



By Jack Mansour

Below are my thoughts about the 139th Run For The Roses. The tradition of writing this article continues. Whether you're in the industry or a casual fan whose only brush with the sport of kings is an annual Derby party, this is written for you. The goal is to convert new fans to the sport one Derby at a time while including enough detail and insight for the semi-serious handicapper. Here's my standard disclaimer... this analysis is FREE and you get what you pay for. The "Jack's Picks" section below has included 4 of the last 5 Derby winners. Let's try it again.

Let's begin with a bit of a history lesson... It's been 35 years since we last had a Triple Crown Winner (Affirmed in 1978) and 40 years since the immortal Secretariat swept the three Triple Crown races (each in a record time). There was a 25 year gap between Citation's Triple Crown sweep in 1948 and Secretariat's in 1973. With a 35 year gap since Affirmed's Triple Crown, is this the year? I wish it every year to no avail. This time, though, it feels like the stars are aligning. In 1969, as famously depicted in the movie SECRETARIAT, Ogden Phipps won a coin toss but chose the "other" foal leaving Penny Chenery with the yet to be born Triple Crown Champion. Now, a generation later, Phipps' descendants come to Louisville with ORB, a colt perfectly bred for the distance (a Grandson of Belmont Stakes winner A.P. Indy and Kentucky Derby winner Unbridled) trained by one of the greatest trainers to have never won the Kentucky Derby. A family's redemption 40 years in the making.

Not only has ORB blossomed this winter as his races have gotten longer, but he is working like he absolutely loves the Churchill Downs track and is peaking at the right time. His final workout was reminiscent of ANIMAL KINGDOM'S prior to that colt's Derby triumph. ORB has finished each of his races as if he's asking for more ground... and now he gets it. I typically avoid favorites and try to find value; but, this horse is acting like he's the ONE. I'm "all-in" on ORB.

Frontrunners: The primary competition will come from VERRAZANO and GOLDENCENTS. VERRAZANO is undefeated in 4 starts and was going to be the favorite until ORB took Churchill Downs by storm this week with his phenomenal workout. VERRAZANO is a physical specimen and has dominated his competition; but, has slowed down as distances have gotten longer. I question his ability to get a mile and a quarter and will try to beat him. GOLDENCENTS is the fastest horse in the field. He'll be on or near the lead and will likely lead the field into the stretch. If his 6 furlong split is 1:11.40 or slower, he may take them gate to wire. Anything faster will leave him vulnerable in the stretch. OXBOW and

FALLING SKY will likely join GOLDENCENTS and VERRAZANO near the lead. OXBOW is an interesting story with hall of fame jockey Gary Stevens coming out of retirement to reunite with "The Coach", D. Wayne Lukas. They have teamed for two Derby wins in 1988 and 1995. OXBOW is arguably the best bred horse in the field being a son of Awesome Again and from the same family as TIZNOW and last year's Belmont Stakes runner up, PAYNTER. Gary will have no choice but to send him from the #2 post, which could cause a faster than expected pace. OXBOW is more than capable of hitting the board at long odds. If OXBOW comes away a little too quickly to maintain his position, it could jeopardize the chance of all four frontrunners. VERRAZANO should get the best trip among this group sitting outside the other speed.

Stalkers: ITSMYLUCKYDAY ran two of the fastest three year old races this year then was no match for ORB in the Florida Derby. He has every right to improve off that performance (as that one came after a 2 month break) and is training very well coming into the race; but, his pedigree suggests he'll peak at 1 1/8 mile and be a bit vulnerable in that last 1/8 mile. He'll be sitting just behind the leaders on the backstretch and outside the other stalkers. He could easily finish in the top 3; but I'm going to try to beat him. GIANT FINISH should be sitting behind the leaders as well, but this guy was just added to the field at the last minute after Churchill Downs' ill-conceived point system failed and the racing office had to save face and start recruiting horses to fill up the starting gate. He hasn't trained with this race in mind, which makes it a tough task; and, he'll be stuck on the rail behind the frontrunners. LINES OF BATTLE is the world traveler of the field. He's from Ireland, just raced in Dubai and has already made an unsuccessful round trip to the U.S. last fall for the Breeders' Cup. He's never run on dirt but is bred for it. I didn't like the way he won the UAE Derby. I'll ignore him.

The next flight of stalkers include OVERANALYZE, PALACE MALICE, FRAC DADDY and VYJACK. OVERANALYZE won the fastest two year old race last year (NORMANDY INVASION was a fast closing second) but won the slowest prep race leading into the Derby. He should have a nice trip sitting just behind the leaders and will have first run on the closers. He's bred to get the distance and could get up for a piece of the pie. PALACE MALICE has been in the top three in all of his races but the Louisiana Derby. That race doesn't count, he was stuck behind horses the entire way and never got out. Mike Smith will figure out a trip from the #10 post: and, being the son of CURLIN, PALACE will get the distance and is sitting on a huge race. The blinkers are going on for this race (not always the best sign going into a big race, but I'll trust Todd Pletcher on this one). This is

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a very live longshot and Mike Smith is at his best on a big stage (just like he was yesterday winning The Kentucky Oaks on a 36-1 longshot). FRAC DADDY is also training very well and LOVES this track. He broke his maiden by over 9 lengths here. His other races are too slow, but deserves some consideration based on his record at Churchill Downs. He may not threaten to win, but could get up in the top 5 at big odds. VYJACK was undefeated before VERRAZANO whipped him in the Wood Memorial. He'll be wide all the way around. That worked for BIG BROWN in 2008 (his trainer was the assistant for BIG BROWN that day), but he's no BIG BROWN.

