

# THE WIZARD SETS HIS CRYSTAL GAZE ON THE DERBY HAZE

By Michael Kipness

*In the following article, which was written exclusively for readers of The HorsePlayer Magazine, The Wizard shares his scouting reports for five definitive Kentucky Derby prep races this year. While these reports will obviously be helpful in handicapping the Run for the Roses and the other two jewels of the Triple Crown, the "Looking Forward" sections will also prove invaluable for other three-year-old races during the upcoming months, so plan to keep this issue on your handicapping desk for a long time.*

*But now we've arrived. The Wizard, assisted by Jeff Rosenberg and Bernie Moore, is waiting for us. He leads us to his crystal ball, where we find his crystal gaze looking east . . .*

We're off to see The Wizard. But our journey doesn't involve ruby slippers, a yellow-brick road or a place called Oz. Rather, we'll be taking a long and winding path to Louisville, Kentucky, where the journey culminates in roses, and the reputations of many well-intentioned thoroughbreds will be plainly visible along the wayside, discarded well before we reach our destination.

In our case, The Wizard is perhaps America's foremost public handicapper, Michael Kipness, ex-New Yorker and high school classmate of another famous handicapper, Dave Liftin. And instead of hiding behind a curtain, this Wizard spends his days stationed in front of banks of television monitors in his custom built racing studio at his home in Guilford, CT, viewing races with a keen eye, looking for any scrap of information the past performances or results charts might miss. Hey, it's a hard job, but overlays don't just appear by clicking his heels.

The Wizard has been practicing his painstaking brand of comprehensive handicapping for the general public since 1987, the year selection sheets first appeared for sale at the racetrack. Two years later, The Wizard began selling his informational reports through Bloodstock Research Information Services (BRIS), and from there it's been nothing short of a labor of love. What began 13 years ago as nothing more than a modest flyer covering the NYRA tracks has spun off into Daily Selection Sheets for no fewer than nine circuits. Also included in The Wizard family of products are a National Simulcast Best Bets Sheet, a Pick 3, Pick 6 and Trifecta Sheet, and Weekly Stakes Selections, all accessible via the Internet ([www.brisnet.com](http://www.brisnet.com) or [www.tsnhorse.com](http://www.tsnhorse.com)).

"The goal of my sheet is to challenge the reader intellectually, and to bring a three-dimensional quality to the handicapping process," said The Wizard in a 1996 Daily Racing Form interview. "If I can paint a picture of a race, then a bettor can see where I'm coming from, which helps him form his own visual impression of the event."

And, as The Wizard sees it, a very strong component of that so-called picture of the race involves pace analysis, which he characterizes as 'the last frontier' of handicapping. While many handicappers seek the obvious visual aspects of horses who get into trouble during the running of a race, it's focusing on the subtleties of pace trouble – frontrunners who have to duel through a fast pace, or closers who were marooned behind a crawling pace that the Wizard prefers.

Of course, with such a large market for The Wizard's numerous information products for everyday racing, the demand on expertise for the Kentucky Derby and the other spring classics for three-year-olds just jumps off the charts. During this special time of year, he produces his Triple Crown scouting Reports and Triple Crown (He also generates the same for the Breeders' Cup.) These scouting reports consist of a chart and recap of the major Kentucky Derby prep races. The reports include the usual essential information, like the date of the race, its conditions and the condition of the track, but they quickly get serious by providing information on any path bias operating in that race, as well as any running-style biases at play.

After those preliminaries, The Wizard synthesizes the race, painting precise word-pictures of the running, as captured by his experienced and highly trained eye.

But it's the final part of each report – the section titled 'Looking Forward' - that offers the most value for readers who want to stay one step ahead of the masses. In 'Looking Forward,' The Wizard lays out the implications of each horse's performance on its continued aspirations (or dashed hopes) not only on the Road to Louisville, but beyond. "I look for runners on the verge of blossoming or maturing through competition or seasoning, before those processes occur," says The Wizard. "Also, I take particular note of runners compromised by a track bias or hindered by an unfavorable pace scenario."

# GRADE 11, \$750,000 WOOD MEMORIAL

DATE: 4/15/00 TRACK: Aqueduct TRACK CONDITION: Wet Fast PATH BIAS: Rail 1 RUNNING STYLE BIAS: F/S 1 TRACK PROFILE AND BIAS DESIGNATIONS:

- (F) Frontrunner - dictates the pace at every call.
- (S) Speed - generally one length or less from the lead. Contests or presses the early pace.
- (SC) Short Closer - rates 'just off' the pace. Sometimes sits behind a speed duel, usually less than three lengths from the front. May also be termed a 'stalker.'
- (C) Closer - runs in mid-pack or further back, about four to eight lengths off the lead.
- (DC) Deep Closer - runs toward the back of the field and comes from six or more lengths behind.

