Jim Mazur's 2024 Derby Day Epilog

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As is my custom, I always recap the Oaks and the Derby day cards. The Derby card featured a drying out dirt track first listed as "muddy" but then quickly to "good." Turf course was listed as "good" throughout the day.   Let's see how things turned out.

Selections For Race 1

	Prog #	Horse	Comment if any
Most Likely to Win	1	Evan on Earth (3-1)	**Trainer bats 27% with 90+ day layoffs. 29% with Gaff.**
Value Plays	6	House United (5-1)	**Blinks on but that is not a positive move for Stall.**
Bombers		NONE	
Heads Up	5 2	Lou's Legacy (6-1) Pure Force (5-2)	**Likes to earn "pieces." Use underneath.** **Not much of a price and the FTS pedigree is just average but this is a must use in the opening Pick 5 mainly because the experience runners are mediocre and Cox bats 25% with FTS.**

We started off on a nice note, as the HEADS UP on PURE FORCE was right on albeit at just 8-5.

Selections For Race 2

	Prog #	Horse	Comment if any
Most Likely to Win	6	Scylla (6-5)	**Easy spot. Single material in the P5.**
Value Plays	4	Steel Racer (8-1)	**Loves the distance; win at CD; in great form.**
Bombers	9	Baby Gundin (30-1)	**Won at CD in November; Just scored at Hawthorne. this the "Last Out Winner Ignored" angle in play.**

We didn't really help anyone in here...SCYLLA whisted home at 1-2 odds.

Selections For Race 3

	Prog #	Horse	Comment if any
Most Likely to Win	9 11	**Invigorated (9-2)** **Mindframe (2-1)**	I find it hard to believe that Repole/Pletcher would run both of these; I expect one to scratch. If not, note that Irad sticks with #11.
Value Plays	1 2	**Cartucho (4-1)** **Cornishman (5-1)**	Won as FTS for Chad Brown going 7f. Upside for sure. Has advantage over #1 and #11 in that he has already won around 2 turns.
Bombers	4	**Anthem King (20-1)**	Ran a solid number on TP synthetic. Could add some fireworks to the exacta or trifecta.

Again the heavy fave won...MINDFRAME also at 1-2 odds with CORNISHMAN running 2nd for a $9 exacta. Ughhhhhh.

Selections For Race 4   Knicks Go

	Prog #	Horse	Comment if any
Heads Up: Many entrants in this race are coming OFF LASIX including the MOST LIKELY. I have tried to ferret out the runners that have performed best OFF of LASIX.			
Most Likely to Win	6	**Best Actor (5-2)**	Won the Smarty Jones without LASIX but that was in '22. No wins without since but maybe good enough without to win this.
Value Plays	7	**Kapuna (6-1)**	Ran 2nd in this race without LASIX last year and has a nice tuneup at Evangeline Downs. Solid shot.
Bombers	11	**Oscar Eclipse (8-1)**	Just won a GP ungraded stakes going 7f OFF LASIX and shows a win at CD and at the distance but both of those wins required LASIX.

Credit rider Florent Geroux for hustling STRONG QUALITY from the gate. There was other speed signed on but Geroux out broke them. This 5-year-old seemed better on turf (6-3-1-0) and had a history of seconditis, AND was coming off LASIX with no previous wins without that elixir. That's why he wasn't on my radar in the Knicks Go. KAPUNA, the VALUE PLAY, ran 2nd at 6-1.

The CD Turf Sprint (1st Leg of the Middle of the Card Pick 5)

Selections For The CD Turf Sprint	
Most Likely to Win	**Mischief Magic (4-1)**
Value Plays	**Coppola (10-1)** **Big Invasion (5-1)**
Bombers	**Arrest Me Red (10-1)** **Eamonn (12-1)**

"A" TEAM	
#	Horse
3	Coppola (10-1)
8	Mischief Magic (4-1)
10	Big Invasion (5-1)
12	Arrest Me Red (10-1)

"B" TEAM	
#	Horse
11	Mister Mmmmm (20-1)
13	Eamonn (12-1)

"C" TEAM	
#	Horse
	#1 #2 #4 # 5 #6 #7 #9 #14 AEs: #15-#17

This is one of my favorite races of the weekend, and one in which I have had consistent success with a fairly simple formula: (1) stick to runners breaking from outside posts; (2) preferably exiting the Shakertown or some other Keeneland race; and (3) with 2-3 starts during the campaign but at least one.

