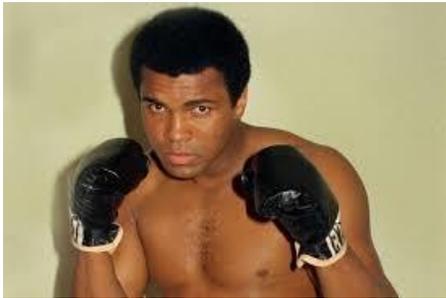


RICE'S DERBY CHOICE JOURNAL

2021

42nd Edition



“I'm a fighter. I believe in the eye-for-an-eye business. I'm no cheek turner. I got no respect for a man who won't hit back. You kill my dog, you better hide your cat.”

– **Muhammad Ali**

Kentucky Derby winning trainers and jockeys range from the familiar to the obscure. Sometimes the obscure players rise to long-lasting celebrity. Others return to the shadows and are known only as the answers to horse racing trivia questions.

Bennie L. “Chip” Woolley. Jr. serves as the unrivaled example of the journey from obscurity to fame and back to obscurity in the sport. In thirty years as a public trainer of racehorses, his lone Graded Stakes win is the 2009 Kentucky Derby (Mine That Bird at 50/1). He did capture a headline briefly in 2011 when arrested for public urination at the Prairie Meadows Casino. Chip made a heartfelt apology.

The subject of this year’s letter ascended from the anonymity of Pennsylvania coal country to national celebrity and the sublimity of a Racing Hall of Fame induction at age twenty-seven. Thanks to a chance meeting at the Folsom Training Center, I was the beneficiary of a private audience with one of the most accomplished and controversial personalities in the sport.

The Folsom Training Center is five minutes from my farm and is where, for several years, I based a small racing stable. The six-furlong training surface is well-maintained as are the barns. Yet the facility earned a Devil’s Island reputation owing to the shadowy pasts of many of its denizens.

The roster of exercise riders included multiple disbarred jockeys. Spectacular Bid’s partner, the late Ronnie Franklin, was one. Several so-called trainers there also had marred resumes. They prepared horses for races but when ready to run, the entries were made by a licensed “paper trainer” at the track.

“Mickey the Snitch” was one of those unchartered trainers. His principal clients were a pair of New Orleans wise-guys in the home siding business. Mickey was the height of a jockey, but his girth would have landed him on the also-eligible list. He moved with a shamle caused by an impaired hip. His smokes were self-rolled.

Mickey’s pedigree was by a Cuban out of an Anglo. He earned his nickname while pursuing a sideline of drug dealing in South Florida and avoided a jail sentence by flipping on his partners. While seeking a redo in the obscurity of Louisiana, Mickey found the mercantile appeal of narcotics irresistible. The last time I saw him was a rainy Saturday mid-morning. A team of DEA agents frog-marched Mickey out of his barn and into a black Lincoln Navigator.

While incarcerated awaiting trial, he tried to organize a hit on the party that had fingered him. His former colleagues took umbrage at that attempt and had him erased before trial. As they say in the trade, he died after a brief illness. Mickey always asked me about stocks. He loved the golds.

One November morning in 2004, I was preparing my unraced, homebred two-year-old filly for a work with my regular rider and friend, Phil Rubbico. He rode No Le Hace to a second-place finish to Riva Ridge in the 1972 Derby. Phil later lost his license owing to a felony conviction for race fixing. His guilty plea got him a suspended jail sentence and community service. Phil thanked the judge.

Novembers here are possessed of a singular allure. Anticipation of the approaching Thanksgiving opening at the Fair Grounds is peaking, football is in high season, and the oppressive summer humidity and hurricanes have given way to dry fall breezes and breathable temps.

After giving a leg up to Phil, I began leading the pair out to the track when I met my barn co-owner, Terry Gabriel, coming the other way leading one of his charges back to our barn with then fourteen-year-old Joe Talamo up.

“Hartack’s out there,” said Terry in a distinctly matter-of-fact tone that revealed no celebrity in the house import. As I released my hold on the rein freeing Phil to enter the track surface, I turned toward the finish line and there standing alone was himself, the Hall of Famer, Bill Hartack.

As well as I had remembered him in the saddle and in post-career broadcasting, the seventy-two-year-old version was not so easily identifiable. His hatless head of hair was thinning but substantial and still more black than gray. A windbreaker with a turned-up collar complemented his khaki pants and hunting boots.

