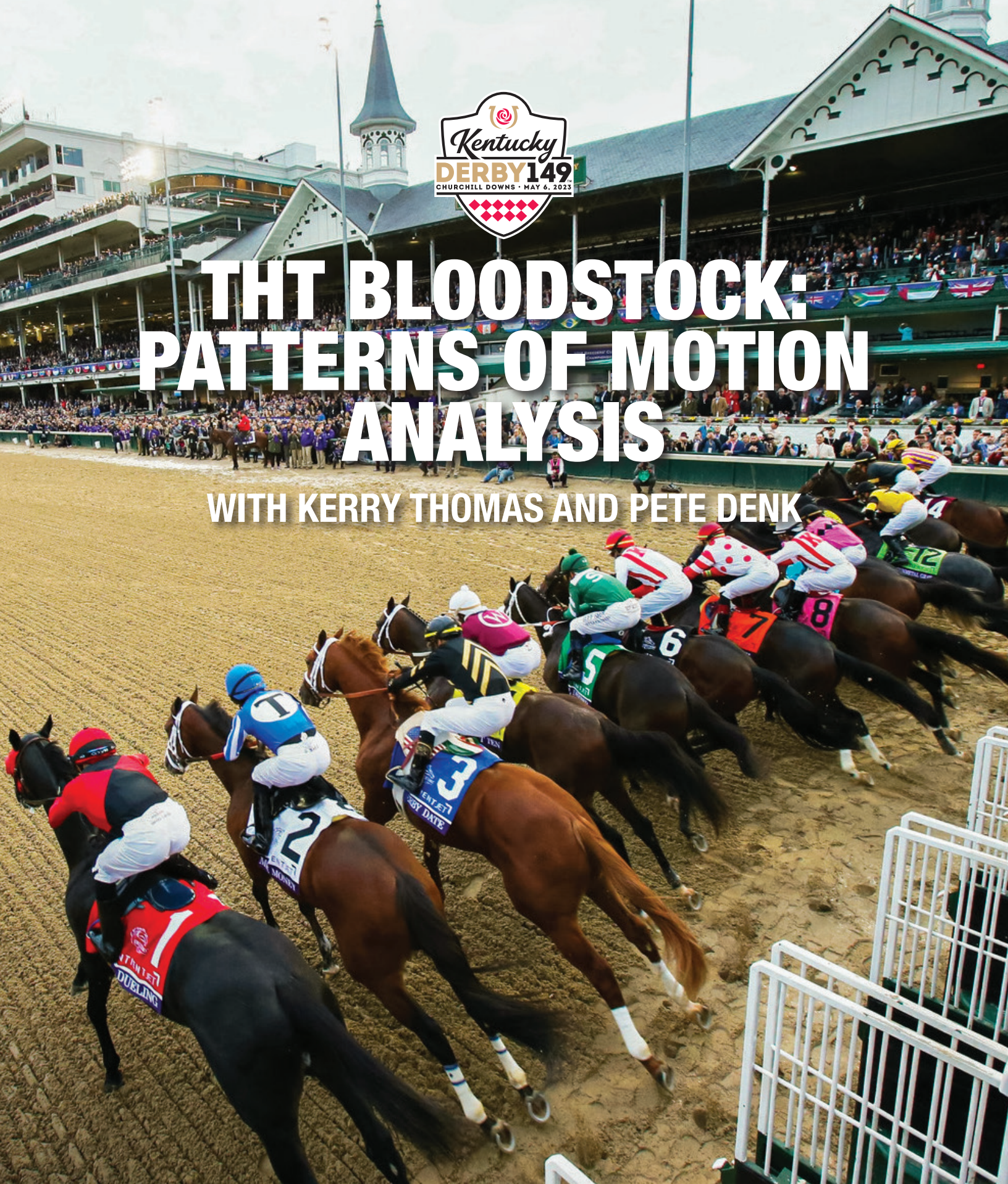




THT BLOODSTOCK: PATTERNS OF MOTION ANALYSIS

WITH KERRY THOMAS AND PETE DENK



KENTUCKY DERBY 2023 PERFORMANCE; DRIVEN BY EMOTION

by Kerry M. Thomas

Since the inaugural race in 1875, first ran at 1½ miles on land provided by John and Henry Churchill, the Run for The Roses has represented many things to many people. What the visionary racing enthusiast Meriwether Lewis Clark Jr. would think if he were here to enjoy the 149th running, I can only speculate, though I surmise that he would smile with joy. The passion that he brought back from Epsom in Surrey and the inspiration from the French Jockey Club, formed in 1863, that in part manifested as the Louisville Jockey Club, seems a contiguous journey carried forth by the spirit of the horse. I would dare say passion, that strong and resilient emotion, is ever bound within the fabric of meaning whenever anyone reflects thoughtfully on the Kentucky Derby.

My personal history with the Kentucky Derby is much shorter in time but no less resolute in the excitement that it instills. I tend to wax poetic and liken the feeling I have for the horses who breathe life into so many of us if not each day, for that one special day, as being akin to those involved at the inception. Where it may be the 149th run for the roses, it is our 13th year of having the privilege to study the intricate nature of the horse athletes competing and the honor of your support in purchasing the results of those efforts. We thank you for that.

The study of horses and what is to me the magical world of herd dynamics I have dedicated a large portion of my life to. Yet still, the enigmatic beauty found within them continues to drive me forward as if I have only taken the first steps into a world where unimaginable discovery awaits. The beauty of the physical horse is majesty to behold, but that which endears is woven within the fabric of our affection; to see the horse is awe inspiring, to feel the horse, intimately moving. The study of the athletes competing on the first Saturday of May can take on many forms, for me it is the study of performance art, an appreciation of an artistry that is driven by emotion.

Ever fascinated to know who they are as unique individuals, the profiles of these athletes are the product of intense film study of their past performances. Focusing on the singular nature of the horse, I consider where they finished in any given race secondary to considering how they navigated and responded in it/to it. To understand a herd of horses in motion first asks for an understanding of the movements of those horses independently. Appreciating individual motion is recognizing singular tendency to changing environments. Unique character traits, tendencies, and sensory efficiency combine to comprise the foundation of their herd dynamic profile,