NOTE: There will be instances when a particular running style was not dominant. When this occurs, two running styles are specified, with the most prominent style given first.

BIAS INTENSITY: (1) - Slight (2) - Significant (3) - Pronounced

NOTE: Occasionally you will see a (+) after a bias designation. This denotes that the existing bias was nearly potent enough to attain the next level.

FRACTIONAL TIMES: 23.21, 46.83, 1:10.49, 1:35.44, 1:47.92

NOTE CONCERNING TRACK CONDITIONS: Intermittent rain of varying intensity fell throughout the day, but somehow the sun was out just before the Wood, and the result was slightly wet footing that was probably the driest of any race on the card. The official track condition changed between fast, good, and wet fast throughout the day, but the track itself was playing kindly to inside paths, and to horses close to the pace, throughout the day, regardless of official designation.

## ORDER OF FINISH AND MARGINS

1.	FUSAICHI PEGASUS	
2.	RED BULLET	4-1/4
3.	APTITUDE	5-3/4
4.	COUNTRY ONLY	6
5.	APPEARING NOW	8-3/4
6.	POSTPONED	11
7.	CAT'S AT HOME	11-1/4
8.	PAINTED PISTOL	14-1-4
9.	EXCHANGE RATE	16-1/2
10.	FIGHT FOR ALLY	17-3/4
11.	CONNECT	24
12.	TRADITIONALLY	32

## RACE SYNOPSIS:

FUSAICHI PEGASUS was well placed down the backstretch between horses as he stalked a solid pace while well in hand. Always two-three paths off the rail, he was under a snug hold until jockey Kent Desormeaux let it out a notch into the second turn. At that point, FUSAICHI began to roll while three wide, his long strides bringing him closer to the leaders as the field entered the stretch. Desormeaux then really let him loose, and as FUSAICHI PEGASUS changed leads in upper stretch, he all but inhaled the leaders while three-four wide, bursting clear past the eighth pole and galloping home through a very fast final furlong while never feeling the sting of the whip. One can watch this stretch run over and over and just marvel at what an athlete this horse is.

RED BULLET was flanked just outside pacesetter COUNTRY ONLY throughout the race, offering mild pressure down the backstretch but picking it up as they turned for home. He had a tough time getting past that game rival, who was on the beneficial rail, but finally got the better of him inside the eighth pole. By then, however, the race was over as FUSAICHI

PEGASUS flew by them both. RED BULLET finished well for second in a big effort, tasting defeat for the first time in four starts. APTITUDE was up against it from the start as he was bumped around early, then assumed his usual position many lengths off the pace on a track that was very kind to those on or close to the pace and also closer to the rail. He made some progress on the backstretch while never racing near the rail, then put in a furious late run while still quite wide through the stretch to just get up for third at the wire.

COUNTRY ONLY set a solid pace while always racing along the beneficial rail. He fought back stubbornly when confronted in earnest by RED BULLET into the stretch and stayed gamely to the end, losing third on the wire but remaining well clear of the rest of the field.

APPEARING NOW bobbled a bit at the start, rated in midpack along the backstretch, made an inside run on the second turn, then flattened out in the stretch. POSTPONED was bumped just after the start, was content to rate well off the pace, and never really made any headway at any point. CAT'S AT HOME secured perfect stalking position on the rail and rated well until called upon into the stretch, at which point he owed no late bid and was passed by the late runners. PAINTED PISTOL trailed the field along the backstretch and never was a factor thereafter. EXCHANGE RATE was close up while stalking the pace three-four wide, but backed up steadily after six furlongs without ever really making any kind of serious bid. FIGHT FOR ALLY was rated in midpack, had a wide trip, and backed up steadily after six furlongs. CONNECT and TRADITIONALLY were always far back and never got involved in the race.

### LOOKING FORWARD:

We now officially have a favorite for this year's Kentucky Derby. And a very deserving one, at that. FUSAICHI PEGASUS could not have finished this race much faster than he did if he had emulated his namesake and sprouted wings. He showed that he can rate patiently and calmly, then offer a devastating turn of foot, and prolonged drive, whenever asked for it. Jockey Kent Desormeaux declared that, in his opinion, FUSAICHI PEGASUS had taken a huge step forward in this race in terms of maturity and professionalism. Who can argue with that assessment? It didn't matter that he raced off the good rail throughout. It didn't matter that he had never raced outside of California prior to this. It didn't matter that he had to create a decent trip for himself in a full field. He rated behind and between horses, made two separate moves, one into a fast third quarter, and still finished like a flash in :37 flat for the final three furlongs while never feeling the whip, doing it all on his own. This horse is a GQ model, a gymnast, and a world class runner all rolled up into one. And, HE'S STILL IMPROVING!

