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“The right to hope is the most powerful human motivation I know.”

-- Aga Khan IV

**“The door has closed forevermore,
if indeed there ever was a door”**



- Bob Dylan, *Forgetful Heart* (2009)

To lovers of the horse, the thoroughbred especially, the apotheosis of the sainted Secretariat came close to fulfilling an almost messianic expectation of perfection in that breed.

His record setting conclusion to and mastery of the 1973 Triple Crown in that year's Belmont Stakes produced acquiescing nods from the most indurate members of the racing community. Not even the late in decade advents of Seattle Slew, Affirmed, Alydar, and Spectacular Bid unsettled Big Red's pedestal. But in 1980, a colt bred in Ireland and debuting in England at two, entered the conversation. Bred and owned by Aga Khan IV, that colt was named Shergar.



SHERGAR

Secretariat's physicality that bordered on perfection was punctuated by three white socks and a white blaze streaking down the front of his striking head. Shergar displayed a similar blaze and four white socks. Both were named three-year-old champions by virtual acclamation.

Secretariat's death at nineteen was earlier than the actuarial average of about twenty-five. Shergar's kidnapping and permanent disappearance at five years of age was an event outside of the high-risk norms of thoroughbred breeding and racing. That event also remains a case unsolved.

The passage of forty years since his birth has long ended the speculation of his whereabouts fostered by the absence of a *corpus delicti*. The time and circumstances of Shergar's passing remain cloaked in mystery.

Prince Shah Karim Al Hussaini Aga Khan IV, now 81, became the 49th Imam of the Nizari Ismaili Muslims as a twenty-year-old Harvard undergraduate upon the death of his grandfather, Aga Khan III. The grandfather's will notably bypassed his son, Prince Aly Khan, in favor of the Aly Khan's son.

The grandfather started the family's racing and breeding business in the 1920's with an intense approach to genetic science. His foundation mare was a foal of 1921 named Mumtaz Mahal. The breeding of her daughter, Mumtaz Begum, to Federico Tesio's celebrated Nearco produced a foal of 1940 which became the most notable genetic influence of the twentieth century thoroughbred. That stallion was Nasrullah.

In 1950 a group led by Claiborne Farm's Bull Hancock purchased the stallion for \$350,000. Nasrullah's impact in America was even greater than in Europe. Nasrullah is present in the pedigrees of Secretariat, Bold Ruler, Nashua, Seattle Slew, Alydar, Spectacular Bid, American Pharoah, and thousands of lesser in the breed.

Speaking of Alydar, some have speculated that his naming was connected to the son of Aga Khan III and father of Aga Khan IV, Prince Aly Khan. The story goes that the Prince was known as "Aly Darling" by the colt's owners and that the name was a contraction of that affectionate term. Whether true or not, Prince Aly Khan was not cut out to be an Imam.

The Prince was the archetype Hollywood playboy. After divorcing Aga Khan IV's English mother, he became the third husband of American cinema glam chick Rita Hayworth. That union fared no better and he was engaged to a

French model when he died in an auto accident in France in 1960 at age forty-eight.

In the brief three years between his father's death and his own, Aly Khan managed the thoroughbred empire with alacrity winning the Arc De Triomphe in 1959 with Saint Crespin III. In that year Prince Aly Khan was named leading owner in England, Ireland, and France. He also found time to mix with Oscar aspirants at Santa Anita, Hollywood Park, and Del Mar.

Aga Khan IV had the family racing business thrust upon him following his father's untimely passing. Hefty estate taxes forced him to sell a substantial portion of his racing and breeding stock. Vowing to rebuild, he kept his breeding and training bases in Ireland and France.

The emergence of Shergar was a testament to and fulfillment of two decades of the young Aga Khan's commitment. His efforts ensured the continued presence of the familiar red and green silks in the sport's most prestigious races.

Shergar was foaled on March 3, 1978 at the Aga Khan's Ballymany Stud in County Kildare. His dam's side was all French being from the Aga Khan's own Sharmeen. His sire was the English horse Great Nephew, who had earlier fathered the 1975 English Derby winner, Grundy.

