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“Facts are stubborn things. Whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions.”

- Future POTUS John Adams speaking in defense of accused British soldiers following the Boston Massacre

For my contemporaries, whose numbers grow smaller by the day, 1968 stands at the apogee of *anni horribilis*. That year, in response to the Tet Offensive in January, the U.S. presence in Viet Nam peaked at a troop level in excess of half a million. Within a two month span that spring, the horror of assassination struck both MLK and RFK.

Viet Nam and Civil Rights generated a fissure in America so acute that a shadow of despair loomed over every band on the spectrum of the body politic. LBJ, in a virtual abdication, declined to seek re-election shortly after a narrow win in the New Hampshire primary. Richard Nixon defeated Vice-President Hubert Humphrey in that fall's general election while George Wallace's third-party candidacy carried five states in the Deep South.

In the spring of 1968, the hardened constituents of thoroughbred racing found a welcomed respite in the ninety-fourth running of the Kentucky Derby. That interlude from strife proved brief.

The favorite at 2.20/1 was Calumet Farm's Forward Pass who sought to succeed Whirlaway ('41), Pensive ('44), Citation ('48), Ponder ('49), Hill Gail ('52), Iron Liege ('57), and Tim Tam ('58) as the eighth Calumet rep wearing the roses.

Dancer's Image, a son of Native Dancer owned by Boston sportsman Peter Fuller, was the tepid second choice at 3.60/1. Native Dancer's only loss in a 22-race career was in the 1953 Kentucky Derby.

Both were coming in hot with the favorite coming off of wins in the Florida Derby and Blue Grass and his challenger taking the Bowie Gold Cup and the Wood Memorial.

The Bowie Gold Cup was run three days after the MLK assassination. Peter Fuller was a longtime admirer of MLK and his wife. Following the win, the owner of Dancer's Image donated the \$60k winner's purse to MLK's widow, Coretta.

Immediately following press reports of that gift, racist hate mail and death threats to Fuller's family and horse ensued. Long before the advent of texting and Twitter, the medium for such venom was either U.S. Mail in the fashion of a ransom note, or anonymous phone calls from a pay phone. Both came in abundance. Though no incidents transpired, security was amped and FBI surveillance was employed on Derby Day.

A year earlier, Proud Clarion's upset of heavy favorite Damascus in the 1967 Derby had been preceded by a confrontation between civil rights activists seeking an end to Louisville's discriminatory housing laws and segregationists determined to keep the status quo.

There was a fear among the Churchill Downs officials that the civil rights demonstrations might result in a disruption on Derby Day itself. Louisville native Muhammad Ali joined the effort as did comedian/activist Dick Gregory. The latter unsettled the nerves of the racing swells with the following quote upon arrival:

"I ain't going to lay down in front of a horse myself but there's a lot of cats that will."

True to Gregory's word, the Monday before the Derby, some "cats" jumped the fence trackside mid-race and laid down on the track surface. The riders were forced to pull up their mounts thereby voiding the contest.

The Ku Klux Klan offered to appear in full regalia and provide protection for the event. Only the last-minute arrival of MLK ended the threat of major conflict. He diverted the activists to a march on Derby Day through the deserted streets of downtown Louisville while the Derby celebrants proceeded undismayed.

In those pre-exotic wagering days, the tote system was limited to twelve betting interests. If more than that number were entered, the ones with the longest odds, per the track handicapper, became a "field bet" giving the bettor multiple horses for a single wager. Fourteen horses were entered and the field bet of three (14.70/1) included Louisiana Derby winner Kentucky Sherry.

According to form, that one broke on top completing the opening six furlongs in 1:09 4/5 while Forward Pass stalked from second and Dancer's Image lagged as the back marker. The leader gave way to the favorite after a mile but the second choice passed everyone despite his rider dropping the whip entering the stretch.



