

# **RICE'S DERBY CHOICE JOURNAL**

**2009**

**30th Edition**

If you followed our advice last year, you are, willingly or unwillingly, in league with our new President because like Mr. Obama our letter embraces "Hope and Change." Change was all we had left after last year's renewal, but a change of result this year is deeply hoped for. Our principal pick last year, Colonel John, was clobbered early in the race and finished bravely despite that. Long shot Gayego was hopelessly wide into the first turn trying to gain the lead and lost all chance. The Colonel later won the Travers and Gayego was purchased by Sheikh Mohammed and has raced with distinction in Dubai. All of which means only that we got it wrong.

This year again possesses the challenge of translating synthetic surface form to the dirt, appraising the new minimalist school of training for this grueling contest, and of course the relative strength of regional markets: West, Midwest, and East. This year we can add a fourth: Mideast, as in Dubai.

Will the flock of deep closers be compromised by a "petty pace?" Will the precocity of Dunkirk overcome his sound bite sized past performances? Can Friesan Fire hold his form with almost two months between starts? Can a son (Musket Man) of a stallion (Yonaguska) that stands a five iron from your editor's farm in Nowheresville extend his Al Davis inspired "win baby win" consecutive Graded Stakes win streak to three?

All these queries and any of your own will be settled this Saturday in a few ticks over two minutes. Let's take a look at the field:

**WEST SIDE BERNIE-** Ran decently in BC Juvenile and earned a triple digit Beyer in Revenge's Wood but is more of an outsider here than East Side Bernie (Madoff) who is 100/1 to ever leave the gate.

**MUSKET MAN-** Has already outrun his pedigree in Tampa Bay and Ill Derby wins but mired in Rodney Dangerfield ratings. "Ooo I tell ya..can't get no respect." Probably in deep here but he is definitely more Musketeer than Mouseketeer.

**MR. HOT STUFF-** Full brother to last year's pick, Colonel John, which you can imagine put him on the screen early. Late bloomer (unlike John) has steadily moved forward and third place close in S.A. Derby was promising. Did not expect him in Louisville and fact that conservative trainer Eoin Harty is there says a lot. Expect a surprisingly good effort.

**ADVICE-** Yet another Pletcher (count 'em three) starter gets in off of last chance saloon win in the Lexington. Yes, Charismatic won the Derby off of that race and the Saints won a playoff game. Someday it will happen again. The advice is here is not this year.

**HOLD ME BACK-** Apropos name for long shot players as he is tempting though best efforts were on synthetic surfaces in Lane's End (1st) and Blue Grass (2nd). One of three WinStar starters, this guy is

trained by Cigar's conditioner (Bill Mott) and partnered by three time winner Desormeaux. Pedigree has grass/synthetic lean as do past performance lines. Price could overcome that reservation.

FRIESAN FIRE- Was the backup in the Larry Jones stable until Old Fashioned's career ending mishap in the Arkansas Derby. Long striding son of A.P. Indy swept the 3YO stakes series at Fair Grounds including a blowout in the La. Derby. Seven week layoff and no race beyond a mile and a sixteenth are only concerns. Friesan has torched the Churchill surface with final Derby work so probably can throw out the "forgotten horse" theory on this guy. Major player.

PAPA CLEM- We bet him at 17/1 when he got beat (2nd) a long neck by Pioneer, bet him again when a got beat (2nd) a long way by Friesan, and finally cashed in the Ark Derby. Another second generation (Papa was Clement Hirsch, owner is son Bo) homebred with predictably quality blood. Son of emerging super sire Smart Strike (Curlin et al.) and rock hard Miss Houdini. Trainer Stute and rider Bejarano deserve more respect than they are getting. This Clem is no Kadiddlehopper.

MINE THAT BIRD- The other first crop Birdstone was on our list early with his 2YO Canadian wins. Ran awful in the BC Juvenile and hasn't shown us much at three. Hate to say it with our personal bets on the sire but Miney looks like a Flight of Fancy, Eh?

JOIN IN THE DANCE- Or more appropriately Backed into the Dance thanks to unexpected defection of Square Eddie. Was all the pace in his eventual fifth place finish in the Blue Grass and figures to play the rabbit for the Pletcher team that is banking on a big late move from Dunkirk. Prediction here is this Dance will end around after a mile.

REGAL RANSOM- The other Godolphin guy also summered at Saratoga at two and was thought to be the understudy until he upset D.P. in the UAE Derby. Same sire as Funny Cide and very likely to get first mover advantage on pacesetter Join in the Dance and has the pedigree to hang around late...very late.

CHOCOLATE CANDY- Ironic name for a homebred of diet queen, Jenny Craig. We always loved sire Candy Ride. This guy has chased Pioneer home twice but getting closer. Was way, way wide in the S.A. derby and still only a length behind at the wire. NoCal trainer Hollendorfer won't get headlines but fade his action at your peril. Price will be big and you get Giacomo's rider, Mike Smith, in the deal.