Shergar received his early schooling at Ballymany. When the time arrived for more serious work, he was sent to the Newmarket yard of master trainer Michael Stoute.

The trainer chose to partner his charge with nineteen-year old Walter Swinburn, son of Irish champion jockey Wally Swinburn. Stoute chose well as the younger Swinburn was also a palpable presence. Nicknamed "The Choirboy" for his innocent youthful bearing, Swinburn's riding and personal life contained recurrent lapses in discipline and resultant suspensions unbecoming of his popular handle.

At two Shergar impressed in his only two starts with a win and a second but was well down the list of Derby candidates at season's end. Through most of the winter, bookmakers had the colt on offer at odds in excess of 30/1.

Those prices became archival after Shergar's first asking at three in the Guardian Classic Trial at Sandown in late April. There he cleared a strong field, anchored by the seasoned Kirtling, by ten lengths.

The bookmakers immediately slashed the Derby futures market for the winner prompting a classic quote by the esteemed race writer and noted punter Richard Baerlein: “At 8/1, Shergar for the Derby, now is the time to bet like men.”

Shergar’s second and final Derby prep was the mile and a quarter Chester Vase which he annexed by a facile twelve lengths. The public assault on the country’s turf accountancy post the race made Shergar odds on favorite for the Epsom classic, still a month away.

The Derby, as it is known with justification since it was the first, is presently contested on the first Saturday in June. The race is run over a one and one-half mile undulant grass course at Epsom Downs outside of London. Though it is chronologically the second jewel of the U.K. Triple Crown, it is miles the most prestigious.

Stoute, Swinburn, and Shergar captured the Derby championship with a devastating ease that left the most ardent Shergar bulls agape with wonder.

This is how the race caller, Peter Bromley, recounted the final moments of the race:

“Shergar’s going for the gun, two furlongs out the Derby is a procession...Shergar is ten lengths clear...there’s only one horse in it, you need a telescope to see the rest.”



AGA KHAN IV LEADS SHERGAR AND SWINBURN AT EPSOM

PURE DELIGHT:
Swinburn
guides Shergar
home at Royal
Ascot in 1981



'He made it look so easy'

WALTER SWINBURN will forever be remembered for his association with the kidnapped Derby winner Shergar.

The naturally gifted rider was only 19, looking more like a 15-year-old who had bunked off school, when he partnered Shergar to a majestic victory in the 1981 Derby.

With his youthful looks, he was nicknamed The Choirboy.

Born in Oxford, Swinburn, the son of the talented Irish Flat jockey Wally, rode his first winner, Paddy's Luck, on July 12, 1978 at Kempton.

He spent his formative years under the guidance of Frenchie Nicholson, the renowned tutor of jockeys.

Pat Eddery also learned his craft with the trainer. Swinburn's quiet style of

By Chris Goulding

getting horses to run for him caught the attention of Sir Michael Stoute, the trainer of Shergar, who appointed him as his stable jockey only weeks before their Derby win.

Along with eight Classic winners, including three Derby winners, he rode All Along to victory in the 1983 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe.

Swinburn almost died after being catapulted into the running rail at Sha Tin, Hong Kong, in 1996, suffering multiple injuries, including a punctured lung, and was in a coma for four days.

Within six months, he was back to record Breeders' Cup Turf success aboard the Stoute-trained Pilsudski.

After fighting a constant battle with his weight, Swinburn quit the saddle in

2000 and took over a training licence from his father-in-law, Peter Harris, in 2004 and sent out more than 200 winners.

Mick Kinane, who rode in that golden era with Swinburn, Piggott, Bodey and Carson, said: "His ride on Lamentation, in the Derby, was phenomenal as he managed an inexperienced horse around Epsom."

"That was one of his outstanding achievements and he definitely had ice in his veins on the big days - nothing bothered him."

John Reid, who fought many a battle with Swinburn, said: "Walter was so talented it almost looked as if he didn't have to put any effort into it."

All the great sportsmen make it look easy and Swinburn was certainly one of them.

SHERGAR AND THE CHOIRBOY

A scant three weeks later Shergar was at the Curragh to contest the Irish Derby at the same distance and he delivered a similar outcome. The Choirboy was under suspension so the esteemed Lester Piggott was deputized. Lester sat virtually motionless throughout Shergar's facile score in County Kildare.