Mid-pack Closers: ORB leads the group that will sit behind the stalkers and ahead of the deep closers and he'll be sitting on the outside and should get a clean trip. He'll probably improve his position up the backstretch and should put himself into contention on the far turn and will be running late. NORMANDY INVASION is normally a deep closer but he has been training so strongly in the mornings that he'll likely show a bit more speed than usual and may be sitting with this group. His trainer, Chad Brown, has managed him perfectly this year cranking him up slowly and he should be primed to run his best race. He'll be flying in the stretch. He'll need a little racing luck as he'll probably get stuck on the inside and will need to weave through horses to get a clean run in the stretch. He's bred for the distance with TAPIT as his sire and has every right to be in the top three or win it with some luck. NORMANDY INVASION closed into a very slow pace in the Wood Memorial and galloped out way in front of VERRAZANO after the wire. MYLUTE will get bet from a sentimental standpoint with Rosie Napravnik's 60 Minutes interview last weekend. This guy is improving at the right time, and we've discovered in his last race that he's most effective taking back and making one big run down the stretch. MYLUTE is bred for this distance with two Derby Winners, REAL QUIET and STRIKE THE GOLD, in his pedigree; and, will be running in the stretch. He's training like he'll continue to improve. CHARMING KITTEN is a decent and consistent grass or synthetic horse. One problem, this race is run on the dirt. KITTEN is not so CHARMING, though, as he knocked over and stepped on his owner, Ken Ramsey, in the Saratoga winners' circle last summer. Let's hope he behaves himself in front of 150,000 people.

Deep Closers: REVOLUTIONARY leads the group of deep closers. He'll be on the rail with his rider, Calvin "Bo-rail" Borel. This is the perfect horse for Calvin as he'll dive down to the rail and rally past horses. He'll need some luck to get the rail to open. Bo-Rail's patented move is a high-risk, high-reward move. He'll need room down there, which might be tough in this group. REVOLUTIONARY had the second best workout of the week and is coming into the

race very well. He becomes the one to beat if it rains (his best performance was on a drying out track labeled as "good"). GOLDEN SOUL does his best running from behind, but he's just not fast enough. WILL TAKE CHARGE is D. Wayne Lukas' "other" horse. He won his last race at long odds and his brother TAKE CHARGE INDY won on Friday on the Oaks undercard. WILL TAKE CHARGE, though, hasn't trained as sharply as you'd like to see him train going into the big race. I question whether he likes this surface. JAVA'S WAR may be flying fastest of all in the stretch. He's bred to run all day long with RAINBOW'S QUEST on his dam's side and has handled the dirt. He'll be passing a lot of tired horses late. It may not be enough to win the race; but, if he's running into a fast pace, he'll get up 3rd or 4th.

RACE ANALYSIS: This is a very balanced race with 4 horses wanting to run on or near the lead; about half the field wanting to be in front or stalking the pace and the other half of the field looking to close from either mid-pack or the back of the pack. It's going to be all about the pace. If GOLDCENTS and the front running group can slow them down and run 23 seconds or slower for the opening quarter mile and 1:11.40 or slower for the first ¾ mile, then the front runners will be very difficult to catch. Anything faster than 1:11.00 and the closers will be coming. ORB is flexible enough to sneak a little closer to the lead if it's slow and sit back further if it's fast. His jockey, JOEL ROSARIO, is as hot as a jockey can be and he'll put him in the right spot. I'm going to assume with OXBOW breaking from the inside and GOLDCENTS' natural speed that the pace will be quicker than expected. ORB will put away the frontrunners and you may see some longshot closers pass tired horses to fill out the exotics. REVOLUTIONARY PALACE MALICE, MYLUTE, NORMANDY INVASION and JAVA'S WAR are the best of the other closers.

IF IT RAINS: Both VYJACK and ITSMYLUCKYDAY have won on sloppy racetracks. REVOLUTIONARY ran his best race on a "good" track. If it rains, all three of these horses move up. Only WILL TAKE CHARGE and GIANT FINISH get downgraded if it rains. The others may not be affected all that much by a wet track

JACK'S PICKS:

1. **ORB (#16)**
2. **PALACE MALICE (#10)**
3. **NORMANDY INVASION (#5)**

LONGSHOT PICKS: OXBOW (#2) or MYLUTE (#6)

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