DANCER'S IMAGE LEADING FORWARD PASS AND FRANCIE' S HAT AT THE FINISH

At the wire, Dancer's Image and Bobby Ussery were a length and a half the better of Forward Pass and Milo Valenzuela. If you bet on Dancer's Image you won, but if you owned Dancer's Image you lost.

Tracks pay winning bettors within minutes of a race's conclusion. Even in the case of a foul claim, a ruling is typical within the time frame of an NFL challenge.

Purse money is withheld pending the winner's completing a successful journey post-race to the "spit barn". Saliva and urine are collected there to detect the presence of banned substances.

The chemist charged with the Derby Day analyses found that the urine sample known to him only as 3956U tested positive for traces of phenylbutazone. Popularly known as bute, phenylbutazone is an effective non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) routinely administered to horses.



DANCER'S IMAGE FLANKED BY OWNER PETER FULLER & TRAINER LOU CAVALARIS, JR.

At the time of the race bute was legal on race day in most racing jurisdictions but not Kentucky. Today the drug is legal on race day in all U.S. jurisdictions with horse racing but not in Ireland, the U.K., and continental Europe. The FDA withdrew approval for human use late in the 20th century due to gastrointestinal side-effects.

Sometime that Sunday the authorities learned that 3956U was the urine sample of Dancer's Image. Following a three-day hearing convened on Monday during which the testing protocol and the chain of custody of the sample were questioned, the Kentucky racing pharisees ordered a redistribution of the purse with Forward Pass the winner and Dancer's Image placed last.

The established Kentucky ruling class is inbred and insular. Many of its members share the belief that their excreted fecal matter is non-malodorous. The Forward Pass connections enjoyed a mutual attachment to that group. The Dancer's Image connections did not.

Despite being the son of a former Massachusetts Governor, Peter Fuller made his bones the hard way. He boxed professionally and earned a great deal of his wealth through a Cadillac dealership. He may have held brahmin status in Boston but he and trainer Lou Cavalaris were road underdogs not only in the race but also in the inquiry. Forward Pass's owner and breeder, Calumet Farm, was a thoroughbred industry deity in Kentucky.

Fuller and Cavalaris were aghast and dismayed by the ruling. The trainer boasted a twenty-two-year record free of any medication violations prior to the incident in question. The owner enjoyed impeccable repute in every aspect of his life.

Throughout Dancer's Image's spring campaign, Cavalaris had truncated his colt's training regimen to accommodate minor inflammation in his front ankles. The Sunday before the Derby, his colt returned from a gallop with swelling and heat in that ankle. This set off understandable Defcon 1 alarms in the barn.

That morning the vet attending to Dancer's Image administered four grams of bute orally to the colt to calm the ankle. Veterinary consensus held that after three days the drug would exit the colt's system without trace. While not a dead cert, there was no angst regarding a clean test on Derby Day.

At this point, were this a horror film, you would hear the sound of a device called a waterphone. That is the instrument used to enhance suspenseful Hollywood moments (think Hannibal Lecter approaching Clarice Starling in *Silence of the Lambs*). That is because the attending vet was a gentleman known as Derby Doc, or more commonly The Doc.

His veterinary skill was peerless, his influence was boundless, his generosity renowned, and his ethics under scrutiny from the beginning to the end of his professional life. Winston Churchill's description of Russia was equally apt of The Doc: "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma."

Until shortly before his death at eighty in 2005 from complications following a stroke, the third-generation veterinarian invited controversy alongside profuse demand for his services. His name was Alex Harthill.

The young prodigy went directly to Ohio State's vet college from high school and in less than three years entered practice in Louisville where one of his first patients was 1948 Triple Crown winner Citation.

After two vets abandoned hope of saving a mare carrying a dead foal, Harthill undertook a complex procedure that extracted the fetus and saved the mare's life. That mare, Isolde, was later bred to Royal Gem. The mating produced 1953 Derby winner Dark Star, the only horse to own a win over Native Dancer, sire of Dancer's Image.