Before any horses' competitiveness can be assessed, their ability to navigate the environment must be considered. Breaking down the race into solitary patterns of motion, sensory efficiency, and the way emotional energy is distributed during performance related stresses brings clarity to natural hierarchy. In a race atmosphere, especially one with an abundance of protracted stimuli such as the Kentucky Derby, the resulting order at the wire does not always reflect the true nature of the athletes. But just as so many streams eventually gather to make a river, herd dynamics innately seek their order and I for one always follow Mother Nature's current.

We look at the probability of success of each horse separately and then compare them physically and mentally to determine the performance hierarchal tiers. Exposed to unparalleled circumstances relative to the demands of the engagement, everything leading up to the moments before post time is an experience all its own. Some horses are impervious to it, some horses are not. How they process environmental stresses is a key ingredient and can play a significant role in how their prospects play out.

There are many intricate pieces of the herd dynamic puzzle to consider, distinctive character traits must be juxtaposed with what is required of them to compete as athletes. Competition against their peers is the secondary consideration, the real question is, are they mental athlete enough to optimize the physical talent they have? During the evaluation process for any would-be horse athlete there are subtle indicators that tell a larger story; sensory efficiency principle among them. The aptitude for psychologically clearing space to move through cleanly, fluently and without pace disruption, is essential for versatility. Being tactical amid herd motion allows the horse to effectively stay clear of or get away from situational chaos as it happens. For a horse to have an opportunity to be successful in a race against equals, they must not be an impediment to themselves. Whether betting, buying, training or even breeding, we must answer the questions; what is the likelihood of this horse getting in their own way? Is this a horse that will need to physically outrun itself to be successful? Can this horse handle the emotional demands of becoming the athlete hoped for? Few things scream underachiever more than talent devoid of the ability to realize its full potential.

