Derby points. Son of top sire CANDY RIDE, whose runners tend to be best at slightly shorter distances. Gets plenty of stamina from dam, QUIET GIANT, a half-sister to Champion ST. LIAM. Slow times in Risen Star and Louisiana Derby suggest he's exercised the right to creep and bear arms. To be fair, GR has run as fast as he had to so far. Whether he can gun his run to a higher gear is the unanswered question.

LANI- His name means Heaven in Hawaiian and his all-Japanese connections were uncorking the Sake in Dubai this March when the colt took the \$2 mill UAE Derby. No winners of that lucrative tilt have fared well in Louisville and the scribes are already dismissing his slow-paced works and recalcitrant gallops. Yet another son of TAPIT and from a mare, HEAVENLY ROMANCE by a personal favorite, '89 Derby winner SUNDAY SILENCE (picked here). Mom was a Grade I winner at the Derby distance in Japan and her family exudes stamina. If he shows a yen for Churchill Downs, LANI could be emperor for the day.

MAJESTO- Son of revered two time BC Classic winner, TIZNOW, and a multiple Grade I stakes producing dam answers any pedigree queries. Pundits have dismissed his second in the Florida Derby off of a maiden win as a weak field, rail trip, "somebody had to finish second" fluke. Trainer Gustavo Delgado, a student of the great Laz Barrera, holds virtually every training record in Venezuela. Jock Emiseal Jaramillo is that country's all-time riding leader. Valid criticism that MAJESTO may not have the *cojones* to win the Derby since he is a ridgling. His name is Spanish for Glory which could come his way if *uno cojone* can get him a mile and a quarter.

MO TOM- For most of the winter at Fair Grounds this was the talking horse but his predilection for running into walls of competitors left many doubting Thomas's in New Orleans. Gives every indication of wanting more ground but the UNCLE MO connection is a question. Tom the horse shares ownership with the NFL Saints and NBA Pelicans (Tom & Gayle Benson) and will be the only one of the three subjects with a winning season if he prevails. Fans are hoping for a Benson Boogie but may have to settle for a Second Line.

MOHAYMEN- Sheikh Hamdan's Shadwell Farm coughed up \$2.2 mill for this son of TAPIT whose name is said to translate as *dominant*. He fulfilled his moniker in his first five starts and was the shortest price in the future book until his bounce as the favorite in the Florida Derby. Dam side pedigree is as blue as the Shadwell racing colors as mom

is by Belmont winner DIXIE UNION and has already produced a Breeders' Cup Juvenile winner. To get back to his winning ways, this colt may need "mo hay, men."

MOR SPIRIT- Owned by Denmark-born CEO of Pandora Jewelry who named the colt for his ninety-year-old Mother, MOR being the Danish term for Mom. Being trained by four-time Derby winner, Bob Baffert, immediately places an entry on the short list of contenders where this guy belongs. Sports three wins and four seconds from seven starts and has started favorite in every one. Appeared to struggle with the sloppy going in the S.A. Derby and deserves a nod for getting second. Noticeably his three-time Derby winning rider, Gary Stevens, allowed MS to finish on his own once EXAGGERATOR went by. Sire, ESKENDEREYA (himself a son of GIANT'S CAUSEWAY), was odds-on favorite in '10 Derby before late scratch and retirement stemming from a training injury. Dam is by Belmont winner DIXIE UNION. Spirited Kentucky works indicate there is nothing rotten in Denmark.

MY MAN SAM- Barely beat the dreaded Apollo jinx by making his first start in mid-December last year. First three starts were on the Aqueduct winterized inner track which often produces confusing interpretations. But there was no confusion in his Blue Grass Stakes result. Making his fourth career start, he broke from the fourteen hole, immediately dropped to last and steadily picked his way through traffic to gain the place. Sam's grandsire is TAPIT by way of his son, TRAPPE SHOT, and from an ARCH mare. Pedigree and running style is all closer. A hot pace will produce the Sound of Music for Sammy.

NYQUIST- The deserving favorite is named for hockey player, Gustav Nyquist, of the Detroit Red Wings, not (as we assumed) engineer Harry Nyquist to whom the Nyquist Frequency is attributed (don't ask). The colt's perfect record includes last year's Breeders' Cup Juvenile and this year's Florida Derby. None disputes his talent and will. Some dispute whether he can stretch his dominance to a mile and a quarter given his pedigree and running style. Same connections as 2012 winner, I'LL HAVE ANOTHER. Whether they will have another is the question of the moment.

OSCAR NOMINATED- Spiral Stakes winner was not Derby nominated so owner got a new partner to provide the \$200k supplemental fee to make the colt eligible. A lot of good horses have come out of the Spiral but only ANIMAL KINGDOM in 2011 has completed a Spiral-Derby double. Dad, KITTEN'S JOY, is top grass sire which would explain the big win on Turfway's synthetic surface. Running on actual dirt could turn this guy into OSCAR THE GROUCH.

OUTWORK- Another of the MO boys whose performances have embodied his name. Took DESTIN to the limit at Tampa and out-mudded the Wood Memorial field in the slowest time in that race's history. Gets some stamina influence from Belmont winning broodmare sire, EMPIRE MAKER. Pletcher-Johnny V is a lethal trainer-jock combo in big events like this one. Resume is light with four career starts and last two the only ones around two turns. Pletch will surely have to OUTWORK the competition to get this guy Derby-fit.

