

**RICE'S DERBY CHOICE JOURNAL**  
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Anthony Comstock Secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice:

*Gaming in every shape strikes at the root of industrious habits. The horse, the noblest animal created for man's use, is today made to do the dirty work of professional gamblers- (1892)*

## **PROLOGUE:**

A century before the appearance of *The Church Lady* on Saturday Night Live, Anthony Comstock was the morality policeman snooping into every private and public aspect of American life in search of any deviation from his puritanical code of right and wrong. His indictment of George Bernard Shaw as “an Irish smut dealer” (presumably adding the Irish modifier increased Shaw’s loathsomeness) inspired the playwright to coin the term *comstockery* meaning censorship based on a perception of immorality. To the relief of horseplayers, Mr. Tony shed his mortal coil in 1915, age 71.

*The only thing we knew for sure about Henry Porter is that his name wasn't Henry Porter-*

Brownsville Girl  
Bob Dylan

Much like Dylan’s enigmatic Henry Porter, the Edison of turf handicapping was known by a name not his own. Pittsburg Phil was not from Pittsburgh nor was his name Phil (the disparity in spelling is due to the “h” being dropped by the city from 1890-1911). That man became the most celebrated high stakes player traversing the horse racing orbit during America’s Gilded Age. The posthumous publication of *Racing Maxims and Methods of Pittsburg Phil* was authored by his friend Edward W. Cole. That text is still held sacred by serious handicappers.

The man who would become Pittsburg Phil was the issue of an immigrant couple of Sewickley, Pennsylvania in 1862. His German father and Irish mother bestowed upon him the quotidian moniker of George E. Smith.

Dire family finances associated with his father’s death ten years later forced young George into the employ of a Pittsburgh cork cutting factory. Certainly the drudgery of that undertaking sparked his creative senses to pursue a less taxing path to financial independence. There is no evidence of a mentor in that quest. Pittsburg Phil was an auto- didact if ever there was.

He first tried breeding, training, and betting on gamecocks in the fight ring and that met with quick and utter failure. Realizing that cockfighting was for him a mug’s game, his next venture was betting on National League baseball and horse racing at the Pittsburgh pool rooms. Though barely eighteen, his disciplined management of limited resources and keeping of copious statistics bore success to the degree that he soon left the cork factory for a life of speculation.

When modern observers reference America’s late nineteenth century as the Gilded Age, few are aware that Mark Twain minted that term with satirical intent. He targeted the indulgent lifestyles of the robber barons that were conducted alongside the rancid tenements teeming with impoverished immigrants.

While numerous texts recount the ribald Wall Street personalities' whose professional and social lives raised Twain's ire, there are far fewer chronicles of the lower level of speculation by those of lesser means.

A fixture of that period in urban locations was the pool room populated with gamblers as the clientele and bookmakers (also called pool sellers) as owner-operators. Horse racing was the predominant subject although baseball and politics were also featured propositions. The racing entries were auctioned to form a pool with the winner collecting the proceeds after a small cut for the house. The game of pool is said to owe its name to the billiard tables that provided entertainment for players in those venues between races.

There Smith fashioned a crude system of race horse past performances based on the results and audio simulations gathered from telegraph reports of races presented in the pool rooms. Within five years, his system had produced a level of success to the point that the size of his bets exceeded the liquidity of the pool room markets of Pittsburgh. With a nut now exceeding \$100k, Smith was ready for the majors, and in 1885 that meant Chicago.

Chicago's Gamblers Alley was the epicenter of the pool room phenomenon and "Silver Bill" Riley was the bank at The Alley's stoutest venue. Colonel Riley, a Union Army veteran, was "slight of figure with deep black eyes and heavy snow white hair and mustache" according to one press report. The Colonel barred minors, smokers, and card games from his establishment. But when it came to horses, sports, and politics all bets were covered by Riley on demand.

The 1884 presidential election served as an example of Silver Bill's integrity as his largely Irish Catholic clientele wagered heavily on Democrat Grover Cleveland. James Blaine, the Republican nominee, had alienated those voters by a campaign slogan that threatened the result of a Cleveland victory would be "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion."