At the finish, commentator Peter O'Sullivan exclaimed "He's in an exercise canter!" And the incomparable voice of Irish sport, Michael O'Hehir summarized succinctly "And it's Shergar first, the rest are nowhere."

Shergar's final win would come less than a month later at Ascot in the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes against older horses. Walter Swinburn's sentence was completed and he was again up on Shergar. An easy outside gallop was not provided but Swinburn deftly negotiated two narrow gaps during a rail trip with the expected result achieved once again.

Shergar's racing career ended in defeat in his next start, a race that should have been run without him. The St. Leger is the third leg of the U.K. Triple Crown. At just over a mile and three quarters it is anachronistic to today's game and irrelevant for breeding purposes. Shergar was a tiring fourth in that one which did nothing to diminish his syndication value.

Rumors persisted that the horse was headed for Kentucky where it was said a syndication valuing Shergar at \$30 million was in place. This was only nine years after Secretariat's syndication set a record at \$6.08 million.

The Aga Khan's desire to have his stallion in proximity to his mares resulted in a syndication valuing Shergar at \$16 million and a return to his Irish home at Ballymany Stud. That move was greeted with hosannas from not only Irish horsemen but the general citizenry as well.

The 1982 breeding season result was a foal crop of thirty-five for Shergar. No one foresaw that his rookie season would also be his last.

By rule, all thoroughbreds' share an official birthday of January 1. In order to maximize maturity for races at two and three, breeders try to have their mares in foal as early as practicable. Since horses gestate eleven months on average, most farms open for breeding business on February 15 each year.

What the Irish call a soft rain fell over Ballymany Stud on the evening of February 8, 1983. Shergar had been booked to fifty-five mares for the season then only a week away. His dedicated groom, the fifty-five-year-old Jim Fitzgerald himself born at Ballymany, had settled the horse for the night and retired to the family cottage, within walking distance of Shergar's stall.



JIM FITZGERALD AGE 85 IN 2013

Security on the property was oriented toward fire prevention and evacuation, not predators. Gates were routinely left unlocked including the entrance gate. Experience made it so until it did not.

The Curragh of Kildare, an area inclusive of Ballymany, is a reposeful green expanse of rich limey soil conducive to building strong bone in the adolescent thoroughbreds kept there. The quiescent mood spreads a cloak of tranquility over the Curragh's entirety that is jostled only by its few racing days.

At about 8:30 p.m. on the ill-starred night, six armed men drove a Ford Granada through the open entrance of Ballymany with a two-horse trailer in tow. They quickly dispersed but maintained a radio connection.

A trio of their lot, dressed in the uniform of An Garda Siochana (the Irish police) combined oddly with a balaclava, knocked on the door of the Fitzgerald's. Answering the door was one of the five Fitzgerald children, their twenty-one-year-old son, Bernard. The gunmen pinned him to the floor while taking the other family members, excluding the father, hostage.

Then, under threat of death, the perps ordered the father to lead them to Shergar's stall and subsequently aid in loading the stallion into the horse box.

Fewer than thirty minutes had lapsed before the trailer bearing Shergar departed Ballymany to parts unknown to this day. The remaining members of the invading party thrust a blindfolded James Fitzgerald into a van, and eventually dropped him on a lonely road, twenty miles north of his home.

His captors warned him, under pain of death, not to speak to the Garda and to inform the Aga Khan that the price for the return of Shergar was the sterling equivalent of three million dollars. To ensure that communication from Shergar's captors was genuine, the password "King Neptune" was established.

Fitzgerald located a telephone and called his brother for a ride home. What followed was a lengthy delay in any notification to law enforcement.

By now it was past 1:00 a.m. at which time Fitzpatrick placed a call to his boss, Ghislain Drion, a native Frenchman and manager of Ballymany. Fitzgerald, fearing for his life, begged Drion not to call the police. His boss complied by tracking down the Aga Khan in Switzerland.

His royal highness immediately rejected any thought of a ransom payment and ordered Drion to immediately contact the Garda with a report of the kidnapping.