Controversy soon accompanied the young vet's heroics. In 1954 an owner from Texas complained to the FBI that Harthill tried to collect \$1500 from the Texan after claiming that he, Harthill, had fixed the race to the benefit of the owner's horse. No charges were brought.

That same year a horse treated by the Doc at Keeneland tested positive for a banned stimulant. The Kentucky Racing Commission suspended the trainer and groom with no discipline meted to Harthill who claimed his only injections were legal vitamins. Later that summer the Illinois Racing Board suspended him sixty days for administering an amphetamine to the winner of a race at Washington Park.

In 1955 Harthill was implicated in an alleged drugging and bribery scheme at Fair Grounds in New Orleans but escaped punishment thanks to a hung jury. Numerous abuse of medication allegations surfaced in other jurisdictions but none resulted in disciplinary measures. The Doc's Teflon reputation and pharmacologic wizardry in such matters grew apace. So much so that serious handicappers of the Derby were keen to identify the "Harthill horses" among the entries.

Beginning with Hill Gail in 1952, Harthill treated ten of the fifteen subsequent Derby winners leading to the Dancer's Image imbroglio. Adding to the Doc's appeal for Derby participants was his exclusive use of Barn 24 at Churchill Downs.

This perk was a major departure from protocol at Churchill Downs where the track allocated stalls exclusively to trainers. The other vets made their rounds in their vehicles stocked with their medical tools and pharmaceuticals. The Doc also operated a retail veterinary supply store a few steps from Barn 24 on Fourth Street, just outside the Churchill Downs confines.

Apart from minor gastric issues, the dosage of bute had the desired effect on the ankle of Dancer's Image until Thursday when the swelling returned. At that point bute was no longer an option so Harthill injected Azium, a legal

analogue of prednisone, into the ankle. Dancer's Image then trained up to the race completely sound.

The decision to disqualify Dancer's Image rested on an implied conclusion that someone had given the horse a dosage of bute on Thursday or later and that dose accounted for a) the positive test and b) his racing sound in his win on Saturday. Ergo the DQ.

Though largely ignored by the authorities, any additional bute administered would have almost certainly been the work of a saboteur. No one on Peter Fuller's team would have done it because it would have resulted in a positive test and also the previous dose had produced gastrointestinal distress.

Other unexplored issues included whether the positive test was accurate and whether it was indeed Dancer's Image's urine. The possibilities of negligence or conspiracy were also left unanswered.

Appeals to the Racing Commission and ultimately the courts kept the controversy alive for five years until the denial of Peter Fuller's final appeal on April 13, 1973.

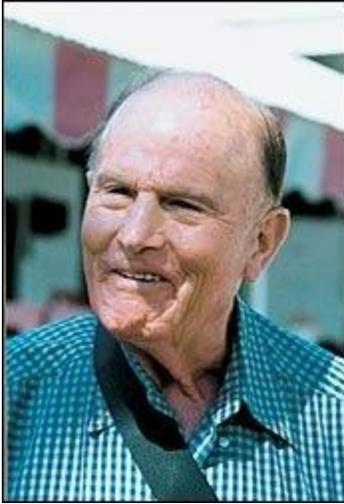
The inattention of the authorities to theoretical conspiracies did not mean there was none. Calumet's dominance in the Derby starting with Citation and the reverence that the name evoked invited suspicion that the decision was not impartial. The deep social ties between the racing pharisees and the Calumet connections combined with Peter Fuller's outsider profile forged a circumstantial case supporting the humbug allegations.

A far more sinister misgiving surfaced from Dancer's Image's trainer who learned of the DQ and positive test by way of a phone call from his fellow trainer, Doug Davis, Jr. Shortly thereafter the two met and Davis found Lou Cavalaris in a state of anxiety bordering on panic. During the conversation Cavalaris speculated that Doc Harthill might be responsible for the positive test either through negligence or malintent.