Okay, okay ... enough superlatives. Now ... was the race FAST?. The best way to put it into perspective is to compare it to an earlier race on the card that involved multiple Grade I winning four-year-old Lemon Drop Kid, who dead-headed for the win. The paces of the two races were within 1/5 of a second of each other at each call up to the six furlongs point, when both races recorded a split of 1: 10 2/5. The next quarter of the Wood went 1/5 faster than the comparable quarter of Lemon Drop Kid's race. However, while Lemon Drop Kid then needed :13.56 to get his last furlong, FUSAICHI PEGASUS got his in :12.48. That, as they say, is real racehorse time. For those who believe in speed figures, I am anticipating that the figure FUSAICHI PEGASUS earns in this race will be clearly the best earned thus far by any Kentucky Derby contender. This colt doesn't appear as if he will have any distance limitations. He's not yet been asked for his best and has still been drawing off in his wins. He is very much a deserving favorite, and a realistic hope to take down the Triple Crown. However, some of the best horses of our times have put in their worst races in the Kentucky Derby. Holy Bull and Skip Away immediately come to mind. The point here is that while FUSAICHI PEGASUS is the most talented three-year-old seen this year, and perhaps in many years, he's no lock in America's toughest race. Watch his works to see how he takes to the Churchill Downs surface. Watch to see if trainer Neil Drysdale starts to get a little nervous (this might be a good thing!). Neil has been down this road before with A.P. Indy, only to see that one scratched the morning of the Derby due to illness. Will this be Neil's year for retribution?

RED BULLET certainly punched his ticket to Louisville with a strong second in the Wood. In most 'normal' years, he would have run a winning race. He handled two turns for the first time with aplomb, and really didn't tire much at the end. He was simply outfinished by a superior animal. Trainer Joe Orseno said earlier in the year that he believed RED BULLET would improve more and more as the distances increased, and so far his assessment has been correct. And, the improved speed that RED BULLET displayed today adds an important weapon to his arsenal. He may need to use it to secure positioning in a large field at Churchill Downs. However, he'll need some luck to be able to turn the tables on FUSAICHI PEGASUS when they meet again.

APTITUDE appears to be the type who will be more of a factor if he runs in the Belmont Stakes than he will in the KY Derby. He really hasn't shown anything in the way of early speed, and is not likely to work his way through a huge KY Derby field well enough to upset the apple cart May 6. I did like his rally against the grain of the track today, and he is lightly raced enough to still have plenty of room for improvement.

COUNTRY ONLY, if nothing else, validated his impressive New York wins earned in lesser stakes earlier this year. He did have the advantage of the rail and the lead today on a track that favored that positioning, but perhaps showed some limits in terms of distance as he weakened late despite those advantages. Sire Carson City's sprinter's blood seems to be making its presence felt through COUNTRY ONLY'S veins. He may develop into a good intermediate distance horse, but is not likely to be a factor by midstretch in the Derby.

APPEARING NOW picked up a decent check for his connections, but should return to the NY-bred ranks, where he could be a terror and make a lot of money. POSTPONED is a nice horse, but has yet to validate his price tag of \$835,000, and is not likely to follow stablemate Lemon Drop Kid's path to the Triple Crown. CAT'S AT HOME looks like he has a bright future, and his outstanding pedigree could see him sprinting or routing equally well. However, it won't be in the KY Derby. EXCHANGE RATE was perhaps the biggest disappointment in this race, but I suppose we should have expected a less than stellar performance when Corey Nakatani took off of him to ride True Confidence in the Arkansas Derby. That makes two dull finishes in a row for this \$1.4 million colt since winning the Risen Star Stakes. He may still show up in the KY Derby because of his owner, who likes to have his horses in high profile races, but it's highly unlikely that he'll rebound enough to be any kind of factor. PAINTED PISTOL, FIGHT FOR ALLY, CONNECT, and TRADITIONALLY all more or less ran to their odds of 70-1 or longer and will not have enough stakes points to get into the Kentucky Derby even if their connections want to run them.