The election was a pick it affair and by the time the results came in, Silver Bill had taken ill and was ordered to bed by his doctor. Immediately rumors circulated that the Colonel had skipped town with the stakes.

His loyal clients waited patiently for his recovery confident in his character. Press reports of the time recounted that "\$250,000 reposed in the safe of Riley" in election action. He made good for every wager earning him a tribute as "the squarest sporting man that Chicago ever knew".

At the Riley establishment a young George E. Smith, in the early innings of mastering the art of thoroughbred handicapping, would acquire a *nom de guerre* that would earn massive celebrity.

Silver Bill's customer base had multiple members with the surname Smith ("a room full of Smith's" he told George). To insure that George's play was accurately recorded, the Colonel gave George the name of Pittsburg Phil and birthed a legend.

Silver Bill and his pool room cohorts soon learned that the young Smith possessed a methodology that would today be designated by the business buzzword *disruptive*.

His winning ways were accompanied by a perfected nonchalance and inscrutability that never revealed success or failure.

The young whirlwind did not witness a live horse race until the 1885 Kentucky Derby card during which he began his direct assault upon the on track bookmakers. Pool rooms were now a fading memory. He was twenty three years old but had the modern gaming term *whale* been in use he would have rated as *Moby Dick*.

Before the introduction of pari-mutuel wagering, the life of the on track bookmaker was one to envy. Their markets were often laid in collusion and their adversaries were an uninformed lot relying on whispered tips and phony barn confidences. Wall Street plungers John W. “Bet a Million” Gates and “Diamond Jim” Brady were welcomed marks. They and their like wagered large and dumb.



The betting ring at Gravesend, N.Y.

The New York Football Giants’ ownership traces to Timothy James Mara, the dominant bookmaker at New York tracks in the early twentieth century. Mara and his brethren (known as Mets) were unaccustomed to the relentless success of Pittsburg Phil. The latter was forced to employ teams of runners, known as commissioners, to conceal his true intents. Often times Phil would place nominal bets on horses with no chance in order to divert attention from his serious plays,

## MAXIM #28

*You cannot be a successful horse player if you are going to get the worst of the price all the time.*

The sophistication of today's serious handicappers makes it difficult to contextualize the originality of George Smith's approach. Observation of a horse's paddock demeanor, track conditions, race strategy analysis, over and underlaid odds, recency, and company lines were all innovations rightly attributed to Phil.



Pittsburg Phil

The characters both biped and quadruped populating the horse racing sphere were intensely reported on by the print media in the Gilded Age. When Phil entered the ring, his every move received coverage worthy of a Miley Cyrus twerk.

Yet apart from the size and savvy of his plays, Smith was in almost every way unremarkable. He abjured the use of both tobacco and alcohol and his attire was unexceptional apart from a small diamond ring.

## MAXIM #6

*All consistently successful players of horses are men of temperate habits in life.*

Phil's wealth soon provided the wherewithal to establish his own racing stable which he did with his younger brother, Bill, as trainer. His astuteness was immediately rewarded but his search for a regular rider for his Pleasant Valley Stable remained a frustration. That is until he spotted a promising young rider whose eventual celebrity would dwarf that of Pittsburg Phil and almost everyone else. His name was Tod Sloan.

Sloan's remarkable ascent to the pinnacle of the game coincided with his association with Phil. But unlike Phil, Sloan lived in life's HOV lane. Elements Of Joe Namath, Dennis Rodman, and Justin Bieber could all be found in Sloan.



Tod Sloan

He was the rider that popularized the “monkey crouch” riding style when most jockeys rode upright as do the Europeans to this day. Sloan was the original *Yankee Doodle Dandy* portrayed in George M. Cohan's hit musical *Little Johnny Jones* as well as the inspiration for the lead character in Ernest Hemmingway's *My Old Man*.

The nineteenth century version of paparazzi was always part of the peoplescope at important race meetings and Smith and Sloan were prominent A-listers in such circumstances. But while Sloan thrived on the attention, Phil never lost focus on his mission.

MAXIM #5:

*A man cannot divide his attention at the track between horses and women*

Phil's lone exception to #5 was an ingénue of the stage named Daisy Dixon who would prove to be the only human love interest in his life. The couple was believed to be very close to being wed when Daisy was spotted by his brother, Bill Smith, canoodling with another man. Daisy's new lover? Tod Sloan.