The Frenchman, frustrated by his inability to reach the authorities, contacted his friend, the Minister of Finance, who passed the buck to the Minister of Justice. By the time the latter informed the Garda, it was daybreak. Shergar's kidnappers now sat on a nine-hour cushion following the abduction.

The first word from the hostage takers was a phone call to the residence of stud manager Drion a day later. The unmistakably Irish voice repeated the demand made to Shergar's groom. The voice specified delivery of the ransom funds to a Paris location.

The kidnappers exhibited savvy in the snatch of Shergar but wrongly thought the Aga Khan was the sole owner of the horse. After the syndication, he had but six of the forty shares. The ransom demand also specified payment in one hundred-pound notes, a non-existent denomination.

The sentiment of the syndicate was in sync with the Aga Khan. No ransom would be paid but a "reward" might be offered for the stallion's safe return.

Multiple brief telephone calls placed to Ghislain Drion over the next several days failed to move the matter any closer to resolution. The last word from the kidnappers came a mere four days after Shergar had vanished.

At 10:40 p.m. on Saturday night, a designated syndicate member informed the voice that photos of Shergar with a contemporaneous newspaper had not satisfied syndicate members that the stallion was still alive and well.

"Well if you're not satisfied, that's it," the caller replied. And that was it.

There followed a procession of persons of high and low order claiming contact with Shergar's captors. None of the claimants possessed the "King Neptune" password and all of their leads produced dead ends. Then there were the mountebanks and clairvoyants that further diverted the investigation.

Enter now the Detective Chief Superintendent of the Garda outpost in County Kildare, James "Spud" Murphy. In his three-piece suit covered by a Columbo raincoat and topped by a Dick Tracy-like trilby hat, Murphy looked

every bit his part as the detective likely to crack the Shergar case. That is until he spoke.



DETECTIVE JIM MURPHY

The native Kildarians possess an accent and syntax far removed from the refinement of the Dubliner. The locals' speech parallels that of the stock Hollywood Irish character actor (think Barry Fitzgerald in *The Quiet Man* or the Lucky Charms Leprechaun). Their most common greeting is "Didja back any winners today?"

The Murphy was setup to be the butt of jokes by the British press which portrayed him as a Hibernian version of Inspector Clouseau. In fact, Murphy had solved numerous high-profile cases including a ten-million-dollar art theft, the capture of a most-wanted terrorist, and the kidnapping of a Dutch industrialist. But his syntax made him easy prey.

The superintendent began a briefing to a press corps anxious for any leads on Shergar's disappearance with "A clue...that is something we do not have."

At another briefing, apparently unaware of Ghislain Drion's ethnicity, pointed out that Drion "speaks perfect French."

On the subject of Shergar's safety, he offered that "A stallion cannot be kept by people who are not well up in the horsey field."

Although he remained chief investigator on the case, Murph's spokesman gig concluded after news starved reporters pressed for an update. After several days of silence, the superintendent summoned the pack of scribes for a pre-dawn briefing. At 5:00 a.m. Spud exacted his revenge.

“Gentlemen, I just called you to say I have nothing to say.”

The investigation wore on for months but a nationwide search for any trace of the horse was futile. From Jim Fitzgerald’s description, three suspects labeled The Nose, The Jockey, and The Guard were sought but never found.

The Garda dismissed suggestions of Fitzgerald’s collaboration citing his own birth at Ballymany and intense devotion to Shergar.

The case remains cold and likely will remain so but multiple theories have plausibility.

THE IRA THEORY- Beginning with the fact that all of the kidnappers with speaking roles had distinct Irish accents, it follows that the IRA would land on the suspect ledger. Further support came from *The Informer*, a confessional by IRA super grass Sean O’Callaghan, who alleged that the crime was the doing of Kevin Mallon, a senior IRA operative. The book claims that Mallon saw the plot as a more benign source of funds for arms than the human version. In O’Callaghan’s telling, when Shergar panicked in his unfamiliar surroundings, he injured himself and his captors killed him. No charges were ever brought against any IRA members.