SHAGAF- A Shadwell homebred whose name translates from Arabic as “fond of” comes to Churchill with only four lifetime starts due to training disruptions from minor illnesses. His three race win streak was halted by a disappointing fourth as favorite in the muddy Wood Memorial. Has pedigree ‘a plenty but needs a big forward step which could be aided by rider switch to Joel Rosario. Top rider just now returning from rehab after bad spill in February at Gulfstream.

SUDDENBREAKINGNEWS- This just in.... we have a possible Wise Guy Horse sighting here. WGH’s usually have a route pedigree...check. WGH’s are almost always closers ...check. WGH’s typically have not won a Derby prep but have shown measurable improvement...check and check. Throw in relatively low profile connections and double-digit odds and the story is complete. This Ark Derby runner-up deserves respect but his lack of early foot will require a dream trip for SBN to be the headline on Saturday.

TOM’S READY- The lesser regarded of the Benson pair merits attention. Trainer Dallas Stewart delivered two Derby runners-up for us at boxcar odds in ’13 and ’14. Finished second in the La. Derby at a big price. Son of our ’00 Derby pick MORE THAN READY will be making his tenth career start so he is sure to be ready.

TROJAN NATION- Pedigree shows a well-planned parenthood. Same dad as ZENYATTA and ’07 Derby winner STREET SENSE. Dam is a Juvenile Fillies Champ by ’90 Derby runner-up, SUMMER SQUALL. After going winless in five lifetime starts, TRO-NAT recorded a bullet work at Santa Anita. That was enough for canny trainer, Paddy Gallagher, to fly him cross-country to Aqueduct for the Wood Memorial. That’s where the rubber met the road as the colt flew along the rail and came second by a head at 80/1. Still a maiden but so was the first Triple Crown winner, SIR BARTON, when he won the 1919 edition of this race. As the Greeks proved to the residents of Troy, it is impossible to handicap a Trojan Horse. Could finish anywhere from 1 to 20.

WHITMORE- Hard luck gelding finished a game third in the Arkansas Derby after a wide trip much like his two seconds in the preps for that race. Always looks like a winner a furlong out but can’t seem to finish. Sire was a Breeders’ Cup Classic winner and running style suggests he can handle the Derby protocol. Big rider switch to Victor Espinoza adds the winning rider in five of the last six Triple Crown races. WHIT MORE can you ask for than that?

OUR PICK-

We have always favored deep closers with our most recent success coming in ’13 when ORB went from last to first. This year’s field is choc-a-bloc with deep closers (BRODY’S CAUSE, CREATOR, SUDDENBREAKINGNEWS, WHITMORE, MY MAN SAM, MO TOM, TROJAN NATION, MAJESTO) any one of which has the talent to win it with an unimpeded path from back to front.

DANZING CANDY and OUTWORK are the likely pacesetters stalked closely by NYQUIST, GUN RUNNER, EXAGGERATOR and DESTIN.

Between those groups will likely be found MOHAYMEN, MOR SPIRIT, LANI, OSCAR NOMINATED, and TOM'S READY.

Our best guess is that this Derby will favor a mid- pack runner and have gone back and forth between two that we like. Both are built for the distance and share the same broodmare sire in Belmont winner, DIXIE UNION. We think they are so similar in stature that we will make a significant exacta box with the two but the rulebook says we have to make a pick which means our selection to win the 2016 Kentucky Derby is

MOHAYMEN



We expect our pick to be third choice in the betting behind NYQUIST and EXAGGERATOR. We are throwing out his dreadful Florida Derby performance and giving more weight to his previous undefeated record at two and three.

Trainer Kiaran McLaughlin just missed with CLOSING ARGUMENT in the 2005 Derby and has trained a Belmont winner (JAZIL, '06) as well as a Breeders Cup Classic winner (INVASOR, '06).

Rider Junior Alvarado is a Derby rookie but has been on MOHAYMEN for all of his starts.

MOR SPIRIT will be the other half of our serious exacta box. Like our pick, he had a disappointing last out in the S.A. Derby where he was a well-beaten second as fave to EXAGGERATOR. Recent works suggest Baffert plans to have him closer to the front.

MS does not possess the quick acceleration of MOHAYMEN but is a grinder with enough speed to be in contention at crunch time.

LONGSHOT PICK-

MAJESTO

We have found MAJESTO intriguing since we first saw his past performances for the Florida Derby. He was a close third to DESTIN in his first lifetime start at seven furlongs. Although he needed four more shots to reach the winner's circle, all were over a mile giving him a solid foundation for the grueling Derby trip. Most of the Florida Derby field was laughable for a Grade I event but MAJESTO displayed maturity when checked briefly in traffic before he could make his run. He was no threat to NYQUIST but was well clear of the rest of the field at the wire and galloped out past the winner with high energy. We love his pedigree, have much respect for his trainer, and anticipate another forward step here. If he delivers, it will be a moment for a mic drop. For us he is a must use at a big price.

ULTRA LONGSHOT PICK-

TROJAN NATION

This letter has never used a maiden in any betting strategy for the Derby but this colt's Wood Memorial second has produced an indelible transfixing effect. Yes it was a slowly run race in the mud but TN went by several seasoned runners and just missed nailing OUTWORK at the wire. We rate his pedigree A+ and a jump up from his Wood could put him in the frame on Saturday.

THE BET-

Main win bet will be MOHAYMEN with a saver on MOR SPIRIT. We will play MAJESTO and TROJAN NATION win, place, and show. We will box the 2 MO's in our main exacta box and use both with our longshot guys in smaller exactas, trifectas, and supers.

Leaving out the two favorites may not be wise but our game is not small ball. We want the IRS as a partner on Saturday.

-JTR

05/04/16

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