In the lyrics of Buck Owens, it was a case of *Adios farewell goodbye good luck so long* to the romance. Phil kept the friendship of the rider but they parted professionally.

Tod Sloan's exceptional talents carried him far, at one point winning nearly half his races over a year (a batting average of .200 is Hall of Fame stuff for a jockey). His career

was truncated by his libertine off track life and the cancellation of his license in England over unproven illegal betting allegations. He died a pauper age fifty nine.

Daisy Dixon eventually wed another high roller of the turf world named Riley Grannan. He possessed many of Phil's handicapping skills but lacked all discipline when it came to betting. Grannan's finances reflected big scores and big scares.



Riley Grannan

At times Grannan garnered more press coverage than Smith as his peaks and plunges provided more drama. In 1895, a press report compared the two:

*Physically these two race track sights are much alike and the similarity extends to their mental structures. They seldom speak and then only a word or two. Each keeps to himself and never indulge in that cheapest of race track privileges – giving tips to his friends.*

*Smith keeps available cash on hand to the tune of \$250,000. Grannan has no similar anchor to windward. When he goes broke he is broke in dead earnest.*

Riley Grannan proved to be a poor keeper and somewhere he and Daisy parted company most likely hastened by Riley's mercurial finances. By 1908, Riley was totally bust. A couple of wealthy pals in Reno staked him enough to open a gambling saloon in the booming gold mining community of Rawhide, Nevada.

His joint was the most popular in Rawhide but the proprietor, ever drawn to the action, found his finances in cold irons bound. On an early spring evening Riley challenged a temperature approaching zero degrees by roaming Rawhide's attractions coatless. The plunger's last play was a loser as he contracted a case of pneumonia that stilled him forever within a few days. His thirty nine calendar years were far exceeded by his combative action years.

Pittsburg Phil's search for a new rider took him to New Orleans where he discovered yet another prodigy named Willie Shaw. They were winning at every turn until Phil's

combining a racing operation with an outsized betting habit drew approbation from the ruling oligarchs. Warnings to roll back his wagers were ignored by Phil. Shortly thereafter, Willie Shaw was accused by the grandees of stiffing one of Phil's entries.



Pittsburg Phil and Riley Grannan

Despite the unfounded charges, Shaw was ruled off the New York tracks as were Phil's horses. Almost a year passed before the suspension was lifted though no evidential hearing ever took place. The New York Social Register would never include the name of George E. Smith notwithstanding his success and integrity.

Phil's outward serenity concealed the entrapped stress of his massive bets and public accounts of his every winner and loser. Losing without a grimace and winning without a smile were steadily weakening his less than robust frame.

In 1904 with a rare off track exercise of his wealth and concession to mortality, Phil commissioned a mausoleum for himself in North Pittsburgh at a cost of \$30k.

Within months a persistent cough forced him into the care of a sanitarium in Asheville, N.C. On February 1, 1905, Phil succumbed to what the doctors attributed to tuberculosis and his friends blamed on suppressed emotion. Only forty three years of age, he left an estate valued at the time of \$3.25 million.

It was reported that while in the final throes of his illness, Phil hallucinated and cheered for his imagined horses in fantasized races. This total departure from his storied manner was a final release of a lifetime of suppressed emotion.

His passing was headline news but not always in honorific tone. One obituary was titled "a wasted life" but that was an exception to the elegies of his greatness. .

His mother had a statue of Phil, in frock coat clutching a racing program, erected at the mausoleum. The New York Times reported that "in the midst of a blinding snowstorm

and in the presence of an immense crowd the body of Pittsburg Phil, the turf plunger, was laid away in Uniondale Cemetery.”



Phil Atop His Mausoleum

When the nine three year olds gathered behind the barrier for the start of the 1916 Kentucky Derby, the H.P. Whitney entry of Thunderer and Dominant was favored at \$1.05 to the dollar. The second choice at 4/1 was a black colt whose dam, Consuelo II, had once been the property of the now late Pittsburg Phil. So how fitting that when the roses were bestowed upon that black colt, the official results of that year's renewal declared that the winner was GEORGE SMITH.