### **THE WIZARD'S TOP TEN DERBY CONTENDERS:**

1. FUSAICHI PEGASUS (2-1)
2. THE DEPUTY (9-5)
3. RED BULLET (8-1)
4. WAR CHANT (8-1)
5. APTITUDE (10-1)
6. HIGH YIELD (10-1)
7. MIGHTY (12-1)
8. CAPTAIN STEVE (17-1)
9. ANEES (17-1)
10. WHEELAWAY (25-1)

This Top Ten list is based on information and analysis available following the prep races of April 15<sup>th</sup>, and is based on an assumption of all variables being equal on Kentucky Derby day, something one must do when compiling such a list three weeks in advance. Certainly, things will change with some of these runners during the days leading up to Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup>, and workouts should be monitored closely, as should the weather. Post position and final composition of the Derby field will also play a major roll in the Wizard's final selections for the race. Commentary on each entrant, final selections, and wagering strategies will be made available, as always, through BRIS ([www.brisnet.com](http://www.brisnet.com)) and TSN ([www.tsnhorse.com](http://www.tsnhorse.com)) on Wednesday, May 4<sup>th</sup>.

# GRADE 1, \$1,000,000 SANTA ANITA DERBY

DATE: 4/8/00

TRACK: Santa Anita Park

TRACK CONDITION: Fast

PATH BIAS: None

RUNNING STYLE BIAS: F/S 1

FRACTIONAL TIMES: 23.29, 47.24, 1:11.57, 1:36.50, 1:49.08

## ORDER OF FINISH AND BEATEN LENGTHS:

1. THE DEPUTY	
2. WAR CHANT	1
3. CAPTAIN STEVE	3
4. ANEES	6
5. SURFSIDE	8-1/2
6. COCKY	11-1/2

## RACE SYNOPSIS:

THE DEPUTY was moving comfortably while flanked three wide outside of WAR CHANT through the backstretch, being patiently ridden while avoiding having to take a lot of dirt in his face. Approaching the second turn, jockey Chris McCarron let out a notch on the reigns and THE DEPUTY made his move, putting in a strong bid while still three wide. Quickening his stride, THE DEPUTY engaged WAR CHANT as those two left early leader SURFSIDE in their wake. With a couple of cracks from McCarron's right handed whip, then a couple of more left handed, THE DEPUTY discouraged any thoughts that WAR CHANT and jockey Jerry Bailey still had of re-rallying along the inside. THE DEPUTY strode out well past the wire and probably could have sustained his strong stretch run even further if asked.

WAR CHANT was well rated off the tepid pace while never more than a length behind pacesetter SURFSIDE and in the two paths throughout. He engaged the front-running filly into the second turn and went by without much urging, but when asked to go stride for stride with THE DEPUTY to his outside through the stretch, simply wasn't up to the task. He finished well while two lengths clear of third, but was either incapable of, or uninterested in, battling tooth and nail with the winner through the final furlong.

CAPTAIN STEVE saved ground down the backstretch while sitting chilly in fourth, was swung out into the stretch, brushed briefly with ANEES, then could not cut into the margin of the top two while finishing well. ANEES was last down the backstretch, began a sustained wide run as the field approached the second turn, brushed with CAPTAIN STEVE briefly in upper stretch, then flattened out. SURFSIDE set a tepid pace on the inside and could offer no answer to her male rivals when engaged in earnest, tiring through the stretch. COCKY struggled to stay within a reasonable distance of the pace down the backstretch and fell further back as the race progressed.

## LOOKING FORWARD:

THE DEPUTY certainly looked powerful with this win, his fourth impressive race in a row. He is now a two time graded stakes winner, and in fact, his lone loss in four U.S. starts was by less than a length to Fusaichi Pegasus while giving that horse six lbs. in the San Felipe and racing wide throughout. The time of the Santa Anita Derby was not sensational, but then again none of this year's three-year-olds have been threatening any track records. THE DEPUTY has displayed as much competitive spirit as any three-year-old I've seen thus far, and from all appearances should be able to be just as effective with the extra furlong of the Kentucky Derby. He showed in this race that he can produce some early foot to establish position, which we already knew, but then relax until asked for his real run by the jockey, something he hadn't yet proven. There appear to be few chinks in his armor. He's consistent, game as the day is long, and has been expertly handled. Whether or not he can improve at all upon this win remains to be seen, as I believe that his connections had him fully cranked for this race. He may not have to improve to win the KY Derby, but he will need to at least reproduce this effort to win it, and is certainly capable of doing so with four week's rest. THE DEPUTY should bring his "A" game to Churchill Downs, and deserves to be among the top three favorites there.

WAR CHANT is a perfect example of why it is so important for a Kentucky Derby contender to have a solid foundation laid as a two-year-old, something that he has not had. When a horse makes it to the races during his two-year-old season, he learns early what the game is all about, and continues to learn as he progresses at age three. But when a horse first starts to race at age three, he still has a learning curve to climb, and to expect him to reach the top of that curve by the time he meets the very best of his generation in the KY Derby is unrealistic.