The blustery Davis was a friend of Harthill but only an acquaintance of Cavalaris. As soon as he left the meeting, Davis informed Harthill of Cavalaris' alarm and accusation implying that his rants were an attempt to conceal his own guilt.



DOUG DAVIS, JR



ALEX HARTHILL



LOU CAVALARIS, JR.

The pair hatched a plot to entrap Cavalaris that held a juvenile level of sophistication. They added ground up aspirin to the feed bag of Dancer's Image believing that Cavalaris would mistake it for bute. They reasoned that if Cavalaris were guilty he would dispose of the doctored feed. If he were blameless, he would report the incident immediately. Unfortunately for Harthill and Davis, Cavalaris had witnessed the salting of his horse's feed.

The episode proved of little interest to the Racing Commission and Harthill and Davis escaped with \$500 fines. Dancer's Image raced once more finishing third to Forward Pass in the Preakness. The ill-fated colt was DQ'd for bumping and placed eighth. His troublesome ankles caused his retirement to stud at that point.

Forward Pass was denied the Triple Crown by upstart Stage Door Johnny in the Belmont. Forward Pass retired to stud at Calumet Farm at the end of his 3YO year.

While the truth about the Dancer's Image mystery remains unsolved, so does the bizarre professional life of Alex Harthill, DVM.

So, what drove the psyche of this Svengali of the Syringe? He was in no way dependent on the gift for either financial comfort or professional repute. Yet he was denied veterinary privileges in multiple jurisdictions at the same time that the most prestigious racing powers sought his services.

In 1975 when the wonderful race mare Ruffian broke down in her match race against Kentucky Derby champ Foolish Pleasure, the attending vets immediately called for Harthill's presence at the operating table.

The following year U.S. Customs officers arrested Harthill for attempted smuggling of an illegal drug into the country from Canada. Harthill pleaded no contest and escaped with a fine.

In 1978 when Affirmed arrived at Churchill Downs in preparation for what would become a successful Triple Crown quest, Trainer Laz Barrera would have no one other than The Doc attending to him.

After Spectacular Bid's Derby win in 1979, Trainer Bud Delp insisted that Harthill accompany his horse to Delp's base in Maryland to prepare for the Preakness. But in that state the Doc could only function as an unofficial advisor since authorities there denied him veterinary credentials.

The locus of the next discordance in the Harthill bio, not surprisingly, was the New Orleans Fair Grounds. In 1980 The Doc landed there as "special assistant to the president" of that track. At that time Fair Grounds was rife with conflicts of interest and piracy.

The controlling shareholders of the track and the Chairman of the Louisiana Racing Commission had stables that raced at the track. While not illegal, it was a practice unique to that track.

With the arrival of The Doc, the freebooting reached a new high. One of his routine practices was to station himself next to the claim box where trainers submit supposedly confidential forms to purchase horses in claiming races.

If a claim were submitted for a "house horse", The Doc would submit a competing claim to lessen the chance of one of the insiders losing his horse.

Harthill also operated a bootleg vet practice at the track as he was not licensed in Louisiana (he had failed the state examination).

In 1989 when Sunday Silence came up with a sore foot after his upset of Easy Goer in the Derby, it was The Doc that Charlie Whittingham called on to get Sunday Silence sound in time for his photo finish win over Easy Goer in the Preakness.

In 1992, Preakness and Belmont champion, A.P. Indy, suffered a similar foot malady on the eve of the Kentucky Derby. The horse's connections

immediately summoned Harthill to save the day. In spite of his efforts, the lameness persisted and A.P. Indy was scratched probably denying him the Triple Crown. An interesting sidebar was that another Harthill horse, longshot Lil E. Tee, won the race.

Not content to go gentle into that good night, in 2001 Harthill revealed in a Daily Racing Form interview that before the 1964 Derby, he administered the then illegal anti-bleeding medication, Lasix, to Northern Dancer. Though now legal in the U.S. and in almost universal use here, Lasix remains controversial. Because it is a diuretic, the “hay, oats, and water” branch of racing participants maintains that Lasix can mask the presence of other drugs. The European Union and U.K. racing jurisdictions still ban the presence of Bute and Lasix on race day.