George Smith

But wait...there's more!

Phil's place in the annals of handicapping is secure but he may not have been the first compiler of past performances. There follows a revisionist history spoiler.

Remember the fellow punter, Riley Grannan, who stole the heart of Daisy Dixon? Well it turns out that the less celebrated Grannan ran away from his Kentucky home at age twelve and made his way to New Orleans. There he found work as a bellhop at the St. Charles Hotel and as a program seller at the Fair Grounds.

The lobby of the St. Charles (now the site of high rise office building Place St. Charles) served as a conference center for the local horse racing heavyweights. And it was there that young Riley came under the tuition of a prominent local bookmaker named Ed Botay. The bookie hired Riley as a runner and spotter at the track where his keen eye promptly earned Botay's trust.

Botay disclosed to Riley the proprietary statistical compilation he kept of the New Orleans horse races. Those primitive charts were compiled apart from and likely before those of Pittsburgh Phil.

Riley Grannan's passing was a signature event in Rawhide's community of searchers for rainbow's end. A former Methodist minister and struggling prospector from New Orleans with the W.C. Fields like name of Herman K. Knickerbocker presided over Riley's funeral.

Knick, as he was known, had been acquitted of a heresy charge by his church's high court but left the ministry understandably bitter from the experience. He eventually landed in Rawhide panning for gold. The eloquence of his eulogy, teeming with heartfelt affection, is a rare piece of Old West Americana. Excerpts follow but the entire oration can be read at [www.nevadaweb.com/ghp/riley1.html](http://www.nevadaweb.com/ghp/riley1.html). It is well worth the trip.

*I feel that it is incumbent upon me to state that in standing here I occupy no ministerial or prelatial position. I am simply a prospector.*

*Riley Grannan was born in Paris, Kentucky, about 40 years ago. I suppose he dreamed all the dreams of boyhood. They blossomed into phenomenal success along financial lines at times during his life. I am told that from the position of a bell boy in a hotel he rose rapidly to be a celebrity of world-wide fame. He was one of the greatest plungers, probably, that the continent has ever produced.*

*He died day before yesterday in Rawhide.*

*If I have gauged his character correctly, he accepted the circumstances surrounding him as the mystic officials to whom the universe had delegated its whole office concerning him. He seemed to accept both defeat and victory with equanimity. He was a man whose exterior was placid and gentle as I have ever seen, and yet, when we look back over his meteoric past we can readily understand, if this statement be true, that he was absolutely invincible in spirit. If you will allow me, I will use a phrase most of you are acquainted with. He was a "dead game sport." I say it not irreverently, but fill the phrase as full of practical human philosophy as it will hold and I believe that when you say one is a "dead game sport" you have reached the climax of human philosophy.*

*He lived in the world of sport. I do not mince my words. I am telling what I believe to be true. In the world of sport--hilarity sometimes, and maybe worse--he left the impress of his character on this world, and through the medium of his financial power he was able with his money to brighten the lives of its inhabitants. He wasted it so the world says. But did it ever occur to you that the most sinful men and women who live in this world are still men and women? Did it ever occur to you that the men and*

*women who inhabit the night world are still men and women? A little happiness brought into their lives means as much to them as happiness brought into the lives of the straight and good. If you can take one ray of sunlight into their night-life and thereby bring them one single hour of happiness, I believe you are a benefactor.*

*And now the time has come to say good-bye. The word "farewell" is the saddest in our language. And yet there are sentiments sometimes that refuse to be confined in that word. I will say "Good-bye, old man." We will try to exemplify the spirit manifested in your life in bearing the grief at your parting. Words fail me here. Let these flowers, Riley, with their petaled lips and perfumed breath, speak in beauty and fragrance the sentiments that are too tender for words.*

*Good-bye.*

For his part, Riley went out with a succinct nihilistic phrase. His final words were "It's all a joke; it doesn't amount to anything."

The life lesson that sadly was learned in the hardest of ways by Riley Grannan is summed up in yet another Philism:

MAXIM # 10

*Many killings are attempted but few are accomplished.*

Our game is unlikely to ever see the likes of Pittsburg Phil, Riley Grannan, Tod Sloan, and Colonel "Silver Bill" Riley again. We can only wish they have been happily reunited in the sweet by and by.