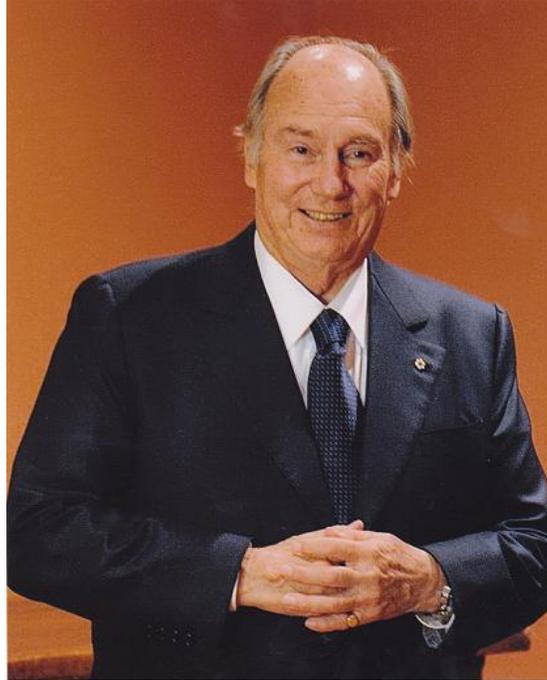
A BELFAST MURAL

THE IRA AS PROXY FOR MUAMMAR GADDAFI THEORY- The Libyan dictator was a source of arms for the IRA and the ransom would have paid for some additional ordnance. Gaddafi's Sunni creed conflicted with the Aga's Shiite discipline. Gaddafi saw the Aga Khan as a rival to the Libyan's goal of leading Islam. So why pass up a chance to poke the Aga Khan?

THE WAYNE MURTY THEORY- The sharpie Kentucky horseman thought he had won a bidding war for fifty-six prized broodmares being sold under financial duress by the prominent French horseman, Marcel Boussac. Several days later a French Court ruled that the Aga Khan had won the bidding. The ruling was upheld largely due to the Aga Khan's prominence in French racing. An enraged Murty went to the Agriculture Ministry and delivered the severed leg of a horse to an official there. "I've never come across such a goddam swindle in all my life," Murty said. The Aga Khan observed: "I don't see why I should be heaped with insults just because Murty took a bad business risk. Had he made a more reasonable bid in the beginning, none of this would have happened." No evidence connecting Murty to the Shergar case was produced and no charges were brought.

THE NEW ORLEANS MAFIA THEORY- No conspiratorial mystery is complete without a Crescent City connection. In this one, a French bloodstock agent, Jean-Michel Gambet negotiated a purchase of the Aga Khan's champion sire Vayraan. The financially strapped Gambet secured financing for the purchase from a source associated with New Orleans mob figures. The deal for Vayraan fell apart, Gambet defaulted on his obligation, and was found dead from bullet wounds to the head in his burning car in Lexington, Kentucky. Under this theory, the creditors felt the Aga Khan owed them a horse and decided to swipe Shergar. A personal acquaintance "with knowledge of the situation" discouraged me from further investigation.

Following is an update of the *dramatis personae* in the matter of Shergar:



AGA KHAN IV

AGA KHAN IV- Now 81, the Aga Khan continues as the spiritual leader of his branch of Islam and remains a leading owner-breeder of thoroughbreds in Ireland and France.



SIR MICHAEL STOUTE

SIR MICHAEL STOUTE- Shergar's trainer was knighted in 1998 and is one of the Queen's trainers. Now 78, Sir Michael has won the Epsom Derby five times, the Irish Derby three times, and three Breeders' Cups.



WALTER SWINBURN

WALTER SWINBURN- Shergar's jockey retired from riding in 2004 with a long list of classic wins including Epsom and Irish Derbies as well as multiple Breeders' Cup races. He trained for seven years after his riding career. Swinburn died in London in 2016 at the age of 55. The cause was a fall from a bathroom window that the coroner ruled an accident.

GHISLAIN DRION- After over twenty years of service to the Aga Khan, Drion resigned abruptly in 1998. Two years following his former employer accused him of financial fraud. Hmmm.

JIM FITZGERALD- Now retired, Shergar's groom lives in a senior row house a mile from Ballymany. On good days he walks to Ballymany and relives the fond and fierce memories of the beloved horse he cared for.