But, sometimes, a runner will jump up in any given race and break the mold so to speak. In this case, it was COGBURN, a former dirt sprinter that found a new lease on life in turf sprints last summer and fall. I liked that he was breaking from the 14 post but couldn't see him winning off an 8-month layoff. So I used him underneath.

Rider Irad Ortiz Jr broke him sharply, stalked and then pounced. Trainer Mark Casse entered FILO DI ARIANNA, another runner that was 0'fer previously without LASIX. He ran big today, finishing 2nd at 29-1. Meanwhile favorite MISCHIEF MAGIC settled for 3rd while '22 champ ARREST ME READ and the BC Turf Sprint runner-up BIG INVASION were up the track.

A disappointing result but these things happen.

Derby City Distaff (Leg 3 of the Oaks/Derby Pick 6):

Selections For The Derby City Distaff	
Most Likely to Win	Alva Starr (5-2) Vahva (3-1)
Value Plays	Red Carpet Ready (9-2)
Bombers	Chi Town Lady (15-1) Sterling Silver (15-1)

"A" TEAM	
#	Horse
4	Chi Town Lady (15-1)
7	Alva Starr (5-2)
9	Red Carpet Ready (9-2)
10	Vahva (3-1)

"B" TEAM	
#	Horse
1	Three Witches (8-1)
8	Sterling Silver (15-1)

"C" TEAM	
#	Horse
	#2 #3 # 5 #6

This race was the 3rd leg in the Oaks/Derby Pick 6, so I hoped that one of my five runners would get home.

My hopes for a score were with CHI TOWN LADY, working lights out for trainer Wesley Ward after a sharp score in a Tampa stakes. She had never strung two wins together much less two races within 45 days. But Ward seemed to have her in the right place.

Unfortunately, she broke behind the field and left herself with too much to do, gaining 3rd place at 17-1. I'm not sure she would've won the race but probably would've split the two faves, VAHVA and ALVA STARR, to save my exacta key.

VAHVA was on everyone's Pick 6 which now featured two faves and a 2nd fave. Yuck!

The next leg for that sequence would be the CD Handicap in three races.

Distaff Turf Mile (Leg 1 Derby City Pick 6 with mandatory payout):

Selections For The Distaff Turf Mile	
Most Likely to Win	Chili Flag (4-1)
Value Plays	Delahaye (8-1)
	Coppice (5-1)
Bombers	Mission of Joy (10-1)

"A" TEAM	
#	Horse
3	Chili Flag (4-1)
6	Delahaye (8-1)
11	Coppice (5-1)
12	Mission of Joy (10-1)

"B" TEAM	
#	Horse
5	Cairo Consort (8-1)
7	Evvie Jets (6-1)
8	Heavenly Sunday (6-1)

"C" TEAM	
#	Horse
	#1 #2 #4 #9 #10

The Distaff Turf Mile kicked off the $0.20 Pick 6 which featured a mandatory payout. Last year, I had come close to scooping the pot, covering 15 of the 19 entrants but not the winner MAGE (win bet saver...same hedge as yesterday's Oaks).

This race looked to be dominated by a 3-horse uncoupled entry trained by Chad Brown. I used his three and and MISSION OF JOY and called it good.

EZ Peeze. Brown not only held all the cards, he ran 1-2-3 leaving crumbs for the others.

On to the Pay Day where a longshot might be lurking.