Whatever explication of the Harthill canon one makes, his efforts both within and without the rules had a singular purpose: to enhance the performance of his subjects. But what if he had conspired to hinder a horse’s performance? To “stop one” in track-speak. A predation of that nature would eclipse all of Dr. Harthill’s prior missteps.

The subjects of our 2016 letter were Holy Bull and his trainer Jimmy Croll. In the 1994 Kentucky Derby, the heavily favored Holy Bull was upset by Go for Gin when the former ran with an uncharacteristically listless disinterest.

The 6/5 favorite had finished 12th in a 14-horse field and yet the stewards had not ordered any post-race drug tests for Holy Bull. Though not dictated by rule, such tests are routine in such instances.

Following is an excerpt from our 2016 letter:

“They got to my horse. I know more than ever that Holy Bull was drugged.” Croll discussed the lax security around his barn at the time and an unnamed character of ill repute that he spotted repeatedly there during the days before the Derby. Authorities later investigated that individual for being in possession of large quantities of the sedative Halcion for which he had no prescription. No charges resulted from the inquiry. “If I had to do it all over, I would have scratched Holy Bull from the Derby. He was sluggish a couple of days before the race, and he was sluggish the day of the race. Looking back now, I can see where there was a reason for that.” Croll added that several months after the Derby, he received an unsolicited visit from the

F.B.I. regarding the circumstances around the race and his horse's performance. Whatever trail existed went cold at that point.



ALEX HARTHILL

There is now reason to suspect that the ‘character of ill repute’ lurking near Jimmy Croll’s barn was none other than Alex Harthill. A year and a half following Holy Bull’s inexplicable performance in the Derby, the D.E.A. filed suit against The Doc and his wife in federal court on 102 charges of ordering large quantities of controlled drugs not customarily prescribed for horses. The list included painkillers, amphetamines, and the anti-insomnia medication Halcion. The D.E.A. sought a judgment of \$2.5 million but the case was settled out of court and sealed.

Halcion would have been an ideal choice for stopping Holy Bull. The drug’s sedating effect would have been just enough to take the colt off his game with no lasting physical harm. Prior to his death at 88 years in 2008, Jimmy Croll had narrowed his list of suspects to one: The Doc.

In his funeral oration eulogy of Julius Caesar, Marc Antony averred that “the evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones. So let it be with Caesar.”

For Harthill the reverse was so. The litany of real and imagined evils attributed to him never seemed to stick. And on his passing in 2005 at age 80, gushing encomiums from the biggest names in the racing game blocked out those ethical scars.

That is shameful but in no way surprising. The thoroughbred racing community has always possessed a seedy population segment with little if any regard for the rulebook.

Decades ago, a wizened Fair Grounds veteran of my acquaintance was asked if the game was on the up and up. His reply still rests indelibly in my mind:

“Lady, if the game was on the up and up, there wouldn’t be anyone here but the horses.”

Within that context where does The Doc fall in the ethical orbit of freebooters and scalawags that bring so much color to the sport? Tough call.

I would give him a pass in the case of Dancer’s Image for the reasons previously discussed. Either the test was faulty or rigged by home town insiders against owner Peter Fuller.

The Holy Bull incident is more serious and more credible but in the end rests on justifiable suspicion but evidence that is only circumstantial.

In the absence of incontrovertible proof that he intended harm to any horse he treated, the Doc advances at least one circle higher on the Dante’s Inferno scale. But he must be held accountable for his decades as a serial scofflaw of the rules of racing and the well-defined standards of the veterinary profession.

Harthill’s skills transcended a knowledge of the pharmacological impact of specific drugs on the health and performance of equine athletes. He was a masterful hands-on practitioner possessed of godlike diagnostic skills.