DETECTIVE CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT JIM MURPHY- Now long retired from policing, Murphy refused all offers to profit from his experience in the Shergar case. He rejected multiple tell-all offers as high as the sterling equivalent of \$300,000. His last quoted comment was "I would like to think that Shergar is still alive."

WAYNE MURTY- The Kentuckian was quoted as saying he played no part in the kidnapping. He added that if the opportunity to swipe Shergar had been presented to him he would have gladly seized on it. In 2013, Wayne Murty

and his twin brother Duane pleaded not guilty to animal cruelty after twenty-four malnourished horses were rescued from a farm they were leasing.



DUANE AND WAYNE MURTY MUG SHOTS

THE IRA- During “The Troubles” this paramilitary group routinely took public credit for every violent act they committed. On this occasion, they were as silent about Shergar as Donald Trump was about Stormy Daniels. Informers are nowhere popular but especially reviled by the Irish. That is reason to doubt O’Callaghan’s claims. Since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, apart from a few dead-enders, the IRA no longer exists.

KEVIN MALLON- Non-conviction of the IRA in this event is not a defense of Kevin Mallon. He is a hard man. Mallon dodged a hanging when he was acquitted of murdering a policeman in Northern Ireland in 1958. Later he was convicted of IRA membership in 1973 but escaped from prison in a helicopter weeks later. While a fugitive he attempted to murder another cop attempting to capture him. He was not released until 1982 only twelve months prior to Shergar’s disappearance. He has denied any involvement in the crime and was never charged.



IRA OPERATIVE AND ACCUSED SHERGAR PLOTTER KEVIN MALLON IN HIS IRA DAYS (LEFT) AND RECENTLY LEAVING A PADDY POWER BOOKMAKER'S LOCATION IN DUBLIN (RIGHT)

THE NEW ORLEANS MAFIA- There will always be a surfeit of Wise Guys e but the classic Mafia Family model is an historical artifact here. However, at the time of Jean-Michel Gambet's demise, there was plenty of muscle applied to those who crossed the organization. Nonetheless the Aga Khan as the target of a bad debt seems a longshot.

SHERGAR- The magnificent horse was known to be easily handled. But a stallion at the onset of the breeding cycle requires special attention. Placing him in a confining horse box in the company of incompetent strangers held no chance for a favorable outcome. While a spiteful homicide is a possibility, the more likely outcome was that a freaked Shergar suffered a fatal injury.

He sired thirty-five foals from his only season at stud. The best was Authaal, winner of the 1986 Irish St. Leger.

CONCLUSION- Shergar is now a permanent fixture of Irish legend as surely as Mad Sweeney and St. Ronan. Barring some deathbed confession, there is next to no chance that the case of Shergar will be solved.

Detective Chief Superintendent Jim Murphy summarized the situation to an inquiring journalist with a Kildarian's eloquence:

"You can't call the case closed until it is."

THE RACE-

The anomalies never stop coming on Derby Day. Both the favorite and likely second choice will be colts unraced at two. Here's to you Apollo (1882 winner and last to be unraced at two) and your curse. There will be four starters sired by the late Scat Daddy who collapsed and died at age eleven in 2015. Curlin will have three and Medaglia D'Oro a pair. The omnipresent Todd Pletcher will saddle four starters and his perennial rival Bob Baffert two. The indomitable D. Wayne Lukas, now eighty-two, will enter his forty ninth starter while seeking his fifth Derby win.

The late fight doctor, Ferdie Pacheco, once remarked about his loony boxer, Riddick Bowe, that the Doc hoped for enough "spasms of lucidity" from Bowe to get a win. We hope to have the same for this year's pick.

THE FIELD-

FIRENZE FIRE (1) - The Italian name for Florence is Firenze not to be confused with frenzy. Showed a lot of promise at two taking the Sanford and the Champagne. But like so many precocious runners, he has not gone on at three. More like embers than fire at this point.

FREE DROP BILLY (2) - In eight starts the BC Juvenile was his only out of the money result. Has run against a lot of these and won or been right there. Pedigree is a grabber too. Billy will have to improve a couple off of recent form to have a shot. Not impossible.