THIS YEAR'S DERBY:

Abe Lincoln once warned a foreign envoy that "I will be very apt to make blunders." Readers of this annual stab know well that is the lone trait your editor shares with that honored President. But between blunders, we have manufactured a few notable scores with last year's Derby providing such an example.

Our pick, ORB, was the outright winner and our ultra-longshot special, GOLDEN SOUL, ran second at 35/1.

In 1955, the Derby featured a classic East-West confrontation with the heavily favored NASHUA (Eddie Arcaro up) against the California bred SWAPS (Bill Shoemaker up). Shoe sprung the upset to get that year's roses. SWAPS' eighteen-year-old exercise rider was named Art Sherman. That teen, now 77, is the trainer for this year's Derby favorite CALIFORNIA CHROME.

If successful, Sherman will become the oldest winning Derby trainer supplanting then seventy three-year-old Charlie Whittingham, who got FERDINAND (picked here) home in 1986.

This year's field has two horses trained by Argentines, four horses that would prefer to run on grass, and four horses whose pedigrees suggest surrender by the eighth pole. Three trainers: Pletcher, Maker, and Baffert will saddle forty per cent of the entries.

As always, we are in search of value and try to craft some betting propositions to enhance your Derby experience.

#### THE FIELD:

**VICAR'S IN TROUBLE-** A Louisiana bred winning the Louisiana Derby is a rare occasion and a Louisiana bred running in the Kentucky Derby is rarer still. But VIC is no ordinary La-bred being by the accomplished INTO MISCHIEF. Will be one of many vying for early command but think his distance limit was reached in his last win at nine furlongs. Past that point, we think this VICAR will be a missing parson.

**HARRY'S HOLIDAY-** Lost a heartbreaker in the SPIRAL STAKES when ARTIE nailed him at the wire by s dirty nose. Contended briefly in the BLUE GRASS before stopping cold mid-race and finishing twelfth of thirteen. Bred to go long and owns a maiden claiming win over the Louisville surface. That's not enough to make us wild about HARRY.

**UNCLE SIGH-** All of this New York bred's races have been at Aqueduct and apart from his disappointing fifth in the WOOD, he has battled down to the wire every time. Sire is beaten Derby favorite INDIAN CHARLIE who gets lots of hard knocking racehorses that do not extend to a mile and a quarter. That final eighth at Churchill will have backers letting loose a SIGH and crying UNCLE.

**DANZA-** This has to be the wise guy horse since he is named for wise guy actor Tony Danza. This colt showed early promise at two but was on the shelf for several months before a so-so three-year-old bow in an allowance race at Gulfstream. Then he sprung a shocker dusting the Arkansas Derby field at 40-1. Sire STREET BOSS was a sprinter but has a classic pedigree. As impressive as that effort in Hot Springs was, have to question whether four lifetime starts afford enough bottom for the Derby trip.

**CALIFORNIA CHROME-** Impossible to quarrel with his favoritism after his launch from Cal bred competition to Grade I Stakes winner. He has demonstrated multiple gears in his climb and quieted the pedigree snobs. The extra furlong and bounce factor are about the only hopes for naysayers. Backers will be paraphrasing Paul Simon: "Momma don't take my CALI-CHROME away".

**SAMRAAT-** Gets his name from the Hindu word for emperor and he certainly ruled until his second place finish in the WOOD. His five race clean sheet included the WITHERS and GOTHAM Derby preps. Toughness is undeniable but pedigree and race record suggest the Derby distance may put this yogi in a twist.

WE MISS ARTIE- Has a couple of decent dirt efforts but best stuff is on turf and poly which is no surprise given the record of Dad (ARTIE SCHILLER) on the greensward. If he handles the Churchill dirt, he should be coming late but a reach to expect a duplication of ANIMAL KINGDOM's double in the SPIRAL STAKES and DERBY.

GENERAL A ROD- Actually not named for the NY Yankees juicer although this colt always runs with plenty of juice. His pedigree and maiden win suggest a classic closer. But since the addition of blinkers, he seems to always yearn for the front end. That was certainly a factor in his fading third in the Florida Derby. Too much talent here to throw out but the GENERAL must retreat early in this one to have a shot.

