

WHO STOLE THE PAPPY, AND THIS YEAR'S DERBY MYSTERY



CASE SOLVED. George's 2014 Prediction

Before naming the Derby winner....

I will admit to being stumped by a bigger Kentucky mystery. Who stole the Pappy? In case you are not a regular at Cipriani Wall Street or other watering holes for the investment banking set, Pappy Van Winkle Family Reserve is very fine bourbon, and unknown persons heisted 195 bottles of the 20 year old nectar from its distillery last October.

So what's the big deal about stealing some whiskey? It has a street value of at least \$260,000, but this is a deeper loss than money. You can't get bottles of real Pappy unless you pay \$1,300 for stuff of dubious authenticity on the internet. The distillery has always reserved output for the select few because it only puts out 7,500 bottles a year. For reference, the annual output of Jim Beam distilleries is 8 million bottles.

Julian Proctor Van Winkle observed in a pre-heist interview that it takes 20 years to make 20 year old whiskey. Why not increase production for future sales? He sagely observed that no one knows the future. "They legalize marijuana, and nobody is drinking bourbon anymore. I don't want to get caught with a bunch of whiskey."

So, was this an inside job by a worker dissatisfied with his 401(k)? Was it a publicity stunt by the owners of the brand, as some cynics suggest? We only know that it was not the principal of the Bardstown High School, who was a "person of interest" until recently (honest). Franklin County Sheriff Pat Melton says he is now redeploying his assets to solution of other crimes, but the thief should be wary. Sheriff Pat undoubtedly has a list of strip stamp numbers, which would show day and time of each bottle's production. Maybe there will be justice at some future date.

And don't bother putting a bottle of ordinary bourbon in your basement for 20 years with the hope of retirement riches; it will be wretched. The unique mix of grains in Pappy is what makes its graceful aging possible.

... and now, the Derby winner



How could anyone, even the most hard boiled handicapper, not cheer for California Chrome to win the Derby? It's another Cinderella story. Trainer Art Sherman is 77 years old and has been on the track virtually all his life, first as a kid in NY and later as a kid in California, when NY barber dad moved the family West. Young Art Sherman stayed in California. He was a jockey with minor success, even beating Eddie Arcaro once, who gruffly conceded, "Nice ride, kid." Art is respected in California, but it is only now at age 77 that this three year old colt, California Chrome, has put him in all the papers.

Art Sherman is not new to what a 3 year old colt can do. Flash back to 1955. Don Draper had just gotten his first job on Madison Avenue, and the nation was betting on Nashua, whose breeding was almost equal to that of his East Coast owners, the Woodwards. Swaps was from California and Art was his teen age groom, i.e. the guy with the curry and the pitchfork. No one really expected Swaps, a California upstart even if he was remotely descended from Man o' War, to beat Nashua. But he did. Swaps won the Derby, and became a national hero, although Nashua went on to win the Preakness and the Belmont. The following year Swaps was the Horse of the Year and retired with almost \$1,000,000 in earnings in 1950s dollars. In 1955, Art Sherman slept in Swap's stall on the train-ride from California to Kentucky. Talk about credentials.



California Chrome has simply dominated competition in California, including well thought of Hoppertunity, who shipped west just to see Chrome's heels from the vantage point of 5 beaten lengths on April 5. There is only one thing that can beat California Chrome on Saturday, bad luck before the first turn. With 20 horses vying for position, the inside horses sometimes get the worst of it in the Derby. They either need to gun at the start, not usually advisable for a 1 & ¼ mile trip, or hold and stay back, conceding many lengths. California Chrome will be starting from post 5, which is not ideal, but not fatal. As Art Sherman observed:

"To me, the first turn is gonna be the whole race. whether he is sitting in a good spot with 20 head of horses fighting for position."

Watch the first turn. Oh, and if you didn't know, "chrome" is a horse term for flashy white markings, which CC has aplenty. And cheer with Art Sherman, the former groom:

"I think that maybe now I have my own Swaps."

A small flutter

Of course, when I go to the races it is to watch the pretty horses. But some people bet money on races. (Can you believe that?) For those persons, California Chrome is going to be the favorite, and a win bet will probably return \$7 for each \$2 wagered. A show bet (any place in the top 3) could provide a profit of 60% - 100%, with a higher return if long shots capture the two other spots.

But betting favorites, even great ones like California Chrome, does not inspire the imagination in a race where winners have been known to return more than 50:1. So let us unearth a few contenders.