Now at least twenty pounds over his riding weight, he nonetheless stood straight and greeted me warmly. His one-word response to my “Good morning, Mr. Hartack,” was “Bill” with a smile and an extended hand. There was no trace of the petulant young maestro who exploded when called Willie or at any other perceived slight. Nor was there any smug certainty when we began speaking of horses including mine. When asked I told him the filly was by More than Ready from an Arts and Letters mare. He nodded with

approval. Neither of us mentioned that it was Arts and Letters' Belmont win in 1969 that denied Majestic Prince and Hartack the Triple Crown.

At the time of our meeting, Bill Hartack was a steward at the Fair Grounds. The Folsom Training Center was seeking approval for a sanctioned clocker to submit workouts for publication in the Daily Racing Form. My guess is that he was on a scouting mission to assess the facility's suitability which was subsequently granted.

Though many jockeys succeed financially in the game, most have risen from economic hardship and spotty educations. Verb disagreements and double negatives typically permeate their speech. The Calvin Borels of the jockey colony far outnumber the Jerry Baileys. Schooling for his TV commentary gig may have improved Hartack's speaking but his urbanity seemed to have long preceded that. There was no trace of his bleak early life in Pennsylvania coal country.

Tragedy struck Bill at age eight when his parents and younger sister suffered calamitous injuries in an auto accident. The father and sister spent months hospitalized. His mother did not survive. The stern William Hartack, Sr. (originally Hartuk) was a Czech immigrant who put in long hours mining soft-coal. He was now a single dad raising two daughters and a son, William Hartack, Jr., in the middle.

The family sheltered in a stove-heated, three room shack that had no running water. Home grown vegetables and a \$.50 daily allowance at the mining company store funded their meager diet. That malnourishment likely contributed to Bill never exceeding a height of five feet, four inches. His bullying schoolmates called him termite, midget, and worse. Fights were frequent but Bill held his own.

Despite earning high school valedictorian honors, remaining in Ebensburg presented an economic impasse for him. But a chance meeting and developing friendship with a middle-aged female led to an entry level job in thoroughbred horse racing. Though her name does not survive the telling, the aforesaid friend was a retired race mare that was gifted to the Hartacks. Bill connected with her at once and rode her bareback, at speed, around Cambria County.

Bill's self-taught riding skills impressed a pal of Hartack Sr. named Andy Bruno, a jockey agent at Waterford Park (now Mountaineer Casino, Racetrack and Resort) in nearby Chester, West Virginia. The agent said that young Bill was the right size and had the skills to be an exercise boy at the track.

A few days later Bill and Andy headed to Waterford where Bill entered the employ and tuition of veteran conditioner Junie Corbin. Two aspects of Hartack's riding impressed the trainer at first observation. The young man possessed a preternatural communication skill with all of his mounts and his riding form was awful.

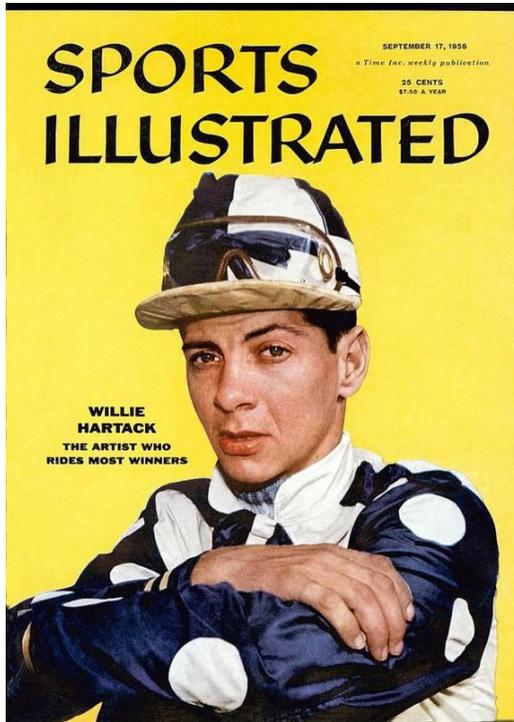
Corbin sagely avoided the subject of his rider's form and on October 10, 1952 they united in the winner's circle for the first time when the trainer/jockey partnership got Nickleby up at 8/1. For the rider, there would be 4,271 more wins to follow.

Hartack soon became the talk of Waterford Park as he won races in bunches. He gained the material comforts that were unknown to him in his early years. But Waterford Park was the bushes, a half mile bull ring that by any measure was small time racing populated by cheap claimers.