We will probably never know how, or even if, he judged his own actions but he evidenced neither remorse nor regret. Although he bet the horses, he was a small player. Surely his circle included examples of errant character but in the milieu of a racetrack, that would not damn him.

What drove this gifted individual capable of fashioning heroic veterinary outcomes bordering on the miraculous to descend into an ethical wilderness populated by charlatans and quacks?

In 1926 the great observer of the political class, H.L. Mencken wrote that

“The mob man, functioning as citizen, gets a feeling that he is really important to the world—that he is genuinely running things. Out of his maudlin herding after rogues and mountebanks there comes to him a sense of vast and mysterious power.”

That lure of “vast and mysterious power” may be what drove The Doc. If that were so, he succeeded. No one ever held sway over Kentucky Derby outcomes as Harthill did. But in the end, we are left with what Donald Rumsfeld categorized as a known unknown: identifiable but unsolvable.

The Doc may or may not have been one of a kind but almost surely, he was the last of a kind.

THE FIELD

Over the forty years of our journal we have made a few large scores, a few moderate scores, and experienced multiple humiliations. Nothing will ever match 2019 for suspense and ultimately unbridled joy. Had the original order of finish been the official result, COUNTRY HOUSE's strong second place finish at 65/1 would have assured us a profit. But the disqualification of apparent winner, MAXIMUM SECURITY, created a lottery-sized jackpot for loyal followers of our letter.

Out ultra-longshot (COUNTRY HOUSE), longshot (CODE OF HONOR), and pick (TACITUS) finished 2-3-4 in the nineteen-horse field. When the stewards unanimously ruled that MAX had interfered with multiple horses entering the lane and placed him seventeenth, our 2-3-4 finish became 1-2-3. The result was a \$2 win payoff of \$132.40, a \$2 exacta of \$3009.60, and a \$1 trifecta of \$11,475.30.

As the lyrics of Dan Fogelberg's song *Run for the Roses* say:

*It's the chance of a lifetime in a lifetime of chance
and it's high time you joined in the dance*

We will never see such a day again but we will take our annual shot once more. This year's field follows:

(1)- FINNICK THE FIERCE- Have to admit there was a time that FINNY gave me visions of another monster score. The one-eyed gelding finished second in the Ky. Jockey Club at two. He is the only one in this field to finish ahead of TTL who was third in that race. FTF's 3YO record has shown promise on occasion but in total is spotty. Can't pick him but will have a small saver.

(2)- MAX PLAYER- Nice score in the Withers in Feb followed by distant thirds to TTL in the Belmont and Travers. Owner switches to Asmussen from NY-based trainer Linda Rice. Rider Rosario opts to pass Derby in favor of Del Mar. Looks like more of a mid-pack PLAYER than a MAX.

(3)- ENFORCEABLE- Son of \$200k stud fee TAPIT whose success as a stallion does not include a Derby win. This guy wintered at Fair Grounds and spoiled me with a win in the LeCompte and then buried me in the Risen Star and La. Derby. Blue Grass effort was more of the same: walk

out of the gate and pass tiring horses late. That might get him a piece at a mile and a quarter.

(4)- **STORM THE COURT**- By tradition the winner of the BC Juvenile becomes the early Kentucky Derby favorite in the winter book. Stormy's win at 49/1 was greeted with skepticism by the smarts and apparently rightly so. He has failed to win in his five subsequent starts at three. Third in the Ohio Derby as the favorite. Not inclined to be courtside on Saturday.

(5) **MAJOR FED**- Came from last of fourteen in the La Derby to be fourth followed by a no-show tenth in the Matt Winn at C.D. Last start a pedestrian second in the low-profile Indiana Derby. If anyone asks Hoosier Daddy at least he can answer BC Classic winner **GHOSTZAPPER**. MF will need quantitative easing of the competition level to get in the winner's circle.