It can be said of each Kentucky Derby field that there are “Derby horses” and there are “horses in the derby.” We have seen enough examples to know when the environment shapes up just right and the horse has the physical talent, given an opportunity a lesser herd dynamic can gain advantage enough to get the drop on those better equipped than they. Even so, there is far more consistency when an athlete is optimizing physical talent through their herd dynamic ability than there is when they are not. Where the “operating system” running the machine is pinioned with inefficiencies such as sensory lead change drag or delays within the interpretative ratio or both, the horse is not moving cleanly through the environment. Sensory lead changes, which are not entirely dissimilar to and indeed precede physical lead changes, are vital for optimal athletic efficiency. Being able to manage multiple stimuli through its seamless transfer from one sensory aspect to another, without sensory impeding equipment, can be of tremendous benefit when adapting on the hoof to stimulus that is itself, in motion. Equipment has its place, yet is only as useful as the depth of the emotional energy leak it is trying to patch or re-direct, or the tendency it is trying to delay. This is less an issue when alone or in circumstances that present the horse with minimal herd chaos to navigate, for they can “run-away” from themselves. Yet when you are having to outrun yourself to be successful, you are an athlete that is subject to the caprice of sudden changes in the environment and subordinate to the influence of stronger herd dynamic peers in competition. Equipage such as the common go-to, blinkers, may well assist the direction of emotional energy by funneling it into the forward aspect, but it can also make the horse “burn hotter” and be oblivious to or slow to recognize oblique stimuli. You have to weigh the ROI when using any sensory impeding equipment or betting horses that “need” it, as this can shift the horse into running with instead of competing against, the herd.

Competing or competitor, it is an important question? Differentiating between the herd dynamic performance tiers as we have them in this report is representative of the horses who are the most likely to influence their environment from those who are more likely to be subject to it. Many factors are involved in getting the measure of herd dynamic strength or weakness. In elite competitive environments if a natural tendency does not serve to strengthen it has the potential to weaken, and this must always be weighed against the projected demands. It cannot be understated that being herd dynamically balanced and sensory sound is among the most vitally important assets any equine athlete can carry into competition regardless of the discipline. A sensory sound horse is naturally equipped not only to realize physical talent but is able to manage the stresses that come with the demands of being an athlete. It makes little difference who you are in the morning if who you are at crunch time is a shadow of yourself. Sensory efficient horses distribute their emotional energy freely, fluently, and sustainably with lower risk of mental fatigue. They are but little influenced by sudden changes and are adept at “reading the room” in anticipation of herd motion around them. These are all indicators of a high degree of emotional intelligence which are party to the oft elusive but highly prized, independent nature.

The sometimes-slight differences between upper tier horses can make a dramatic impact on outcome. Competitive nature, inherent in all horses, is augmented physically through manipulated breeding. But for this to be translated into “heart” or “grit,” which gives them competitive edge, the horse must be able to independently process stress, maintain the fluent distribution of emotional energy, and freely navigate situational chaos. To be competitive over an extended period with elevated emotional and physical intensity without the risk of mental fatigue, is a cornerstone of what it means to be an elite athlete. If you are a horse breeder not breeding for emotional intelligence, sensory soundness, i.e., independent nature, you are building a race car while leaving the driver to chance. Stress matters; how it is managed, how it is filtered. Herd dynamic stamping is as powerful a component as physical stamping is a desired one.

To understand the effect of accumulative stress over distance we cannot measure distance in the physical sense. Psychologically “distance” is a measurement in time; duration of experience is the time-in-motion the body is moving not the speed with which it moves. Competitive stresses are relative to the intensity levels of emotion which can come from ramping up to another gear of physical speed, maintaining protracted pace or adjusting to situational chaos. If emotional vitality is leaked at any of these points, it threatens to syphon away tactical energy and sets in motion the onset of mental fatigue. Horses that walk the emotional tightrope during competition benefit from a person in the saddle who guides them with feel and finesse while having a strong intent-of-purpose. Becoming an absorber of emotion and conductor of its direction allows horses with lower levels of independent nature to move more fluently through the environment in concert with you. Horses instinctively seek harmony within their environment, and contentment with their peers.