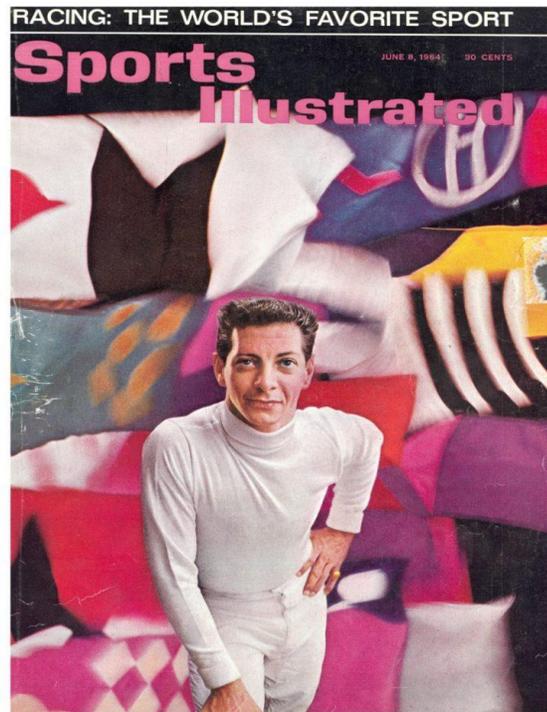
Bill Hartack's career was contemporaneous with the late stages of thoroughbred racing's Golden Age. Every major newspaper had a dedicated horse racing beat writer. Under the pen name Audax Minor, Canadian George F. T. Ryall wrote *The Race Track* weekly column in *The New Yorker Magazine* from 1926 to 1978.

Network TV routinely broadcast major stakes races on weekends. Horse Racing, boxing, and baseball were the leading spectator sports of that era. The NFL and NBA were still junior partners on the sports scene.

On the East Coast, prominent names from the Social Register owned and bred thoroughbreds of parallel pedigree. On the West Coast Hollywood stars kept boxes at the California tracks. Within this milieu of celebrity, Bill Hartack would become what is known today as an A-lister. In a day when it was a huge deal, he appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* once and on *Sports Illustrated* three times.



SEPTEMBER 17, 1956



JUNE 8, 1964

If he hoped his talent would invite comparison with the two big names in race riding, Shoemaker and Arcaro, Hartack had to move to the one-mile tracks and longer races. He made the move with ease, and the following year led the nation's riders in total wins (328).

Whether he was riding the first half of the daily double or a major stakes race, Bill Hartack rode every race with peak intensity and determination to win. He resented any suggestion that he do otherwise. He was all in all the time. This may have explained his seemingly permanent state of irascibility as he felt surrounded by half-steppers, grifters, and charlatans.

In his profession and his life, Bill saw himself as a sole proprietor. In his three-part Sports Illustrated memoir, he could recall no happiness in his childhood. None. And in adulthood, no amount of success could assuage his insecurity. He was at odds with owners, trainers, agents, valets, stewards, the racing press, other jockeys, and fans. In other words, the world. He was not some kind of misanthropic curmudgeon. He was derisive only of people that he perceived lacked the dedication and integrity that he possessed.

A quote from William Faulkner's 1951 novel, *Requiem for a Nun*, is helpful in decoding Hartack's complicated psyche:

"The past is never dead. It's not even past. All of us labor in webs spun long before we were born, webs of heredity and environment, of desire and consequence, of history and eternity."

Every rider needs a competent agent who is the jock's go-between with trainers who name their horses' partners in each race. The agent's work involves marrying his rider's skills with the horse's talent and the race conditions. There is also a schmoozing element aimed at getting the trainer's commitment.

Fight managers and jockey agents share the curious quirk of referencing their engagements in the first person, e.g. "I am fighting Muhammad Ali or I am riding Secretariat." No matter that the manager never throws a punch and the agent never sits astride. But they both profit well from their clients' success. A rider's agent typically gets a 20% cut of the jock's winnings.

Bill Hartack's breakthrough moment came when Chick Lang spotted him riding in Maryland and agreed to take Bill's book. Lang was a racing insider and third generation horseman. His dad, also Chick, rode the 1928 Kentucky Derby winner Reigh Count. His maternal grandfather, John P. Mayberry trained 1903 Derby winner Judge Himes.

Lang provided an entrée for Hartack to the top racing outfits, including Calumet Farm which had won four Kentucky Derbies prior to their association. After 1957 the Calumet total would be five and Bill Hartack's one.

Calumet's trainer, Jimmy Jones, succeeded his lauded dad, Ben Jones, in 1953. General Duke, a Calumet trainee, was the 1957 Derby favorite and was to be ridden by Bill Hartack. The colt would run as an entry with Iron Liege, deemed the lesser half of the team. A foot injury forced a General Duke scratch on race day that subsequently ended his career. Hartack assumed the mount on Iron Liege.