PROMISES FULFILLED (3) - Given an easy lead he can be tough as he proved in the Fountain of Youth. Make him work on the lead and you get the FL Derby disaster. Spoiler alert: no easy leads are granted in the Derby. Promises will be unfulfilled in this outing.

FLAMEAWAY (4) -Another Scat Daddy son that just never stops trying. Seconds in the TB Derby and Blue Grass were contested to the wire. Probably in a little deep here but don't throw that flame away too soon.

AUDIBLE (5) - His four straight wins since his third-place maiden bow last September have sounded an alarm heard by all the aspirant trainers outside of the Pletcher camp. Top rider Castellano bolts from D'Oro to the Audi.

Opinion here is that is more in deference to the barn than the horse. Serious contender but possibly a few decibels short of a boom.

GOOD MAGIC (6) - Million-dollar baby has delivered with no Hocus Pocus. Won the BC Juvenile with authority and did the same in the Blue Grass. The Fig guys point out his declining Beyers but his talent is no illusion. Pedigree and connections are tops. Serious player.

JUSTIFY (7) - Heads the Scat Daddy bunch and likely the betting choice. Undefeated in three starts earning triple digit Beyer Figures in each. Baffert trains, Mikey rides...what not to like? Maybe nothing but his first lifetime start was this February. He has not ventured beyond the friendly confines of Santa Anita where his number of opponents was four, four, and six. Now stretching out to the Derby distance against nineteen opponents in a carnival atmosphere makes Justify just iffy.

LONE SAILOR (8) - Owner Gayle Benson is now the lone sailor of the stable after the Saints and Pelicans owner's passing. Got going late in last year's Kentucky Jockey Club over Derby track. Just missed catching the winner in this year's LA Derby in by far career best effort. Distance not a concern but think Fair Grounds Derby bunch was below average this year. Like the cut of his jib but needs more wind in his sails to hit the board.

HOFBURG (9) - Name is the current Austrian White House equivalent. Juddmonte homebred is making only his fourth career start though he does pass the race- at- two test. Strong second place finish in the Florida Derby came after Audible had closed the door. Hall of Fame trainer Mott spots his horses well so expect improvement Saturday. Maybe enough to break out the lederhosen.

MY BOY JACK (10) - Another pairing of the Desormeaux Bros. team of Keith and Kent produces the winner of most at bats as the Derby will be his eleventh start. Looked the goods in the LA Derby a furlong out but settled for a close third. Son of our 2012 pick, Creative Cause, has a pedigree and running style that should move him up late if he can stay wide. If the boy is a Jack in a Box, no chance.

BOLT D'ORO (11) - Sire's name (Medaglia D'Oro) translates as Gold Medal which when paired with the sprinter Usain produces the colt's moniker. Tough and talented but has not finished first in two starts at three although he was placed first on a highly questionable DQ in the San Felipe. Then

chased Justify in vain in the S.A. Derby. Owner-trainer Ruis has handled his colt well but low percentage barn ex their star.

ENTICED (12) - Godolphin homebred finished second in the Wood and was denied a claim of foul against the winner that was a very close call. Has a win at two over the Churchill course in the Kentucky Jockey Club. We have lots of time for trainer McLaughlin and could be enticed by what could be long odds.

BRAVAZO (13) - D Wayne always puts a bottom in his Derby horses and this guy is no exception as he will be making his ninth career start here. Won a head bob in last prep for LA Derby but was beaten twenty lengths next out in that one. Pedigree is solid but multiple no shows suggest no bravos for Bravazo.

MENDELSSOHN (14) - Could be the best of the Scatties after he buried some pretty nice horses in Dubai at the UAE Derby. Three million-dollar yearlings are expected to deliver and he did in the BC Juvenile Turf. His seven starts have been at six tracks in Ireland, England, U.S., and Dubai. Trained by the inscrutable Wizard of Ballydoyle, Aidan O'Brien, winning trainer of twelve Irish Derbies, six Epsom Derbies, and twelve Breeders' Cup races in four categories. That Dubai score may have been a Mendelssohn Overture.