Understanding herd dynamics plays a vital role in the human to horse collaboration in all aspects of domesticated life, most especially when it comes to performance. When your expectations are that a herd-animal operate at elite levels isolated from inherent nature, developing the athlete sensitive to their herd dynamic is critical for them. There can be differences between what you are expecting the horse to be, and who they are. Identifying key elements in the way they are distributing emotional energy through both the Group and Individual Herd Dynamics, the efficacy of their sensory systems and how natural tendency influences movement are key components to tapping in to independent nature. The primary functions of Group Herd Dynamic (GHD)

in competition and performance are keeping emotional energy from leaking through the Individual Herd Dynamic (IHD), maintaining mind-to-body fluency, providing environmental awareness, and acting as the foundation of versatility in situational chaos. The relationship between the horse and their environment is managed largely through the broad brush of GHD where the ability to focus on individual targets, elevate emotional intensity for grit-it-out battles or anything we consider competitive in nature, is primarily managed by IHD.

The rate and efficiency of sensory interpretations determine the rhythm of GHD processing and allow that energy to shift into IHD pace during times of elevated intensity. This means in short; a herd dynamically balanced athlete assimilates and adjusts to multiple stimulus around them without losing competitive focus and mental pace. Though their physical speed may be altered to adjust to changes, psychologically they are where they are going. Movement and speed are relative terms in the framework of competition.

I look at speed in two different ways; one being physical pace, the second and more influential when it comes to athletic ability, is psychological rhythm. By nature, patterns of behavior translate to patterns in motion, when there is disparity between these under competitive stresses over protracted time-in-motion, the horse is not fluent. Instead of moving through space in a smooth and purposeful manner, they are moving in space, subordinate to the caprice of environment. One thing is for sure, any horse that lacks the aptitude of leadership amongst their peers, shall be quite happy to follow those that do. Your best hope then, is that they can outrun both themselves and their competition.

Of the many important factors that are involved in developing the athlete the relationship between the natural herd dynamic of the horse and the processes and tendencies of the humans in their charge, looms large. Identifying the natural patterns of motion is one thing, juxtaposing this against the influence of the human factor, an exercise in postulation of how nuance affects their performance capacity, is something else altogether. It is an intricate part of the evaluation process, a piece of the puzzle that can certainly affect the realized placement of the athletes in their final performance tiers. Things to consider; there are many!

I was recently asked about what it is that I learn from doing these evaluations from year to year? The answer to that is, quite a lot. If you want to continue to improve, learn and discover new innovations, you cannot live your life in fear of losing or of being wrong. If you are truly endeavoring to better yourself, it matters not the noise and ridicule you risk. If your "truth" needs validation from others, perhaps it really is not your truth at all. I can say with certainty that I have learned and discovered much, and will continue to learn and discover, from that which I was mistaken. Over the years you continue to chisel and hone, you "sharpen your pencil" and in the same line of thinking of tracking a horses' growth patterns through their careers, the years of sale notes, breeding notes and racing profiles, serve as a foundation for growth and learning. To continue to get better, to desire to be the best at anything, demands that we be willing to improve upon ourselves. My driving passion has always been to delve deeply into what is for me, the magical world of herd dynamics. Endeavoring to extract the singularity of a horse from within the mystery of the herd, for a better view; a view from the hoof.

Personally, these 13 years of Kentucky Derby Analysis have never exclusively been about betting the ponies, but rather an effort to introduce the intricate magnificence of the horses themselves in a different light. Though I do not place a bet, I always want to bring "who" they are right off the TV screen and into your hearts. In service to and for the equine athletes, it's about presenting their intrinsically unique characters to the world. Regardless of discipline or breed, herd dynamics are about the horse first, the discipline we have chosen for them comes after. If we put the lens of focus on the horses and then pan-view from that perspective, we are better able to connect emotionally. I believe it is through that connection, respect, and understanding, that we can nurture and enrich the equestrian industry.

Here at THT Bloodstock we are a full-service company and we take great pride in the responsibility of providing horse-first services in not only racing, but across multiple platforms and disciplines all around the world. Herd Dynamic Profiling I always say is for every horse, in every discipline, from anywhere.