(6)- **KING GUILLERMO**- Owned by retired Detroit Tiger All-Star Victor Martinez. Was convincing in his Tampa Derby win at 49/1 and followed that with a strong second in the better division of the Arkansas Derby. All good if the Derby had been run in May but KG has not run since to prep for a September Covid Derby. That four-month quarantine could be the Tell for this William though recent works at C.D. have been sharp.

(7)- **MONEY MOVES**- The **MONEY** definitely moved to him at the two-year old sale where he brought \$975K. Son of **CANDY RIDE** moved into this slot when Pletcher opted out with **DR POST**. Castellano picks up the mount with defection of **CARACARO**. Connections and pedigree are A+ but resume is skinny if promising. Zero stakes starts and zero Derby points.

(8)- **SOUTHBEND**- Well-bred son of **ALGORITHMS** was sold to a partnership following his second-place finish in the Ohio Derby and moved to the barn of last year's winning trainer Bill Mott. In one start since was a way back fourth in the Travers. Looks like another owner-vanity last minute entry. SB will need more than the luck o' the Irish here.

(9)- **MR BIG NEWS**- Another of the 11th hour wannabees that buzzed into the entry box. Spent the winter here where he got his first win on his fourth try. An uninspiring fifth in the Blue Grass his last start. Has a Euro pedigree that seem to fit the turf better than the dirt. Has a ways to go to justify his moniker but certainly not Fake **NEWS**.

(10)- THOUSAND WORDS- Started with three straight wins before a couple of so-so setbacks against the big hitters. Reentered the conversation with a 9/1 upset of HAP in what was supposed to be a final Derby tune-up for that one. The race earned TW a 104 Beyer Fig making his \$1 mill yearling price more credible. Another Baffert-trained mystery horse that could finish anywhere.

(11)- NECKER ISLAND- Named for a spot in the BVI owned by Richard Branson, the other son of HARD SPUN in here took some of our money finishing fifth in the MATT WINN at C.D. in May. In his next start he was claimed for \$100k, a healthy discount from the \$250k he brought as a yearling. New owners got a pair of thirds in the Indiana and Ellis Park Derbies for their effort. Nice claim but hard to convert two minor derby thirds into roses at Churchill.

(12)- SOLE VOLANTE- His name in Italian means Flying Sun and his winter record in Florida was bright. His only start outside of Florida was a crash and burn in the Belmont where he was 15 lengths behind TTL. Even if you throw that race out it takes a leap of faith to envision this son flying in Louisville.

(13)- ATTACHMENT RATE- Son of one of my all- time faves HARD SPUN who gave us half of the exacta with STREET SENSE in 2007. Most of the HS offspring have early speed but this guy runs with a detachment rate in his opening fractions. Last start was a non-threatening second to ART COLLECTOR in the Ellis Park Derby. Barring a sudden improvement, he appears in pretty deep here.

(14)- WINNING IMPRESSION- Record of late has been WINNING depression with a pair of seventh place finishes in the Ellis and Indy Derbies. No Derby points and few Derby prospects. Owners are racing partnership marketers and starting a horse here is good for biz. Not impressed.

(15)- NY TRAFFIC- This blue-collar NY bred has hit the board in all four 3YO starts and all in Graded Stakes. Earned his first triple digit buyer in his final Derby prep, a close second to AUTHENTIC in the Haskell. Although the difference was only a nose, AUTHENTIC appeared lazy more than tired after making the lead. Still NYT's progress has been steady if unspectacular and another step forward could make him a threat.

A bet could get you stuck in Derby TRAFFIC but also could land you in the HOV Lane.

(16)-HONOR A.P.- Has the fewest starts (5) among the major contenders but has made them count including an upset of 3/5 favorite AUTHENTIC in the S.A. Derby. Then in a shorter race for his final prep, HAP's backers made him 1/5 but he looked bored until the final strides when he got up for the place. Trainer Shirreffs at 75 is a wise old owl who brought GIACOMO home for us in the '05 Derby at 50/1 and guided the sublime ZENYATTA to greatness. Mike Smith was aboard for those and will partner with HAP on Saturday. Pedigree and profile fit the distance well.