INSTILLED REGARD (15) - Draws into the race with scratch of Quip. Hollendorfer trainee suggests more distilled than instilled as he runs hot and cold. Was in the frame in the Los Al Futurity with a pair of good ones and followed that with a win at FG in the LeCompte. Went cold in last two with a fourth in the Risen Star and ten lengths behind Justify in the SA Derby. Disregard.

MAGNUM MOON (16) - Four for four, all at three including the ARK Derby where he lugged out late. Looked more disinterested than tiring and will likely be second choice in the betting. Big fan of sire Malibu Moon but MM's races have been so easy we don't know how he will deal with a serious threat assuming he gets one. Gives Pletcher another very live shot at a lunar landing.

SOLOMINI (17) - Second teamer for Baffert has slipped from his earlier place on the short list of likely winners. His third in the ARK Derby was his poorest placing in six starts. Consistent sort but has not had a solo finish since last year. If you play him, best to make it a mini.

VINO ROSSO (18) - You could expect this name when the owners are Repole and Viola who have had plenty of reasons to pop corks in the racing biz. Although he should have come down for bumping and herding Enticed in the Wood, he was the best horse. Amazingly the stewards left Vino up as the winner but subsequently fined his rider, Johnny V., \$1500 for "careless riding." What a game. Story is that Velasquez was given his choice of the Pletcher quartet and picked this guy. Jocks are notorious for picking the wrong horse in these situations but most jocks are not Johnny V.

NOBLE INDY (19) - Gets the least respect of the Pletchers but showed a lot of guts to come back in his LA Derby win. Problem is that race seemed slower than other major preps. Noble efforts are well below Indy speeds.

COMBATANT (20) - Draws in with the defection of Gronk. The least heralded of the Sons of Scat here is not a put down given the company. All of his starts at three have been in Hot Springs prepping for and running in the ARK Derby. Always in the hunt but seems to hang late. Respect for Asmussen but best chance looks like the back of the superfecta.

OUR PICK-

“Yeah, but who did he beat?” is the perennial query from wizened handicappers at Derby time. For U.S. races the answer is easily found and weighed with speed figures and DRF charts. Foreign races, the UAE Derby in particular, create a bigger challenge. Since the race’s inaugural run in 2000 when the winner (China Visit) finished sixth in Louisville, multiple winners have competed with one commonality... zero wins. We think that is about to change.

This year’s winner set a new record time for the mile and three sixteenth distance while cruising home by eighteen and a half lengths in his first start on dirt. Previous wins were on grass and synthetic.

“Yeah, but who did he beat?” Glad you asked. In his wake for the place money was the UAE Oaks winner, Rayya, who is now in Bob Baffert’s barn and looks a good thing for the Kentucky Oaks. Another three lengths back was Reride, a Steve Asmussen trainee, who was coming off of a win over eventual Sunland Derby winner, Runaway Ghost.

Our trainer is Aidan O’Brien who saddled a record twenty-eight Grade I winners last year.

Our jockey is Ryan Moore, O’Brien’s #1 rider. Moore also was named on the favorite in the 2000 Guineas, first race in the U.K. Triple Crown. That race is also on Derby Day and Moore has opted for Louisville.



AIDAN O’BRIEN



RYAN MOORE

Our pick is a son of Scat Daddy and Leslie’s Lady, the dam of Beholder and Into Mischief.

And the winner is.....

MENDELSSOHN



COMPOSER



HORSE

THE BET—

We expect **MENDELSSOHN** to be fourth choice and high single digit odds. We will bet win and place.

LONGSHOT-



ENTICED

Our longshot pick is **Enticed** which should be a minimum of 25/1 and figures to improve off of his tough loss in the Wood. We will bet him win-place-show.

ULTRA LONGSHOT-

The moonshot stab at a probable 40/1 or more is **Free Drop Billy**. Only out of the money once in eight starts against top colts. Pedigree says he will love the mile and a quarter. Might get a piece of this.

EXACTA-

We will make a serious four-horse box of **Mendelssohn-Enticed-Bolt D'Oro-Vino Rosso**. And some small ones using **Billy** with our picks.

As the Kildarians say:

Go n-éirí leat!

-JTR