On behalf of Pete Denk and myself, thank you for purchasing the 2023 Kentucky Derby Analysis, and for the support of our Derby work over these 13 years. I hope we have helped not only add value to your strategies and plays, but also in stripping all that away and appreciating the horses for all their splendor. Visit us over at thtbloodstock.com and let us know how we can help you, achieve your goals.

"Horsemanship; advocacy for the horse, by the horse, through the horse."

Thank You ~Kerry



Herd Dynamic Rankings (by tier) for the 2023 Kentucky Derby

TIER 1 ★★★★★

1. Forte

TIER 2 ★★★★★★

2. Angel of Empire

3. Derma Sotogake (Jpn)

TIER 3 ★★★★★★

4. Tapit Trice

5. Kingsbarns

TIER 4 ★★★★★★

6. Two Phil's

7. Verifying

8. Mage

9. Mandarin Hero

10. Practical Move

11. King Russell

12. Continuar (Jpn)

13. Skinner

14. Disarm

15. Reincarnate

16. Rocket Can

17. Confidence Game

18. Hit Show

19. Lord Miles

20. Sun Thunder

21. Raise Cain

TIER 5 ★★★★★★

22. Cyclone Mischief

23. Jace's Road

A note from Kerry and Pete: We provide these rankings as a service, but we strongly encourage you to read our observations on the individual horses and glean from the profiles what you wish, combining them with your own opinions and observations.

Our primary goal is to help bring to light the individuality of each horse – to accurately answer the question who these horses are as herd animals and emotional athletes.

We placed our top five win contenders in tiers 1-3.

Once you get past the first few horses in Tier 4, they are loosely arranged. We were splitting hairs in many cases. Don't put too much emphasis on the order.

We thank you for the interest in our work!

FORTE

*Colt by Violence—Queen Caroline, by Blame
Bred in Kentucky by South Gate Farm*

Owner: Repole Stable and St. Elias Stable

Trainer: Todd A. Pletcher



With five consecutive victories including last year's Breeder's Cup Juvenile (G1), Forte comes to the Kentucky Derby with an elite, battle-tested Herd Dynamic.

We see quite a few Individual Herd Dynamic (IHD) character traits in Forte, including competitive nature and target ability.

But we classify his running style as a tactical Group Herd Dynamic (GHD) pattern of motion. He typically places himself mid-pack or better, dials in on the front of the herd, then gradually asserts himself over time-in-motion. This is a confident, patient horse who distributes his energy beautifully.

Forte got off to an early start by Derby horse standards, debuting at Belmont Park on May 27 in a 5-furlong maiden dash.

He broke well, then settled in 3rd place, about three lengths back of the early pacesetter. Forte marked the front horses almost immediately, showing off his big forward projection. He made a smooth transition to get off the inside, then was devouring ground on the far turn.

Forte showed no sensory pushback as he closed in on his opponents, and no herd attachments as he ran by them. He won by 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ lengths, eased up.

The majority of young colts who dominate in that manner going 5 furlongs in their debut will develop as IHD speed horses. Forte is unique because so much of his growth has been centered in his Group Dynamic.

That growth pattern kicked off with the only loss of Forte's career, in the Sanford Stakes (G3). Sitting 7th early in traffic, Forte never saw much open space in front of him. Coated in dirt, he rallied steadily to finish 4th. The internal fractions tell us Forte was tiring late, but mentally he did not stop trying to advance. It was a solid first race vs. winners.

Forte took a big step forward in the 7-furlong Hopeful Stakes (G1) at Saratoga. The race was run on a messy, sloppy track

that a lot of horses didn't handle. Forte broke inward and bumped at the start, but he shook the contact off. In 5th place early, he quickly dialed in to the leaders.

With rider Irad Ortiz Jr. asking Forte to run on the far turn, he advanced hugging the 2-path, while the leading trio drifted way outside due to pacesetter Gulfport getting out a bit. Showing off his independent nature, Forte powered home to win by 3 lengths.