FEBRUARY 10, 1958

The wise men (not the wise guys) of horse racing still regard the 1957 renewal as the best assemblage of equine talent of any Derby ever run. At the finish, Gallant Man (3.70/1), Round Table (3.60/1), Bold Ruler (1.20/1), and Federal Hill (7.90/1) processed in that order behind the winner, Iron Liege (8.40/1). The fifth-place finisher is seldom included with the three exalted names that finished in front of him. But Federal Hill was also a serious racehorse. As a kid I saw him win the Louisiana Derby at the Fair Grounds in record tying time.

The race also featured an epic riding gaffe by Willie Shoemaker. Hartack and Iron Liege were leading mid-stretch. The Shoe aboard Gallant Man stuck a head in front but confused the sixteenth pole with the finish line and briefly stood up in the saddle. He resumed race riding instantly but at the wire Shoe and Gallant Man were a nose short of the win. The consensus view post-race was that, ex the error, Gallant Man would have won. After countless rerun watching, I think either colt could have got the nod in the photo.

Four more Derby wins were to come in the Hartack dossier, tying him with Eddie Arcaro for most Kentucky Derby scores by a jockey (five). He needed but twelve attempts to tie the record. Arcaro got his fifth win in 1952 and

rode in the race twenty-one times. The only rider close to the pair, Bill Shoemaker, took twenty-six tries to get his four Derby wins.



IRON LIEGE AND GALLANT MAN AT THE WIRE

Anyone inclined to put an asterisk next to Hartack's 1957 Derby win should also note that the following year he and Calumet's Tim Tam won five stakes races leading up to the '58 Derby and looked like the goods coming up to that race.

Subsequent to the pair's Florida Derby win that solidified Derby favoritism, Hartack suffered a broken leg when his mount reared in the gate and thrust him against the rear of it. As he was loaded into the ambulance, he told Chick Lang to get a light cast put on his leg so that he could gallop a horse later in the week and by Saturday be ready to ride Tim Tam in the Derby. He would not ride for over a month.

Milo Valenzuela replaced him and Calumet had another Derby. That team also took the Preakness. Hartack fumed when he was denied the mount in the Belmont. Cavan upset Tim Tam in that race and a fractured sesamoid forced the latter's retirement.

Lucille Markey, the doyenne of Calumet, sent Bill a \$5000 check as a peace offering. He never cashed the check and never rode for Calumet again.



CHICK LANG EXAMINES BILL'S FRACTURED LEG

Hartack's second Derby win came in 1960 aboard Venetian Way, a chronically sore horse that benefitted from the legality, at the time, of bute in Kentucky. After a fifth-place finish in the Preakness (where bute was not legal), the trainer blamed Hartack and replaced him in the Belmont. In that race Venetian Way finished second to Bill Hartack and Celtic Ash. Hartack had made his point.

Despite their shared success, the Hartack-Lang association had become fraught. After six years of Hartack's obstinacy, Lang had enough and quit. The terms of his successors were mostly measured in weeks. Lang became a track executive and was known as Mr. Preakness for elevating that race from a Derby afterthought to a race of consequence.

Derby number three came two years later when Hartack piloted Decidedly over even money favorite Ridan. The trainer of Decidedly was the impeccable Horatio Luro. Known as *El Gran Señor*, Luro was a debonair Argentine from a wealthy ranching family prominent in the breeding and selling of polo horses. While he had a playboy reputation, Luro was a serious and superb horseman.



HORATIO LURO

In 1964 Luro and Hartack would again team up but almost by accident. Luro's most promising three-year-old that year was Canadian-bred Northern Dancer. Luro was adamant that his horse not feel the whip and fired two jockeys on that account before engaging Bill Shoemaker for the Florida Derby.

After winning the Florida Derby, Shoemaker won the Santa Anita Derby aboard Hill Rise. That win boosted Hill Rise to Derby favoritism and a riding commitment from Shoemaker. A miffed Luro then named Hartack as his rider for Northern Dancer.

Hill Rise started as the solid 7/5 favorite with Northern Dancer second choice at 7/2. No one doubted Northern Dancer's talent but many, including his trainer, questioned his ability to get a mile and a quarter.

Hartack was left-handed and was never hesitant to use his whip, almost always on his dominant side. This combined with his awful form of constant rocking from side to side made him easy to mark in a race. Detractors said he looked like a bouncing ball. Hartack replied that there were many riders who looked posture perfect and usually followed him to the finish. He was right.