VINCEREMOS- Translates from the Spanish to "we will conquer" and conquer he did in the last TAMPA DERBY prep. Followed that with respectable second in the main event then but bombed in the BLUE GRASS which can probably be thrown out due to polytrack. VINCE sports a money pedigree but would not be in here without late defections in the top twenty. Always respect a Pletcher entry but afraid this one will translate to "we were conquered."

WILDCAT RED- With acknowledgement to former President W, we definitely *misunderestimated* RED. We saw him as a one dimensional sprinter but he came with a neck of sweeping the three graded stakes for three-year-olds this winter in Florida. Derby distance looks beyond his pedigree but then so did the Florida Derby. If he outruns his bloodlines again, WILDCAT could well be the wild card.

HOPPERTUNITY- Leader of the Baffert group has five starts but uh-oh, none at two. Cue the Apollo Curse once again. That said while his second to CAL-CHROME in the S.A. Derby appeared to be in another zip code from the winner, it was a plenty good effort. HOPPY was the same distance behind C.C. as FERDINAND was behind SNOW CHIEF in the 1986 S.A. Derby and we know how that turned out. Any HOPPERTUNITY knocks are issued at your peril.

DANCE WITH FATE- Appropriately named as this colt is coming to the Derby with only three weeks rest and a preference for synthetic surfaces and grass. His BLUE GRASS win showed a classic closer's pattern that should play well on Saturday but he'll have to DANCE beyond his sire, TWO STEP SALSA.

CHITU- No idea what his name means but from what we've seen it means speed. In first big test in the last prep for the SANTA ANITA DERBY, he just failed to last to CANDY BOY. He followed that with a dusting of MIDNIGHT HAWK and COMMISSIONER in the SUNLAND DERBY. Sire HENNY HUGHES was all speed but lots of staying power on the dam side. Baffert doesn't take them to Louisville for the juleps. CHITU won't cheat you.

MEDAL COUNT- Although he shares DYNAFORMER as sire with '06 Derby champ BARBARO, this guy has been a total grass-poly specialist. His two dirt efforts have been no-COUNT. Nice close to be second in the BLUE GRASS may garner some support but hard to see a MEDAL for him in Louisville.

**TAPITURE-** Has been on lots of Derby watch lists since his win last November in the IROQUOIS at Churchill. Lost narrowly to HOPPORTUNITY in a roughly run stretch battle in the final ARKANSAS DERBY prep. Sent off at 2/1 in the DERBY itself, he failed to show up and finished a distance fourth to DANZA. A best effort could put him in the mix but hard to predict that.

**INTENSE HOLIDAY-** Steady if unspectacular performer appeared to be a Pletcher backup before injury to FLORIDA DERBY winner CONSTITUTION. Now may be barn's best shot. Running style and pedigree suggest he will get the trip and despite his name he never takes a day off. With a spring break, he could hit the board.

**COMMANDING CURVE-** Took four shots at two to become a winner but hit the board in all three Churchill starts. We bet him in the La. Derby and his third place finish came after being clobbered leaving the gate. Running style and pedigree scream a mile and a quarter but he has yet to deliver a COMMANDING effort. Needs to move forward or we will see a hanging CURVE.

**CANDY BOY-** The BOY looked to be the goods after impressive win in key S.A. Derby prep but regressed in the main event out west where he was a distant third to CAL-CHROME. We loved his sire, CANDY RIDE, so much that we were lured to pick two previous sons in '09 and '10 much to our regret. Painful conclusion? While Dad got a mile and a quarter, that distance is beyond the sweet spot for the kids unless this BOY is the exception. Hard to cotton to this CANDY unless Sammy Davis, Jr.'s proves right that the CANDYMAN CAN.

**RIDE ON CURLIN-** Has not run a bad race in his nine lifetime starts including his most recent second in the Arkansas Derby. Hard for us to visualize him in the Derby frame. Having his sire's name as part of his own will certainly attract attention at the windows but we would ride by, not on, this CURLIN.