Medal Count at 20:1



He is a throwback to the stout horses of past years, who could run a race and come back a week or two later for another. These days, trainers want more time between races, but the trainer of Medal Count had no choice. To qualify for the Derby, he needed some last minute earnings, so Medal Count won a stakes at Keeneland on April 4 and then was second in a top prep race, the Blue Grass, on April 12. You would think he would be pooped, but reports from the track are that he is squealing, works with his neck bowed, and couldn't be happier.

Trainer Dale Romans has been to the Derby 4 times, and 3 of his horses finished in the money. That's impressive. He is not wasting his horse just to gratify an owner's wish. He is also very clear about the game plan for Saturday. Drop back and make one big run at the end. His 14th post position is ideal for that style, and there will be some horses running very fast, very early, so he will have tiring targets.

Why 20:1? The odds are high because previous recent races were on turf or artificial surfaces, and Churchill has a natural dirt surface. Don't worry. He will run well at Churchill, and a show bet on Medal Count could return as much as \$10 for each \$2 if you bet that way.

Danza at 8:1

His last race, a win in the prestigious Arkansas Derby, was frighteningly good, but he was also lucky. Horses in front banged into each other and he slipped through an opening on the rail. It was the strongest late move that any three year old has made this year. The question is whether he can repeat that effort and if he will have that luck again. In his favor, he was a fast two year old, although he only started twice and then was given a break, probably due to a minor injury. It's nice when horses can rally from behind. It's even nicer when they show they have sprint quality speed, as this one did last year.



Wicked Strong at 6:1



He won the Wood Memorial on April 5, and that race has often previewed the Derby winner. He has Massachusetts connections, and a name that shows the heart of the Commonwealth. The owner is a syndicate of more than 20 investors which was formed by Centennial Farms, a pioneer in the concept that you don't need to be the sole owner to have a lot of fun in racing. Centennial was

founded by the late Don Little, Sr., and I can't say that name without fond memories of a gentleman who was bigger than life. While in his 70's, he came to his end recently in Florida doing what he loved, jumping a horse in competition. Horse people are crazy. We all know that, so let's hope that this wicked good horse does well.



Candy Boy at 15:1



This is a long striding colt, who dawdled and did nothing spectacular as a 2 year old while catching up with his growth. California Chrome beat him by almost 9 lengths on April 5. There is just something about his appearance that makes me think he is going to be very much improved on Saturday. I'm not alone in this. His well-respected trainer, Jon Sadler, has the same view. Ditto for Gary Stevens, who has ridden

him for the last three races and is one of the most sought after jockeys in America. Gary is high on the horse's prospects and, although jockeys are typically sanguine, his endorsement counts.



Ride on Curlin at 15:1 (with Calvin Borel)

Who better to ride in the Derby than Calvin Borel, aka Calvin Bo-Rail? Calvin has won 3 Kentucky Derbys. He is Mr. Patience, and is a savant of sorts, thinking in denominations of 1 & 1/4, the rare distance of the Derby. He will sit chilly on Saturday, waiting and waiting until it's the time when others are gasping. Calvin knows every grain of dirt at Churchill Downs. Ride on Curlin was a reasonable second in the Arkansas Derby behind Danza.

Calvin didn't ride him that day. Expect better things this Saturday.



Intense Holiday at 8:1



He's got the connections: trainer Todd Pletcher and Jockey John Velasquez. He's the "wise guy" horse this year, and is reasonably accomplished with good showings in the Louisiana Derby and the Risen Star Stakes, both of them decent prep races in New Orleans.



What encourages me most is this recent comment from Daily Racing Form reporter, Mike Welsch, after watching Intense Holiday's final pre-race breeze: "Best of the day."

Enjoy the day, and don't waste your Pappy on a Julep.

Please. It would be a sacrilege. Just neat in a glass, and use ordinary bourbon for your julep.

If you do want a good julep on Saturday – it usually takes a year for my palate to recover – there is an excellent recipe on the food network at this link. <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/the-perfect-mint-julep-recipe.html> ***Be advised*** this is a 24 hour and 35 minute process to really do it right, but it's less than you need for Peking Duck.

Enjoy this Saturday. Of course, I know you will all be kind on Monday, regardless of the outcome.

George Chimento
May 2, 2014

"... a man of excellent birth and education, who squandered a fortune upon the turf, and who lived now by doing a little quiet and genteel bookmaking." A. Conan Doyle -- Silver Blaze.