WAR CHANT did have a single race late in his two-year-old season, but came into the Santa Anita Derby with just three starts. He has now shown in his last two starts that he is still somewhat green and learning about this game. The fact that he's a late foal only adds to the concern that he won't be adequately prepared mentally for the KY Derby. Prior to the KY Derby, he had prevailed in all three starts because he had met lesser foes. He was in fact immature and paying attention to almost everything EXCEPT his competition through the stretch in the San Rafael. He still held on to win because of his ability. When facing a top horse like THE DEPUTY, WAR CHANT was not nearly as focused or game through the stretch as that rival was, and paid the price with his first loss. It's unlikely that he'll mature and improve enough by the first Saturday in May to beat the best of his generation. Jockey Jerry Bailey did suggest to trainer Neil Drysdale after this race that he try blinkers on WAR CHANT, but do you really want your money riding on a horse getting an equipment change for the biggest race of his career because he's still not focused on racing? WAR CHANT has tons of ability, but needs more seasoning.

CAPTAIN STEVE was perhaps deserving of the two-year-old championship last year, but his huge win in the Grade I Hollywood Futurity came after voting was closed for the Eclipse award, so he lost out. He has plenty of foundation, and in fact has not had a layoff since his career began last June. However, he seems to have hit a plateau in terms of ability. While he's still probably good enough to win graded stakes, it's not likely will be one of them, unless trainer Bob Baffert can somehow get him to jump up and run a career best on May 6. It's not impossible, particularly given that Baffert has had such success in the KY Derby, and that CAPTAIN STEVE won a tough Grade 11 stake over the Churchill track as a two-year-old. His stock has slipped, however, with two non-threatening third place finishes in his most recent starts.

ANNES ran very well last time off the layoff, but doesn't seem to have moved forward in this race, as I had expected him to. He looked like he was winding up to make a big run as the field approached the second turn, but then flattened out by midstretch. It should be noted, however, that the track was favorable to speed (not biased, but favorable), and that he was trying to close into a pace that was on the slow side for the first six furlongs. THE DEPUTY got his final three furlongs in about :37 2/5, and it would have been hard for just about any three-year-old to make a dent into that kind of fast final fraction while coming from the back of the field. ANNES winning the KY Derby is not out of the realm of possibility but he'll need a torrid pace, as he got in the Breeders' Cup, and a heck of a lot of luck avoiding traffic along the way as he tries to rally. He'll also need to show considerable improvement off this effort. I am not as optimistic about his chances now as I was prior to this race.

SURFSIDE may still be the leader of the three-year-old filly division, but she proved in this race that she cannot compete with the best three-year-old males. This should come as no surprise to most everyone except trainer D. Wayne Lukas, who seemed to fail to notice that she had not improved at all as a three-year-old over her two-year-old form. Can't blame a guy for trying, I suppose, but don't press on if you don't have the goods. With several other three-year-old fillies showing recent impressive improvement, SURFSIDE may not even be a lock for the Kentucky Oaks, which is where I hope her connections will realize she belongs.

COCKY represents trainer Bobby Frankel's most recent carrier of 'Derby Fever' (remember Honest Lady last year?). COCKY may be a nice horse and have a promising future, but it won't be highlighted at Churchill Downs on May 6. Any realistic chances that Frankel has lie with 9 APTITUDE, and we'll know more about that one after the Wood.

# GRADE 1, \$750,000 TOYOTA BLUE GRASS STAKES

DATE: 4/15/00

TRACK: Keeneland - Race 9

TRACK CONDITION: Fast

PATH BIAS: Inside (1+)

RUNNING STYLE BIAS: F/S (2)

FRACTIONAL TIMES: :23.34, :46.00, 1:09.27, 1:35.58, 1:48.79

## ORDER OF FINISH AND BEATEN LENGTHS:

1. HIGH YIELD	
2. MORE THAN READY	Head
3. WHEELAWAY	3
4. DEPUTY WARLOCK	3-1/2
5. BARE OUTLINE	4-3/4
6. SETTLEMENT	7-3/4
7. MIGHTY	10-3/4
8. HAL'S HOPE	14-3/4

## RACE SYNOPSIS:

HIGH YIELD broke alertly, chased briefly, then benefited from an opening along the rail on the clubhouse turn to establish the early lead inside. He was well handled on the front end by rider Pat Day down the backstretch with HAL'S HOPE to his outside applying pressure. HIGH YIELD was able to dispose of that rival on the far turn, only to be engaged by MORE THAN READY, and he battled gamely with that rival the length of the stretch, prevailing to win by a head.