Pat Day Mile (Leg 1 of the Derby P5)

Selections For The Pat Day Mile	
Most Likely to Win	**Nash (3-1)**
Value Plays	**Who Dey (10-1)**
Bombers	**Northern Flame (20-1)**

"A" TEAM	
#	Horse
3	Northern Flame (20-1)
7	Who Dey (10-1)
8	Top Conor (5-2)
12	Nash (3-1)

"B" TEAM	
#	Horse
2	Beeline (10-1)
9	Frosty Indulgence (30-1)
11	Vlahos (8-1)

"C" TEAM	
#	Horse
	#1 #4 #5 #6 #10

A full field of evenly matched runners gave handicappers a headache. There were several runners trying to buck history on several fronts:
   One career start: Vlahos   Two career starts: Beeline, Frosty Indulgence, Top Conor
   Stretching out from 6f or 6.5f to a flat mile: Beeline   Vlahos

To complicate the handicapping even further, 2nd choice Nash has more place finishes than victories. I've been doing this a long time but, in this instance, I had handicapper's fatigue and forgot a no-brainer angle: when totally befuddled by a race...hit the ALL button.

I didn't do that. Instead I came up with a tepid foursome for my A TEAM. One of those was BOMBER NORTHERN FLAME. Two races back, this sophomore popped a solid 85 Beyer in running 3rd in the G2 Rebel. Next out, trainer Ken McPeek moved him to the synthetic in the JR Steaks at Turfway Park (finished 8th). Now it's back to the dirt and a 5f CD bullet in the holster. At 25-1, he was perfect for our ticket. Although his trainer, Ken McPeek, won the Kentucky Oaks yesterday, he often settled for pieces on big race days. So I mainly used him underneath.

It didn't matter. NORTHERN FLAME didn't lift a hoof.

SIEZE THE GREY had two career victories...a MSW score and an allowance tally...both on LASIX. In his last two, he was 7th in the Blue Grass and 3rd in the J R Steaks. At this stage of the game, trainer D. Wayne Lukas doesn't miss a dance. This one was forwardly placed and won by daylight over..........my seconditis runner, NASH.

My main caveman p6 plays was kaput but I still alive on a saver ticket.

American Turf (Leg 1 Derby Pick 4);

Selections For The American Turf	
Most Likely to Win	**Legend of Time (7-2)**
Value Plays	**Neat (6-1)** **Stay Hot (10-1)** **Cugino (10-1)**
Bombers	**Lagynos (15-1)** **Can Group (15-1)**

"A" TEAM	
#	Horse
5	Legend of Time (7-2)
6	Neat (6-1)
7	Stay Hot (10-1)
11	Cugino (10-1)

"B" TEAM	
#	Horse
3	Lagynos (15-1)
13	Can Group (15-1)

"C" TEAM	
#	Horse
	#1 #2 #4 #8 #9 #10 #12 #14 #15

This race is always a difficult puzzle and that trend continued in '24 as 14 were entered. Those who get the puzzle right usually have been rewarded with double-digit payouts in each of the last nine editions. Historically, I noted two key trends: (1) 17 of the last 19 winners raced at either Gulfstream, Tampa, Keeneland or Turfway Park in their final American Turf prep; (2) we've seen just two WIRE winners in the last 27 years.

I worked backwards and listed some runners with some eliminating flaws:
Twirling Point: needed LASIX for both scores.

Trikari: both wins came on synthetic; will be part of the pace. Wire or stalker winners rare in this race.

Formidable Man: on LASIX last two with the last a score over SA allowance turfers.

Noted and **Agate Road:** both part of a Repole owned/Todd Pletcher trained uncoupled entry. Each has shifted back and forth between dirt, turf and/or synthetic. **Noted** has yet to Beyer in the 80s; **Agate Road** marooned in post 14.

Abrumar: knows how to win (4-3-0-1) but is front-end oriented and will have company on the engine.

Set and **Can Group**: part of a Mark Casse trained uncoupled entry. **Set** is 2 for 2 and front-end oriented and will be trying to set it up for his late-running stable-mate as that one tries to overcome post 13.

Usually, a Godolphin runner shipping in for Charlie Appleby is an automatic play. And thus I had to respect his LEGEND OF TIME. Yet, unlike most Godolphin Euro shippers, he had run his last three races against "who knows what" on the turf at Meydan. Despite the unknowns, I still tabbed this guy as MOST LIKELY just on the connections alone.