Forte spent October of his two-year-old season in Kentucky. He stretched out to two turns in the Breeders' Futurity Stakes (G1). Negotiating the traffic of a big field of 14 would provide him with more opportunity for GHD growth.

Forte broke inward slightly and was jostled in minor traffic early, but his focus remained forward. In 7th place at the 5/16 pole, Forte's transitions as he moved from inside to the outside were so smooth. He is good at moving, taking control of space, then retargeting.

There was only one horse who could stay with Forte in the lane, and that was Loggins. To this day he is the horse that gave Forte the best fight. Forte crowded Loggins slightly in the stretch and prevailed by a neck (surviving an objection).

This was a sharply run race, and there was some physical fatigue there, but Forte's ability to retain forward efficiency was the difference. Loggins hasn't run since, but it was an excellent race. Five next-out winners came out of the Breeders' Futurity, including three graded stakes winners.

Forte moved onto the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1), where he broke outward at the start, but quickly settled in. One thing we have noticed about Forte is that he does hold a little pressure while standing in the starting gate, and it usually translates to lateral movement at the break. He recovers quickly and doesn't carry over any stress after that first step, but there is a pattern of behavior there.

Forte settled in 5th behind a fast early pace in the Breeders' Cup. His forward projection was building as the field approached the far turn. He was already looking for a path to advance before Ortiz asked him. We love to see that natural forward draw.

In 6th place and still on the inside on the far turn, Forte split horses then got out to an open path in a matter of a few strides. He is very smooth and independent in his movement, and he anticipates changes in herd structure very well. Forte entered the stretch in the 6-path, building into his IHD competitive drive.

JJ Hernandez on pacesetter Cave Rock tried to meet Forte's challenge. He went to a left-handed whip, but with Forte bearing down on him, Cave Rock swerved back in toward the rail, away from Forte. Running his final 5/16 in a beautiful :30.61, Forte left no doubt who the best two-year-old in America was.

Forte was essentially a finished product at that point, and that could be partly why trainer Todd Pletcher has run him only twice this year.

Forte showed he hasn't lost a step in the Fountain of Youth Stakes (G2). He had a slight stumble at the start but got away fine. In 5th place but just behind the leaders, Forte was running relaxed and easy, with his ears flopping.

He was right on the leaders' butts through the middle portion of this race, almost pushing on them in a playful manner. He split horses on the far turn, got out 4-wide, and took over in the lane.

Forte burst away from the herd to win by 4 ½ lengths while holding a beautiful line. His internals again showed wonderful, sustained energy distribution (:48.09, :24.11, :30.92). He was barely slowing down at all.

Forte got to practice dealing with a difficult post (#11 of 12) in the 1 1/8-mile Florida Derby (G1). He stumbled just slightly at the start, but recovered lightning fast. He was able to get down to the 3-4 path into the first turn, though lost some position doing it.

In 9th place on the backstretch, Ortiz and Forte started their move early. He was advancing gradually on the far turn, but moving into a pocket when Mage blew by on his outside. Ortiz redirected Forte to follow Mage. Forte's lateral movement and sensory transitions were silky smooth, as usual.

Moving 5-wide, still in 5th place into the lane, Forte didn't panic or let Mage get too far ahead of him. Moving with a calm focus, Forte accelerated late, running his final furlong in :12.56 to win by a length.

It is a testament to Forte's sensory system the way he interprets stimulus and competitively advances through changing environments. His GHD environmental awareness and IHD competitive drive are woven together seamlessly. That gives him tremendous efficiency and independent nature.

Forte makes complex tasks seem easy, and he has been tested. This is the Herd Dynamic profile of a Kentucky Derby winner.

If you are looking for potential cracks in the Derby favorite's armor, we see two things worth discussing.

Forte holds pressure when he stands in the gate. His recoveries are great, and with his GHD pattern of motion, it has not hurt him so far, but it is still part of his profile.

If a horse holds pressure when standing in the gate, there is a chance they could feel some stress in the long build-up to this race. Gate pressure is nervous energy that has nowhere to go. Most horses diffuse it by running. Standing around for an hour before the Derby and having to walk slowly through crowded areas can set off that stress response.