(17)- TIZ THE LAW- Tiz the chalk and deservedly so. Same owner and trainer as '03 Derby Champ FUNNY CIDE. Both are NY Breds which is no longer a pejorative if not high praise. TTL has an ideal profile for this race in pedigree, running style, and consistency. In his last prep he buried a decent if unspectacular field in the mile and one quarter Travers Stakes. That race also negated the criticism that he had not improved from 2 to 3 with his speed figures. He earned a 108 Beyer number in that facile score. TTL's sole career defeat was at Churchill Downs on a sloppy track as a 2YO. The price will render him unbettable for us but certainly the likely winner.

(18)- AUTHENTIC- Was three for three going into the S.A. Derby when HONOR A.P. reversed the order from their previous encounter in the SAN FELIPE. His name is not a misnomer but his appetite for a mile and a quarter is questionable. Never discount Baffert in this race. Johnny V rides for the first time as Smitty sticks with HAP after partnering AUTHENTIC's Haskell score. AUTHENTICity guaranteed.

OUR PICK

This year's favorite, TIZ THE LAW, possesses the ability to stalk and pounce and has proven himself at the Derby distance. Conceivably an opponent with exceptional speed might run away from the field and be beyond TTL's late kick. We don't see one among the entries though AUTHENTIC is a possibility and to a lesser extent so is THOUSAND WORDS.

If a rider chooses to track TTL and go with him when he moves, good luck. He has waved goodbye to all that have tried that so far. Maybe, just maybe there is someone he hasn't faced yet that possesses the ability to out finish him. That is also a reach but at least we have a candidate.

Our pick was a \$850K yearling and is from the first crop of 2016 Older Dirt Male Champion, HONOR CODE. HC is a son of the great A.P. INDY. Whatever other qualities our pick gets from his sire and grandsire, one is of particular interest. All three are ridglings. That is, they possess testicles but they are not descended. You can't say the apple hasn't fallen far from the tree because the apple has not fallen at all.

Our pick's running style and pedigree suggest the mile and a quarter will be a great fit. His mom, HOLLYWOOD STORY, was a million-dollar Grade I winner and possesses numerous stamina influences in her pedigree.

We have always believed in respect for elders especially since becoming one. So why not.....

HONOR A.P.



LONGSHOT PICK- We are going with NY TRAFFIC for the longshot spot this year. NYT is the less celebrated of the two NY breds here but he has outrun his humble pedigree and possesses an energizer bunny quality we like.

ULTRA LONGSHOT PICK- This is always a stab and prob just another losing ticket but can't seem to shake FINNICK THE FIERCE from my mind. (Still haunted by the memory of MINE THAT BIRD in '09. Bet him every start and abandoned after a poor effort in his last Derby prep. He then splashed home first at 50/1). Think FINNY is capable of making a late move and could get a piece of the tri or super at a monster price. MAX PLAYER has improved with every start though trailing TTL by a lot in the last two. MAX and HAP are both sons of HONOR CODE.

THE BET

The entry day minor foot injury to would-have-been second choice ART COLLECTOR has turned our betting economics awry. We had visions of HAP being fourth choice at 8/1 at least. The Morning Line now has him second choice at 5/1. We will still play...win only.

Our longshot pick, NY TRAFFIC, is 20/1 on the line. More to our liking. We will bet him win, place, show.

We will do the same with our ultra-long picks, FINNICK THE FIERCE and MAX PLAYER, but very small.

EXOTICS- Our main exacta box will be TTL-HAP- NYT- AUTHENTIC That is 15-16-17-18. We will use the same for tris and throw in FTF and MAX, #1 & #2, in a tiny super.

We include AUTHENTIC though unsure of his ability to get the distance. But if he gets an easy lead, he could hang on very late.

As always in the words of professional boxing referees, "Good luck and protect yourself at all times."

-JTR