Instead of sticking to the historical profile, I decided to go out-of-the-box and back SoCal invader STAY HOT, a colt that I went ga-ga over last fall in the BC Juvenile Turf. He owed me money and this was the spot to collect.

I was dubious of LEGEND OF TIME and thought I had hitched my wagon to the right longshot. Nope.

Another SoCal invader, FORMIDABLE MAN, set the pace at 24-1. He almost made it but was caught by 47-1 longshot fuzzy TRIKARI, a colt that was 2-for-2 on synthetic but 0 for 2 on the turf. Yikes.

Luckily, I had partnered with two friends in a Pick 4 that ended in the Derby. It was a $700 play that singled longshot HERE MY SONG in the next leg. ALL with 5 with the logicals in the Turf Classic and 9 runners in the Derby. Usually when I hit the ALL button I get a 5-2 shot. But not this time.

CD Hdcp (Leg 1 of the Derby Pick 3)

Selections For The CD Handicap	
Most Likely to Win	**Bo Cruz (10-1)**
Value Plays	**Gun Pilot (10-1)**
Bombers	**Raise Cain (20-1)** **Minnesota Ready (15-1)**

"A" TEAM	
#	Horse
1	Raise Cain (20-1)
3	Bo Cruz (10-1)
8	Minnesota Ready (15-1)
10	Gun Pilot (10-1)

"B" TEAM	
#	Horse
5	Here Mi Song (20-1)
7	Track Mate (12-1)
11	Hoist The Gold (7-2)

"C" TEAM	
#	Horse
	#2 #4 #6 #9

I was really high on BO CRUZ in this race. But he scratched off the program. So I promoted HERE MY SONG from the B TEAM and singled him in the aforementioned Pick 4. I knew that was a bit dicey in a wide-open affair like this one. Plus his trainer, W Stinson Jr, was not a household name.

Last year, Stinston prepped HERE MI SONG in the Big Daddy on the Turfway synthetic. He then upset the Commonwealth before running into Cody's Wish in the '23 edition of this race.

This year, Stinson again prepped HERE MI SONG in the Big Daddy but skipped the Commonwealth for the big dance on Derby day.

I keyed him and took extra exactas and trifectas with my now MOST LIKELY player, GUN PILOT.

This was almost a homerun, as HERE MI SONG took the lead and fought with GUN PILOT before that one put him away. Man, I should've gone two deep in here! But I did have a nice $20 exacta to cash that paid $282.

And, my Oaks/Derby Pick 6 was still alive albeit a bit on the chalky side.

Turf Classic (Start of Derby Daily Double; Leg 5 of the Oaks/Derby Pick 6)

Selections For The Turf Classic	
Most Likely to Win	**Naval Power (7-2)**
Value Plays	**Integration (5-1)** **Program Trading (9-2)**
Bombers	**Webslinger (10-1)** **Never Explain (15-1)**

"A" TEAM	
#	**Horse**
1	Integration (5-1)
5	Program Trading (9-2)
9	Never Explain (15-1)
11	Naval Power (7-2)

"C" TEAM				
#2	**#3**	**#4**	**#8**	**#10**

"B" TEAM	
#	**Horse**
6	I'm Very Busy (4-1)
7	Webslinger (10-1)

Godolphin and Appleby were back, this time with a much more formidable entry in NAVAL POWER. Chad Brown entered a pair in here—PROGRAM TRADING and I'M VERY BUSY. Casse's WEBSLINGER was 2 for 2 on the CD turf but hadn't won on any other surface since capturing the American Turf last spring.

I had them all on the Pick 6 play.

Of the two Browns, I liked PROGRAM TRADING better. He was making his first start of the '24 campaign but this was a race in which previous winners had scored in their seasonal debut. I'M VERY BUSY just won at the Fair Grounds but was now coming OFF LASIX. I was dubious.

So I boxed the PROGRAM TRADING and NAVAL POWER and that is how it unfolded, with the former just getting his head up at the wire. WEBSLINGER showed his affinity for the CD turf by running 3rd.