MORE THAN READY, employing surprising rating tactics, stalked HIGH YIELD and HAL'S HOPE while two wide down the backstretch, split rivals on the far turn, raced well behind a lively early pace, challenged HIGH YIELD through the stretch, brushed with him before changing leads, and fought it out gallantly to the wire.

WHEELAWAY, content to race in the second flight down the backstretch, began to improve his position on the turn, made a bid nearing the eighth pole while in full flight, but could not make up ground on the top two after that, possibly due to the prevailing speed bias at Keeneland.

DEPUTY WARLOCK was badly outrun early, leveled off nicely late on the far turn and into the stretch while racing extremely wide, then closed well late against the bias while racing well out in the middle of the course. BARE OUTLINE, equipped with blinkers for the first time, ducked to the left while hitting the gate at the break. He then quickly recovered and assumed a tracking position behind the early leaders down the backstretch, raced in a bit of a 'pocket' toward the inside, but lacked a positive response once clear on the far turn. SETTLEMENT, without speed throughout, was outrun. MIGHTY veered right at the start, was quickly straightened out, floated out very wide on the first turn, raced well behind a lively early pace, then moved inside on the far turn to commence his bid only to flatten out badly in the stretch. HAL'S HOPE raced outside pressing the early pace of HIGH YIELD down the backstretch, was pushed along to keep pace on the far turn and gave way readily in the stretch.

## LOOKING FORWARD:

Without question, this was the most exciting finish of all the Triple Crown prep races which comprised the BIG 3/PICK 3 on Saturday, April 15. The fractions were quick and the final time credible. That said, the final three furlongs were completed in a rather pedestrian time of :38.82, which does not seem to bode well for these runners on May 6. HIGH YIELD, steadily hounded to set a fast early pace, clearly was advantaged by an inside speed bias and the tight turns at Keeneland. Front-running tactics may be the way to go at Keeneland, but at Churchill Downs, HIGH YIELD might be better served if allowed to rate off the early pace. Trying to wire a Derby field is a difficult task, especially over a course that is usually much fairer to all types of runners, especially at a mile-and-one quarter. Churchill Downs possesses a long stretch and the last eighth of a mile could be HIGH YIELD'S undoing. Hustling tactics would work well in The Preakness Stakes at Pimlico, the middle jewel of the Triple Crown, where its tight turns and speed favoring nature look kindly upon front-runners and pace pressers.

MORE THAN READY dispensed a sharp second in defeat while reverting to rating tactics. He has limited two turn experience and without a doubt this was his best effort over a distance of ground. Although his pedigree might make him a bit suspect at ten furlongs, his newly found ability to rate should serve him quite well at Churchill.

Going into the Blue Grass, I felt WHEELAWAY would benefit from a fast and contentious pace scenario. And he certainly did. However, I was also of the opinion that he was a cut below the top caliber three-year-olds, and this performance did nothing to alter my mindset. On the positive side of the ledger, he is still improving, and doing so quickly. A son of distance influence and Kentucky Derby winner Unbridled, he should only benefit from added ground. However, at this time, he does still appear a longshot to win the Run For The Roses.

DEPUTY WARLOCK'S performance in the Blue Grass Stakes is much better than it first appears. At a distinct disadvantage before the gates even opened given the prevailing speed bias of the track and his come from the clouds running style, he did acquit himself quite well. Although closing into a slow final three eighth's of a mile, he was forced to accomplish this against the grain of the track. Should he head to the Kentucky Derby, he bears watching, as he seems to be the type of runner who could possibly clunk up to complete the final spot on a trifecta or superfecta ticket.

BARE OUTLINE seems to have moved up with the addition of blinkers, but was aided by the speed bias and still tired. He's not ready for the Derby. MIGHTY'S effort was quite puzzling, to say the least. He quite simply never showed up. The trouble he encountered during the early portion of the race was minor and he appeared to race lethargically throughout. He had trained well prior to the Blue Grass, sparkling in his morning workouts at Churchill Downs, a track which he seems to adore. The only contestant in the Blue Grass without Lasix, Mighty 'might' have bled. Look for Lasix to be added should he make the trip to Louisville. HAL'S HOPE, the Cinderella story on this year's road to the Triple Crown, may have seen his 15 minutes of fame. Jockey Roger Velez had to prod HAL'S HOPE to keep pace on the far turn and finally wrapped up on him when HAL'S HOPE was hopelessly beaten in the stretch, as he had nothing left to offer. A well deserved rest may be in order. He has unquestionably earned it.