Whoever your Derby horse is, it is a good idea to get a look at them before the race to see how they are handling the environment. Horses that hold pressure in the gate or who have holes in their sensory profiles are going to be the most susceptible.

The other thing worth pointing out is Forte's Herd Dynamic growth curve. He completed it in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile. Forte is on top. Whether in nature or at the racetrack this is the plateau that colts aspire to be on.

The timeline of herd leadership is uniquely individual and also based on the rise of new competition. The horses we group in the two tiers directly below Forte are the ones we think are in the best position to ask the question, how long can he stay on top?

ANGEL OF EMPIRE

Colt by *Classic Empire*—*Armony's Angel*, by *To Honor and Serve*
Bred in Pennsylvania by *Forgotten Land Investment Inc.* & *Black Diamond Equine Corp.*

Owner: Albaugh Family Stables LLC

Trainer: Brad Cox



As we sift through the horses in the Kentucky Derby each year, there are questions we always ask. Does this horse have the traits to negotiate a 20-horse field? Does it have the physical stamina, mental capacity & emotional makeup to last the 1 ¼-mile trip in front of 100,000+ screaming fans?

In the case of Angel of Empire, we answered, “Yes” to both of those questions.

Angel of Empire has good sensory/behavioral traits when it comes to dealing with herd chaos. Despite his impressive size, he isn't afraid to stick his head into tight spaces. During our film review, we often saw him sliding into open spots or splitting horses while maintaining good forward momentum and focus.

Angel of Empire is fairly balanced between the Group and Individual Herd Dynamics, with a shift to the GHD. He has the patience of a classic GHD horse, but we see IHD intensity in his pinned ears, stiff tail carriage and drive to the wire. He has a competitive, grinding mentality.

So far, the longer the race, the better his competitive energy looks. Undeclared in two starts going 1 1/8 miles, Angel of Empire won the Risen Star Stakes (G2) and Arkansas Derby (G1) going away. His closing times in those races rank among the best in this year's Derby.

Angel of Empire also rates very highly on Pattern of Motion re-enforcement. He has employed the same running style in all six of his races. He is not fast out of the gate, but he does a good job hooking into the field, often getting a mid-pack closer's trip.

Trainer Brad Cox must not have rated Angel of Empire to highly early, as he started him at Horseshoe Indianapolis, a “C” level track, on August 9. The 1-mile maiden race was run on a sloppy track. While running in a pocket through the far turn, Angel of Empire showed a nice combination of patience and forward projection.

When a narrow opening appeared on the inside, he shot up the

rail and accelerated through a final quarter in :24.73. He held a good line into open space, showing competitive zeal and body control as he splashed home through the mud puddles to win by 1 ½ lengths.

We didn't take much from his second career start, a turf sprint at Kentucky Downs. He was taken up and lost ground early and never looked comfortable chasing sprint fractions on the undulating turf course.

Angel of Empire looked much better back on the dirt at Horseshoe in a 1-mile allowance race on Nov. 14. After finding his comfort zone in 6th place, covered up mid-pack, he slid through the inside very smoothly on the far turn. He split horses at the top of the lane and gradually took over. His physical lead change was a little drawn out, but he held a good line as he drew away to win by 6 lengths.

Angel of Empire's sensory and physical lead changes looked smoother in his three-year-old debut when finishing second to his loose-on-the-lead stablemate Victory Formation in the 1-mile, short-stretch Smarty Jones Stakes at Oaklawn Park. He galloped out very well in that race.

Angel of Empire made his graded stakes debut in the Risen Star Stakes (G2) at Fair Grounds. Going 1 1/8 miles in a field of 14, Angel of Empire settled in 8th place in the second flight. This horse looks quite comfortable in tight quarters, and he builds forward focus while in those complex situations. His transition from high-revving GHD cruising gear to IHD competing mode looks smooth and natural.