I was alive in the Oaks/Derby Pick 6.

THE KENTUCKY DERBY

Selections For The Kentucky Derby

Most Likely to Win	**Sierra Leone (3-1)** **Fierceness (5-2)**
Value Plays	**Catching Freedom (8-1)** **Forever Young (10-1)**
Bombers	**Honor Marie (20-1)** **Track Phantom (20-1)** **Mystik Dan (20-1)**

"A" TEAM

#	Horse
2	Sierra Leone (3-1)
4	Catching Freedom (8-1)
7	Honor Marie (20-1)
11	Forever Young (10-1)
17	Fierceness (5-2)

"C" TEAM

#	Horse
	#1 #5 #6 #10 #13 #14 #16 #18 #20 #21

"B" TEAM

#	Horse
3	Mystik Dan (20-1)
8	Just A Touch (10-1)
12	Track Phantom (20-1)
15	Domestic Product (30-1)
19	Resilience (20-1)

Unfortunately, The IT department at Churchill has never been able to figure out how to display the will pays for the the Oaks/Derby Pick 6. I was sitting with just three bullets—JUST MARIE, FOREVER YOUNG and favorite FIERCENESS. Based on the prices, I wasn't expecting a windfall.

My main interest was with FOREVER YOUNG, as I had a $1,500 futures bet on him at 10-1. He was now the third choice at 7-1.

I punched in my *TWILIGHT ZONE* exactas and trifectas and used JUST MARIE and FOREVER YOUNG on the bottom of exactas and trifectas.

JUST MARIE got clobbered at the start and was tutti finutti in just 3 seconds. Trainer Steve Asmussen had put the blinkers on TRACK PHANTOM and assured everyone that they weren't going to gun for the lead. Yea, right. He broke on top with JUST STEEL chasing and FIERCENESS flying from his outside post. But the fave never looked comfortable and went into reverse when asked to run.

Meanwhile MYSTIK DAN, 3rd in the Arkansas Derby but seemingly more inclined to run best on an off track like he did in the Southwest, was stalking the leaders and slipped through on the rail. But SIERRA LEONE and FOREVER YOUNG were bearing down in the stretch. Both were coming like freight trains and leaning into each other along the way.

THE KENTUCKY DERBY continued

In one of the most thrilling finishes in recent Derby history, MYSTIK DAN held on in a 3-way photo finish in which two noses separated the 1-2-3 runners. That was a tough beat for my $1,500 future wager on FOREVER YOUNG. I cashed a consolation P6 payoff for peanuts.

Although I didn't cash out, MYSTIK DAN validated my historical profile. For the weeks leading up to the Derby I had been harping about Derby prep paths. The Wood, Blue Grass, Louisiana Derby and UAE Derby were all winless in many years with the latter two never producing at all. Ditto for the Tampa Bay Derby and, while we are at it, the GP Oaks on Oaks day!

MYSTIK DAN came out of the Arkansas Derby, a prep right up there with the Santa Anita and Florida Derbies in producing Derby winners. But because he hadn't Beyered higher than 82 in a dirt route on a fast track, I simpy didn't give him the respect even though he was one of my A TEAMERS on the Derby Day Pick 6. I watched the Arkasnsas Derby several times. He just didn't seem to have any ooomph in the lane. Neither did Lukas' JUST STEEL. But maybe that's because the Baffert-trainer winner MUTH was much the best that day.

And the Santa Anita Derby winner had scored with just an 89 Beyer and that was a new top for him. I couldn't hang my hat on him either.

So, when it came time to skinny down the Oaks/Derby Pick 6, I went with FOREVER YOUNG and JUST MARIE and an iffy FIERCENESS. I used MYSTIK DAN in the Derby Day $0.20 Pick 6 but got eliminated by the Graham Motion fuzzy in leg 2.

Despite the Derby result, I couldn't be disappointed with the weekend's results and the Oaks Pick 5 payoff.

Expect some new faces in the Preakness and maybe one or two Derby refugees but maybe not the winner...the last time McPeek ran him back quickly, the hoss ran fifth.

Onward.

Jim Mazur