# GRADE 11, ARKANSAS DERBY

DATE: 04/15/00

TRACK: Oaklawn Park - Race 9

TRACK: Fast

PATH BIAS: None

RUNNING STYLE BIAS: None

FRACTIONAL TIMES: :23.13, :46.87, 1:11.62,

1:36.66, 1:49.08

## ORDER OF FINISH AND BEATEN LENGTHS:

1. GRAEME HALL		8. COUNTRY COAST	10-3/4
2. SNUCK IN	3-3/4	9. HERE COMES ROCKET	11
3. IMPEACHMENT	3-3/4	10. CRYSTAL GULCH	16-1/4
4. ELITE MERCEDES	5	11. AFTERNOON AFFAIR	17-3/4
5. POLISH MINER	5-1/2	12. FAN THE FLAME	19-1/4
6. SCOTTISH HALO	5-1/2	13. TRUE CONFIDENCE	23-3/4
7. RONTON	10	14. TIMBER WOLF	DNF

## RACE SYNOPSIS:

GRAEME HALL was hustled to the lead from his outside post, relaxed nicely on the front end down the backstretch, increased his margin when called upon in the stretch, and drew clear while never seriously threatened late.

SNUCK IN, rating off the early pace while outside of rivals down the backstretch, began a bid on the far turn, raced outside rivals entering the stretch, and finished evenly late to just save the place.

IMPEACHMENT, badly outrun earlier while trailing the field, picked up the pace on the far turn, entered the stretch widest of all, closed with interest while racing out in the track and then lugged in a bit in midstritch, which may have ultimately caused him to just miss second.

ELITE MERCEDES, sent to stalk the early pacesetter GRAEME HALL down the backstretch, pressed that rival to the far turn, then offered only a mild response when asked in the stretch. POLISH MINER, content to race off the pace while racing outside down the backstretch, made a menacing wide middle move on the turn, continued that rally into the stretch, but failed to sustain his bid under pressure. SCOTTISH HALO improved his position while wide on the turn but had little left in the stretch. RONTON raced far back early, raced wide in the stretch and passed some tired horses. COUNTRY COAST, HERE COMES ROCKET and CRYSTAL GULCH had little or no impact on the outcome of the race and were never a factor at any point. AFTERNOON AFFAIR stalked the early pace along the inside and steadily dropped back after six furlongs. FAN THE FLAME rated behind the early leaders in the second flight between rivals, then gave way badly in the stretch. TRUE CONFIDENCE, in good position tracking the early pace while outside of horses down the backstretch, began to falter on the far turn and tired badly thereafter.

## LOOKING FORWARD:

I considered the Arkansas Derby to be the weakest link of the BIG 3/PICK 3 on Saturday, April 15. There were only two graded stakes winners in a field of fourteen runners, those being Scottish Halo, who captured the Grade III Laurel Futurity as a juvenile, and Snuck In, who annexed the Grade III Rebel against a vulnerable field. It would be hard to imagine GRAEME HALL or SNUCK IN outfinishing such top caliber sophomores such as FUSAICHI PEGASUS or THE DEPUTY at the Derby distance of a mile-and-one-quarter. Nevertheless, GRAEME HALL is rapidly improving and could make his presence felt, at least to the stretch, in the Kentucky Derby. However, he will certainly not enjoy the same scenario he encountered in the Arkansas Derby, going unchallenged on the front end.

As for SNUCK IN, ten furlongs appears to be a bit beyond his reach, especially facing top notch competition. He would be well served if kept in middle distance events. IMPEACHMENT did well to finish third, and would have moved up a spot if not for lugging in a bit in the stretch run, as stronger handling might have made a difference in his bid for second. I suggest he follow a similar trail as SNUCK IN, facing softer rivals at middle distances. ELITE MERCEDES was a big disappointment. Not a straw lay in his path and he clearly could not get tire job done. POLISH MINER certainly has ability, but is a tad immature mentally. He could prove to be a quite useful animal should his mind 'catch up' with his body. RONTON would benefit from a respite and a drop in class. COUNTRY COAST can probably run all day, though at this point not against top company.