**WICKED STRONG-** This son of 2007 Derby runner up HARD SPUN (picked here) impressed at two but had a pair of dull races this year before a grinding score in the Wood Memorial that looked like he wanted more. Trained by Jimmy (son of HOF Allen) Jerkens who inherited his Dad's talent and patience. We expect WICKY will be plenty STRONG in the late stages.

**THE RACE-** This year's renewal contains a surfeit of speed with nearly half of the entrants capable of making the lead or forcing an honest pace. This provides a favorable setup for stalkers and closers. CHITU, VICAR, GENERAL, SIGH, and RED will likely vie for the early lead with CAL-CHROME, CANDY, SAM, DANZA, TAP, and VINCE stalking that pace. The rest of the field, including our pick, will take back saving ground for the long charge down the Churchill lane. Somewhere around the quarter pole, Espinoza will push CAL's button and the speed horses will fade. CANDY and DANZA will chase CAL as the closers led by HOPPY assert their role.

Midway the stretch, HOPPY is cutting into CAL's lead with every stride with a cluster of closers gaining on both.

And down the stretch they come with HOPPORTUNITY in front of a fading CALIFORNIA CHROME. But on that far outside, closing with a rush and nailing HOPPORTUNITY at the wire, it's.....

## **WICKED STRONG**



**Wicked Strong Winning the Wood**

**OUR PICK-** In 2007 we expected STREET SENSE would win but searching for price, we went with a son of DANZIG named HARD SPUN at a generous 10/1. We recommended an exacta box with the two as well as a win/place on HARD SPUN. That colt made all the running until caught by STREET SENSE. We had a great payday and have remained loyal to both horses as their sons and daughters are now distinguishing themselves on the track.

Our pick is a son of HARD SPUN and the CHARISMATIC ('99 Derby winner by a head over our pick MENIFEE) mare MOYNE ABBEY. There is stamina a plenty in the dam's family as you would expect given that the abbey itself has lasted over five hundred years in County Mayo, Ireland.

Our pick is trained by Jimmy Jerkens, who like his Hall of Fame father Allen, is defined by the term *old school*. With the Jerkens' the horse always comes first. Impatient owners need not apply.

WICK first caught our attention in last fall's REMSEN when he was third beaten a half-length by then early Derby faves (both since sidelined), HONOR CODE and CAIRO PRINCE.

After two dull efforts at Gulfstream over the winter, where his dislike of the short stretch was apparent, he woke up when shipped back to New York. His 15/1 morning line odds for the WOOD proved too good to be true as wise guy money cut the price at 9/1 by post time. As happy as we were to cash, a good closing second or third would have given us enough confidence to go with him here.

But his race was not flawless. He wandered in the stretch and seemed to lose focus peeking at the crowd. Another negative is that the WOOD has not produced a Derby winner since FUNNY CIDE in '03.

Our pick is reunited with his REMSEN rider, the underappreciated Rajiv Maragh. He is a son of a jockey and is of Indo-Jamaican descent. Maragh piloted MUCH MACHO MAN to a third place finish in the 20111 derby. We expect improvement here.

LONGSHOT SPECIAL- Our long shot stab this year is DANCE WITH FATE. In spite of his impressive close to win the BLUE GRASS, he is being ignored because that win was over the synthetic surface at Keeneland. Fair enough since six of his eight lifetime starts are on either grass or polytrack surfaces. But those two dirt starts were far from disastrous—a second in the G-I FORERUNNER and an eighth of thirteen, after a troubled start, in the B.C. JUVENILE. Crafty West Coast conditioner Peter Eurton picks his spots well which leads us to dismiss his negative comments about the colt's chances on dirt after the BLUE GRASS. Rider Nakatani was second aboard NEHRO in the 2011 Derby and has won nine BREEDERS' CUP races.

ULTRA LONGSHOT- Last year our ultra-pick was a Dallas Stewart trainee that drew in after a late scratch. Same circumstances...same trainer. Karma rules. COMMANDING CURVE could well be the longest of the long so we will go across the board and use in exotics.

THE BET- We will bet WICK to win, DANCE win-place, and CURVE across the board. We will box those three with HOPPY in exactas. We will use throw in CAL CHROME in tris and supers.

Good luck and hope to see you again next year.

JTR

We wish to acknowledge an historical horse racing web site, <http://colinsghost.org/>, that was invaluable in our research.