After Northern Dancer made the lead and Hill Rise challenged, Hartack prevailed. The chart said that Northern Dancer "responded to gain command

a quarter out and prevailed under strong left-handed whipping.”
Commentary from Luro on Hartack’s employment of the crop? Crickets.

In those days, to bet on a race there were two choices: the on-track pari-mutuel window or an illegal bookmaker. Simulcast and on-line wagering were still decades away. As a student at L.S.U., I made my first Kentucky Derby bet on this race with a bookie at the Pastime Bar in Baton Rouge. Looking for price, I backed The Scoundrel to a third-place finish.

In the Preakness, bettors backed Hill Rise into 4/5 favoritism despite the slightly shorter distance. Northern Dancer was an easy two and a quarter length winner over The Scoundrel with Hill Rise third.



NORTHERN DANCER HOLDS OFF HILL RISE

Despite Northern Dancer’s distance limitations that were acknowledged by his trainer and rider, he was backed into 4/5 favoritism in the Belmont with Hill Rise second choice at 2/1. Northern Dancer bested Hill Rise once again but they both finished behind Quadrangle and Roman Brother.

Despite his envious Derby resume, Hartack was getting fewer live mounts due to his often-insolent attitude especially toward agents, trainers, and owners. Because he only rode to win, he was never hesitant to request a scratch of any mount he deemed unsound in the warmup. It mattered not at all to him how prestigious the horse’s connections were. Further complicating matters was a costly I.R.S. beef attributable to a felonious accountant who purloined the checks Hartack sent him meant for taxes. The accountant went to jail but Hartack recovered nothing.

A call from Johnny Longden broke the slump. Possibly the greatest rider ever, Longden rode for forty years and won the Triple Crown aboard Count Fleet in 1943. He moved seamlessly into training after his retirement. Longden and Hartack competed briefly in the late days of the former's career. The old man not only respected Hartack but actually liked him.

In the fall of 1968 Longden was very high on a two-year-old colt that he had planned to name Bill Shoemaker to ride. But Shoemaker was still rehabbing a hip injury. Longden chose Hartack as his replacement.



MAJESTIC PRINCE AND JOHNNY LONGDEN

With Hartack up, Majestic Prince won his debut on Thanksgiving Day. The pair would annex six more wins leading up to the 1969 Kentucky Derby. Majestic Prince started favorite in the Derby at \$1.40/1 but was all out to gain a neck win over third choice Arts and Letters at \$4.40/1. The fifth and final Derby win for Hartack was the only one in which he rode the betting favorite. The Preakness results were almost identical (Majestic Prince by a neck over Arts and Letters) foretelling a Triple Crown bid.

Both Longden and Hartack were opposed to running the colt in the Belmont due to a worsening tendon inflammation and noticeable weight loss. Majestic Prince's owner, Canadian oil man Frank McMahon, overruled the trainer and jockey. Arts and Letters reversed the order with a four-length win in the

Belmont and won Horse of the Year honors. Majestic Prince was retired to stud with nine wins from ten starts.

Hartack got no career boost from his success with Majestic Prince and weight was becoming an issue. In 1974 Hong Kong offered a solution. The weight allowances were more generous as were the economics. He rode there until his retirement in 1981.

Bill Hartack always refused to comment when asked what horse was the best he ever rode. But Gary Palmisano, a trainer at the Fair Grounds, fishing buddy of Bill's and mutual friend of mine, got the answer. After repeated attempts, Gary coaxed the answer from Bill while the two were fishing: Majestic Prince.

Like everything else, Bill's lifestyle fit no standard molds. While he always had high end cars like a spoke-wheeled Caddy and a closet full of expensive suits, he was not profligate. His preferred avocations were hunting and fishing, frequently solo.

Though there was no hostility present, he had next to no contact with his family in adulthood. Yet he bought his father a farm that provided escape from the coal mines and paid tuition for his kid sister at the University of Miami. His family called him Sonny, if not sunny.

Were he at his professional zenith today, Hartack would likely benefit from the services of a handler who could modulate his public demeanor and press relations. Or maybe not.

Though he gave many people reason to dislike him, Hartack was not without friends of both sexes. He never married but he was regularly accompanied by a prepossessing demoiselle. And there was an extended relationship with the pop singer Connie Francis in the mid-sixties.



CONNIE FRANCIS



BILL HARTACK

Bill had a long-time friendship with the celebrity interviewer, Larry King, as well as star quarterback Joe Namath. After a humiliating loss by the Jets when Namath was in his prime, the pair found a low-end bar to commiserate. A patron recognized them and began harassing Namath about his play that day. The annoyance persisted despite repeated requests to cease. Hartack, spotting the offending party fifty pounds, dropped him to the floor with a single left hook. The conversation then concluded.