# GRADE 1, FLORIDA DERBY

DATE: 03/11/00

TRACK: Gulfstream Park - Race 12

TRACK: Fast

PATH BIAS: Outside (2)

RUNNING STYLE BIAS: Short Closers (1)

FRACTIONAL TIMES: :23.49, :47.02, 1:10.86,

1:37.43,1:51.49

## ORDER OF FINISH AND BEATEN LENGTHS:

1. HAL'S HOPE		8. SCOTTISH HALO	14-3/4
2. HIGH YIELD	HEAD	9. DEPUTY WARLOCK	15
3. TAHKODHA HILLS	10	10. ELITE MERCEDES	15-1/2
4. SETTLEMENT	12	11. BARE OUTLINE	25
5. POSTPONED	13	12. HADES	EASED

## RACE SYNOPSIS:

HAL'S HOPE, well handled on the lead, set a pressured early pace, gained a slim lead when HIGH YIELD was maneuvered off the rail, fought back gamely when challenged again by that rival in the stretch, then refused to yield the lead late in a gutsy effort. He had added Lasix for the first time in this race. HIGH YIELD, forced to race along the deeper inside footing down the backstretch, disputed the early pace of HAL'S HOPE. jockey Pat Day was finally able to guide him off the rail on the second turn, attacked the eventual victor once again in the stretch, but could not get by. TAHKODA HILLS improved his position late, although he was never a threat to the top pair. SETTLEMENT, badly outrun after a bit of a tardy start, raced wide entering the stretch and passed tiring rivals late. POSTPONED, outrun early, dispensed a strong middle move while wide on the turn and into the stretch and then failed to sustain his rally. SCOTTISH HALO stumbled when the ground broke from under him at the start, raced as a team with POSTPONED down the backstretch, and had no response when called upon. ELITE MERCEDES, forced to steady a bit early between runners, recovered to reach a contending position down the backstretch, then faltered badly after six furlongs. BARE OUTLINE chased the early pace down the backstretch and gave way. Both DEPUTY WARLOCK and HADES had little or no impact on the ultimate outcome of the race.

## LOOKING FORWARD:

HAL'S HOPE and HIGH YIELD dominated the Florida Derby in the same manner that they have ruled in the two turn Triple Crown prep races at Gulfstream this winter. The half mile of the race, completed in :47.02, was certainly honest. The twosome proceeded to turn up the heat with an intense third quarter mile in an eye-catching :23.84, which successfully 'bottomed out' the rest of the field. The Florida Derby was virtually reduced to a match race from that point on, in what was undoubtedly the most lopsided Triple Crown prep race contested to date for the 2000 season. However, if one is to believe the final time of the race, and one can never be sure of the teletimer at Gulfstream Park, the subsequent 3/8 of a mile was negotiated in a very pedestrian :40.63. This certainly does not bode well for the rest of the runners in the Florida Derby, and casts a cloud of suspicion over the top two finishers as well. Although HAL'S HOPE was extremely tenacious in victory, much has been written of jockey Pat Day's overconfident ride on HIGH YIELD, alluding to the fact it might have actually cost him the race. I strongly disagree. In all three career victories by HIGH YIELD, he has had a clear lead at the top of the stretch. Not once has he passed horses to win while in contention, and in my estimation, could be labeled to be a bit of a "cheater", much like his stablemate Cat Thief.

Both horses are pointing to the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes on April 15 at Keeneland. Although that course owns a well deserved reputation as speed favoring, HAL'S HOPE and HIGH YIELD had best have their running shoes on turning for home as the competition becomes more demanding. At this time, the probability of either horse successfully negotiating a mile-and-a-quarter on the first Saturday in May appears to be bleak. The results of the Blue Grass will obviously serve to form a more conclusive opinion.

Without sounding like I am "a master of the obvious", this was not a contentious race to say the least, as you had to go back ten lengths to the third place finisher. TAHKODHA HILLS has a running style which might suit him well in a race like the Illinois Derby, with a drop in competition over a course which gives off-the-pace runners a better chance to fire their best shot. Although this was to be used as a prep race for POSTPONED, he will certainly have to move forward with giant strides if he is to be competitive at the Grade I level. While still eligible for a second allowance condition, it will certainly be interesting to see if his connections elect to keep him on the Derby trail. SCOTTISH HALO was compromised by a troubled start and raced lethargically thereafter. I am not ready to altogether dismiss him, as his dirt form prior to the Florida Derby fiasco was excellent. Although he had worked well over the course in the morning, it was quite a different case in the afternoon, and something might have been amiss with him. I will continue to look for clues to ascertain the reason for his disappointing performance. ELITE MERCEDES did encounter some trouble early in the race, but it appears he might not be able to compete against this caliber. Also, he could be a horse that is a "need to lead type", as rating tactics have been disastrous thus far. BARE OUTLINE raced within shouting distance of the leaders to the far turn before tiring and would be best served if given a brief respite and dropped a notch in class for subsequent races.

*Michael Kipness, a.k.a. The Wizard, has selected two of the last three KY Derby winners (Silver Charm and Real Quiet). He also provided to his clients the Pick 6 on Santa Anita Derby Day this year that paid \$15,102 on a \$384 ticket. You can reach Michael via e-mail at wizardocshore.com or by calling 1-888-594-1267 for free details about selections by phone.*