GENERAL QUARTERS- Retired high school principal claims horse for \$20k and goes to Derby sounds like a stretch. But he was clear in the stretch in the Blue Grass. Also rans in the Blue Grass fare much better than winners when the game moves to Louisville. A first quarter of the field finish is our best hope for this General.

I WANT REVENGE- Respectable Cal efforts on synthetic surfaces were followed by freakish efforts in the Gotham and Wood at Aqueduct. Likely favorite is by the underrated Stephen Got Even (which was owned by disgraced CEO of Conseco Inc., Stephen Hilbert). IEAH crowd of Big Brown fame bought into the deal after big Gotham score. They kept trainer Jeff "I Want Syringe" Mullins, whose illegal medication missteps rival Robert Downey, Jr. Only good biped in this picture is star teenage jock, Joe Talamo, who began exercising horses age twelve right here in Folsom, La.

ATOMIC RAIN- Someone has to be number twenty and he is it. Nuclear winter will win a Derby before Atomic Rain.

DUNKIRK- This guy was a \$3.7 mill yearling and may well end up being a bargain. Was sent off the chalk in the Florida Derby before giving way to Quality Road in deep stretch. Now that quarter cracks have forced Q.R. to take the "road less traveled," Dunny will likely get pounded at the Churchill windows. And if he doesn't get there, we will see a recreation of the WWII Evacuation of Dunkirk.

PIONEER OF THE NILE- His wins are called ugly but they keep accumulating and horses he vanquished (Revenge and Clem) shipped East and notched Grade I wins. All starts are on synthetics but dirt works at Church impressive. Three time Derby winner Baffert trains and top rider Gomez opts to stay here over Dunkirk. Pedigree cries for Derby distance and if this guy is not in the frame the Pioneer will be a Pie in the Ear.

SUMMERBIRD- This son of Belmont winner Birdstone came from the clouds, off a maiden win, to finish a narrow third in the Arkansas Derby. Now when it comes to Swami Angles, you can't beat this. Innisfree Farm's only yearling is a colt by Birdstone foaled on the 86th birthday of your editor's Dad. This Bird's trainer is named Tim Ice. This is as close to a Derby start as we will ever get. We have to bet him. You, of course, don't.

NOWHERE TO HIDE- Eleventh hour sneak in on Win Willy's late scratch. Up the track in all Derby preps. Next start after Derby will be a non-winners of two. Respect trainer Zito but think the D. Wayne Derby flu may have spread to Nick's barn.

DESERT PARTY- One of two Dubai brothers to take a shot this year. Both in a sense have dual citizenship as they are both U.S. bred and raced here as two year olds. He was a \$2.1 mill yearling and is by Street Cry, sire of '07 winner Street Sense. Derby has evaded the hugely successful Godolphin enterprise but this year's entrants are their strongest hand to date. If they don't get a piece of it this year, they may become the deserted party.

FLYING PRIVATE- This we know: Ole D. Wayne would run Mr. Ed in the Derby if the alternative was not being in area code 502 on May's first Saturday. Now this is not a bad horse but disappointed in the Ark Derby after placing in the Lane's End. Do not think this private is first class.

#### THE PICK:

This year's final cut has been as tough as any in memory. By definition the favorite, I Want Revenge, was a toss out. Next to go was Dunkirk. Despite his obvious talent, we worry that a start that looks like a Wal-Mart opening on Thanksgiving Friday could be tough on a colt with no 2YO experience. Pioneer of the Nile has done nothing not to like but short price and trying to win five straight cooled our enthusiasm. We'd love to see the Friesan Fire connections in the winner's circle but the weak gallop out, after his torrid work, left us a bit apprehensive of a short priced horse. The Dubai contingent looks like they will be closer this year than any previous and Desert Party was our last finalist to go.

This left us with our pick who will be double digit odds for sure. His second place finish in the Santa Anita Derby to Pioneer left no doubt about his ability to close or to stay. His overland route probably approached a mile and a quarter that day so we know he can handle the Derby distance.

His sire, Candy Ride, has replicated his own ability in his progeny and his dam, Crownette, by Seattle Slew is replete with other classic names like Affirmed and Alydar.

Our pick is a deep closer so don't lose heart if we are out of it early. We are relying on pilot Mike Smith to keep him out of trouble and wound tight for that big late run.

Owner Jenny Craig has been responsible for thousands of pounds of weight loss but this go round we'd like to put on some pounds and dollars. So how about a bite of CHOCOLATE CANDY!

LONGSHOT SPECIAL- More like a moonshot than a longshot. MR. HOT STUFF will likely be 50/1 but he was just behind CANDY in the S.A. Derby and is improving by the day. One more jump forward could put him right there.

THE BET- We will make a serious win/place play on CANDY and bet MR. across the board. Our exacta box will be the first three S.A. Derby finishers: PIONEER OF THE NILE-CHOCOLATE CANDY-MR. HOT STUFF. Needless to say we are looking for an IRS deduct if we hit any of this stuff.