Another New York friend was the artist, Leroy Nieman. He produced serigraphs of both Namath and Hartack. The latter was the artist's first portrayal of a jockey.



HARTACK BY LEROY NIEMAN



NAMATH BY LEROY NIEMAN

Among his other enduring friendships was one of forty years with New Orleans Judge Eddie Sapir who was also the agent for N.Y. Yankees manager, Billy Martin. In 1971 Sapir accompanied Hartack on a month-long barnstorming tour of the lesser East Coast tracks.

If Hartack had a BFF, he was car leasing business man, Gary Condra. They met in a Miami bar in 1956. Condra and Hartack's friendship was uninterrupted from that point until Bill's passing.

In November of 2007 the pair was planning a fishing trip to Costa Rica to take place following a Hartack hunting trip to Texas near the Mexico border. He checked into his cabin alone prior to his scheduled hunt. His guide found him unresponsive there the following morning. He had died of cardiac arrest attributed to a pre-existing heart condition. That illness was abetted by a three-pack a day Salem cigarette habit.

Gary Condra drove to the remote location to claim the body. He arranged the funeral in Condra's hometown of Iberia, Missouri and provided for burial in a Condra family plot.

Less than a year after our meeting, Katrina upended the lives of everyone here. Bill's apartment flooded and he lost almost all his possessions. When he died, Bill had no permanent residence as he was still working as a steward living the life of a circuit judge principally between Louisiana and Kentucky. His only trip to Missouri was his last.



BILL HARTACK IN 2007 AT AGE 74

In an interview with Jimmy Breslin for True magazine in 1960, Bill Hartack encapsulated his view of himself and the game:

"I know racing has given me a chance to make a lot of money, but I also know that I'm in my position in racing today because of the fact that I get the horses down in front. Some say that racing has given me everything. It did not. I do not fit into racing's plans, racing fits into my plans. Take a look through the years and you'll see that if you are not near the top in racing then you are not wanted."

In a sport rife with freebooters, spalpeens, and scoundrels of every stripe, Bill Hartack's most vocal detractors never questioned his talent, integrity, or virtuosity. He owned a matchless commitment to excellence and I will always treasure his kindness shown to me.

A lyric from Bob Dylan's latest album, *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, is a fitting coda to Bill Hartack's both bleak and majestic life:

*"I'm a man of contradictions, I'm a man of many moods
I contain multitudes"*

Bill Hartack died as he had lived: a sole proprietor steeped in multitudes. His epitaph reads:

*William 'Bill' Hartack. Born Dec. 9, 1932. Died Nov. 26, 2007
Winner of Five Kentucky Derbys. One of the World's Greatest Jockeys
Dedicated to Honesty and Integrity in Racing.*



SOURCES:

Former L.A. Times race writer Bill Christine's biography, *Hartack*, was invaluable.

The Sports Illustrated archives.

Personal interviews



*And then the harder they come
The harder they fall, one and all
Ooh, the harder they come
Harder they fall, one and all*
- Jimmy Cliff

THE ENTRIES

Here begineth my annual mind numbing when first viewing the twenty-horse Rubik's Cube in Louisville. Into Mischief, sire of last year's winner Authentic, is the sire of three of the 2021 entries. Trainers with multiple entries abound: Pletcher (4), Cox (2), Asmussen (2), Casse (2). Three entries have no 2YO starts and two entries have only one 3yo start. What were once hallowed traditions are decaying into shibboleths.

Please remember that our betting strategy is designed for max returns which means max risk and zero returns when heavily bet horses win. If that's not your game, I hope you at least enjoy the read.

Below is a capsule comment on the entries followed by my yearly stab:

(1) KNOWN AGENDA- Trainer Pletcher seeking his third Derby win and his agenda is well known. As Al Davis said: "Just win, baby." K.A. is son of the great Curlin and will be ridden by top NY jock Irad Ortiz. After stalking the pace, thundered home in the Florida Derby. As they say in chart-speak, he looms a bold threat.

(2) LIKE THE KING- Son of '13 Belmont champ, Palace Malice, looks to replicate Animal Kingdom's Jack Ruby Steaks/Kentucky Derby parlay in '11. Should like the distance and trainer Ward is high percentage player. Will have to run a lot faster here to invite Elvis comparisons.

(3) BROOKLYN STRONG- Sneaks in after defection of Caddo River. Son of our '14 pick, Wicked Strong, won the Remsen at the end of his 2YO year. Disappointed followers with a dull fifth in the Wood Memorial. Nice to see Umberto Rispoli get a Derby mount here after losing his spot on R.Y.W. but hard to make a strong case for Brooklyn here.

(4) KEEPMEINMIND- Classic example of excellent two-year-old form that does not progress at three. Closed well to be third in the BC Juvenile then won the Derby pre-cursor, KY Jockey Club, at Churchill in November. Two starts at three have been duds: sixth in the Rebel and fifth by 16 lengths in the Blue Grass. Hard to remember; easy to foreget.

(5) SAINTHOOD- Always have to respect the WinStar operation but another with a January debut and only win against maidens. Finished a respectable second in the JR Steaks on the synthetic at Turfway but that does not merit canonization.

(6) O BESOS- Son of Derby winner, Orb ('13), picked here. Bet him in the Risen Star at 21/1 and again in the LA Derby at 28/1 to no avail. Both were marked by wide trips and strong closes for a fourth and a third. Second Derby attempt for trainer Foley and first for rider Pedroza. Almost certain to be passing horses late. His name in Spanish means kisses and if he can move a bit earlier there could be plenty of smooches to go around.

(7) MANDALOUN- Another son of Into Mischief that is a Juddmonte homebred. Mandaloun is a form of window found principally in Lebanon. If you took his 13/10 odds as LA Derby favorite, you might have looked for a mandaloun to jump out of in an act of self-defenestration. This colt has started the favorite in all five lifetime starts and won three but the sixth place finish in the LA Derby lost a lot of supporters. Interesting that the jock hand rode through the stretch. C.D. works have been excellent and at a price could be worth using.

(8) MEDINA SPIRIT- Baffert looked loaded a while back but phenom Life Is Good is sidelined and Concert Tour is passing here for the Preakness. That leaves blue collar M.S. who has never been worse than second in his five starts. Last two he chased L.I.G. and R.Y.W. From first crop of Protanico, M.S. was a bargain \$35k 2YO buy and has outrun his pedigree. Gets the iconic Johnny V. as pilot. Expect a spirited effort.

(9) HOT ROD CHARLIE- A shocking second to E.Q. in the BC Juvenile at 94/1. Proved it was no fluke when he wired the Louisiana Derby field in his second 3YO start. Trainer O'Neill seeking third Derby (I'll Have Another ('12) and Nyquist ('16). Flavien Prat rides in place of Joel Rosario who jumps to R.Y.W. Looks like Chuck is revving his engines at the right time.

(10) MIDNIGHT BOURBON- Solid 2YO record and wire to wire score in the Le Compte at F.G. made him early fave for the LA Derby. Subsequent third and second in the Risen Star and LA Derby dimmed his star a bit. Son of the sainted Tiznow's LA Derby better than it looked and subsequent works have been stout. Late bump of Joe Talamo by Mike Smith is unfortunate for Joe. Can't resist this one: M.B. has a shot!

(11) DYNAMIC ONE- Son of Belmont winner Union Rags ('12) who gets runners. Took five tries to get a win then straight into the Wood Memorial. Looked like the winner til the last jump when the other Pletcher trainee nipped him at the wire. Nice colt but probably not the most dynamic one.

(12) HELIUM- Gave me one of my few Derby prep winners at 15/1 in the Tampa Bay Derby when he came from the clouds. Won both starts at two on Canadian synthetics and T.B. Derby is lone 3YO prep. Big fan of trainer Casse so have to trust the two month gap between starts. Nay sayers cite his low speed fig in Tampa. But he is son of top turfer, Ironicus, so no fear of running out of gas for Helium.

(13) HIDDEN STASH- Only female-trained entry took Helium to the wire in the Tampa Bay Derby. Seven starts make him one of the more experienced but has yet to show the speed of some in here. Constitution is capable of siring a Derby winner but none so far. If there is a stash here, so far it has been hidden.

(14) ESSENTIAL QUALITY- The deserving favorite possesses the essential qualities of pedigree and performance. The 2YO champ of '20 is undefeated and runs fast every time. Hot young trainer Cox gets first and second Derby starters here. Jockey Saez was on DQ'd first place finisher Maximum Security in '19. Churchill works ok but gallop outs only so-so. Investable but not invincible. As with all favorites, we will try to beat him.

(15) ROCK YOUR WORLD- Indeed he did when he cruised gate to wire in the Santa Anita Derby dusting the 4/5 favorite. Only three starts and none at

two. First two were on the grass and all in Arcadia's friendly confines. Talent is abundant but wish he had more foundation. Son of the estimable Candy Ride. Trainer Sadler always at or near the top at major Cal meets. R.Y.W.'s regular partner, Italian rider Rispoli, gets bumped by Joel Rosario. That is a karma factor that could be a world rocker.

(16) KING FURY- \$950K yearling by Curlin wasn't close to qualifying until his 18/1 stunner in the Lexington Stakes at Keeneland. Picked a great time to get it together. Time was ok but this was only start at 3 and there was not a whole lot behind him in that race. Veteran trainer McPeck won last year's Preakness. Bounce risk leads me elsewhere.

(17) HIGHLY MOTIVATED- Another Into Mischief: bred by owner Seth Klarman, a genius level Wall Street hitter. Has only one of his five starts over a mile but made it count. He took Essential Quality to the wall in the Blue Grass before yielding by a neck. Top trainer and jock combo of Chad Brown and Javier Castellano. Some question distance limitations but no one questions motivations.

(18) SUPER STOCK- Upset winner of the Arkansas Derby impressed visually but he did benefit from a speed duel up front. Before that his resume was workmanlike if not exceptional. Trainer Asmussen has won just about every major stakes race except this one. Hard to gauge whether this stock's next move will be an uptick or a downtick.

(19) SOUP AND SANDWICH- Another Into Mischief. This one a Live Oak homebred. Owner is granddaughter of Campbell Soup founder. First start not til late January where he cruised as he did in next the following month. At double digit odds in the Florida Derby he vied for the lead throughout before conceding late to the winner. Appears to have considerable upside but inexperience (failed to change leads in last) could land him in the soup if sandwiched in a twenty horse field.

(20) BOURBONIC- Another of the four Pletcheristas entered here. Came from dead last at 72/1 to take the Wood Memorial in a major step up (you could have claimed him for \$50k last December). Rider Carmouche is a native of Cajun Country and steadily climbed the ladder to the big time. Pedigree and running style suggests the distance no problem but mid-pack is best guess on finish.

Miss Beryl: Do you still bet on that horse race of yours?

Sully: What, the trifecta?

Miss Beryl: Yes. Has it ever come in?

Sully: Not yet.

Miss Beryl: But you still bet on it.

Sully: Well, sure. I mean, the odds have gotta kick in sooner or later.

-Nobody's Fool (1994)

Paul Newman (Sully) & Jessica Tandy (Miss Beryl)

THE RACE-

Throw out the lone speed possibility. No one is likely to steal this one with an easy lead. Hot Rod Charlie, Rock Your World, , Highly Motivated, and Soup And Sandwich will see to that.

Essential Quality, Super Stock, Like The King, Known Agenda, Medina Spirit, Sainthood, Midnight Bourbon, Manadloun, and Brooklyn Strong would all like to stalk that hot pace but there is not room for everybody. Some will be taken out of their game and shuffled back.

Bourbonic, Helium, Dynamic One, O Besos, Hidden Stash, and Keepmeinmind all appear to be deep closers. None is likely to be in the front half of the field early.

THE PICK-

“You are what your record says you are” said Coach Bill Parcells years ago. If true, our pick is deserving with a record of two wins and three seconds from five starts. While his pedigree may not fit the Keeneland Summer Catalogue, we see a lot to like there. His sire is by Giant’s Causeway, out of an A.P. Indy mare, and won almost a million dollars. His dam is by Brilliant Speed, a son of one of the great stamina influences, Dynaformer.

Except for his maiden win, at first asking, every start has been a graded stakes. His jockey (Johnny V.) has won three Derbies and his trainer (Baffert) has won six. In a quote that brought back memories of Yogi Berra, his trainer said that our pick “has a heart that is bigger than his body.” Oh well, you get the point.

The pick is in and is

MEDINA SPIRIT



Sure hope Bob Baffert is sandbagging when he says M.S. is in the “top ten of the Derby starters.”

Non-believers can rightly point to the colt’s sound defeat by Rock Your World in the Santa Anita Derby but that’s why we’re getting double digit odds. He has trained well since and loves the Churchill surface. So we will bet win and place.

We will box exactas and tris with M.S., our longshots and Rock Your World.



MIDNIGHT BOURBON BABY PIC

LONGSHOT PICK will be Midnight Bourbon who has also been very consistent and looks to be peaking on time. Watched him all winter here. Love everything about this guy and expect a big effort. Win and place on M.B.

ULTRA LONGSHOTS will be O Besos and Helium. Throwing in a pair of deep closers in case pace melts down late. We will bet them across the board.

Best of luck. Don't forget that Babe Ruth hit 714 home runs but struck out 1330 times. Wish we could be so lucky.

- JTR