Angel of Empire split horses on the far turn then worked to the outside. His stablemate Tapit's Conquest was driving with good momentum on his outside hip. Angel of Empire was still in 4th place at that point, gaining on the leaders but in danger of being passed himself. He dug in and as he switched to his right lead, Tapit's Conquest gave in, drifting out and assuming an adjunct role.

Running his final furlong in a solid :12.85, Angel of Empire then passed Two Phil's and Sun Thunder to win by 1 length. In his first graded stakes try, Angel of Empire showed herd independence and environmental control. This was a big Herd Dynamic growth race, and the performance was validated when Sun Thunder came back to run 4th in the Blue Grass Stakes (G1), Two Phil's impressively won the Jeff Ruby (G3), and Angel of Empire shipped to Oaklawn to take the Arkansas Derby (G1).

In Arkansas, Angel of Empire settled in 7th place early. The race was about half over when Angel of Empire started zoning in on the leaders under his own power. With the six horses in front of him fairly bunched up, rider Flavien Prat decided to go wide, and started hand riding at about the 6f mark.

Moving 4-wide around the far turn, Angel of Empire's IHD transition looked sharper than ever. He reached 3rd place, just a length off the lead at the quarter pole, then blew by them all in early stretch. There was no competition, and Angel of Empire released cleanly from his opponents.

He ran his final furlong in a very sharp 12.12, winning by 4 lengths, moving with purpose and control through the wire. He looked like he was lengthening his stride at the end of this 1 1/8-mile race!

Angel of Empire is getting stronger. He is a subtly smooth operator in herd chaos, and he has practiced and refined his pattern of motion. There are a few faster, flashier horses in this field, but Angel of Empire looks like a very qualified contender who should love the Derby distance of 1 1/4 miles.

TIER 2 ★★★★★

DERMA SOTOGAKE (JPN)

Colt by *Mind Your Biscuits*—*Amour Poesie* (Jpn), by *Neo Universe* (Jpn)

Bred in Japan by *Shadai Farm*

Owner: Hiroyuki Asanuma

Trainer: Hidetaka Otonashi



We think Derma Sotogake has a legitimate chance to be the first Japanese bred and trained horse to win the Kentucky Derby.

Comparing horses from different countries can be very tricky, but given recent results at the Dubai World Cup and here in America, there is no doubt that Japanese form is holding up at the International Grade 1 level.

Most importantly to us, Derma Sotogake enters the Kentucky Derby on a fantastic Herd Dynamic growth pattern.

Few American race fans, including us, knew anything about Derma Sotogake until he won the UAE Derby (G2) on March 25. It was a flashy 5 ½-length victory that almost looked too easy to be true. The field was absolutely strung out behind him, and his times compared favorably to how older horses ran in the Dubai World Cup (G1) on the same night.

One of the interesting things we learned about Derma Sotogake when we watched all eight of his career races is that, until Dubai, he had never led a race from start to finish. Derma Sotogake is an Individual Herd Dynamic horse with a strong competitive streak, but he has a versatile, tactical running style and excellent energy distribution.

It took his connections a few races to figure out Derma Sotogake's game. He debuted in a 1 1/8-mile turf race at Hanshin on June 26. He was a little green but he showed good raw competitive instincts. He was looking around a bit while running through traffic to finish 6th.

His second race – another 1 1/8-mile turf race – was a throw-out to us because Derma Sotogake was outfitted with blinkers. The head gear caused delays in Derma Sotogake interpretative process, and that slowed down his physical movements.

The blinkers came off, and Derma Sotogake tried dirt in his third start. Going 1 1/16 miles at Kokura, he was in a 16-horse field. Derma Sotogake needed to adjust to his vision being

opened up again, and that is probably why he hopped at the start of this race. He was in traffic in 12th place early, and his rider had to work to get him to settle. His focus points still looked a little random.

Derma Sotogake started his move early, then had to wait, then got going again and rallied to finish 3rd. Due to the variables of turf and blinkers in his first two races, this is where his growth curve really started.

Moving to Chukyo for start #4 and increasing his distance to 1 1/8 miles, Derma Sotogake gave a glimpse of who he really is. He had the outer post in this field of 11, and he handled that scenario well. He broke fast and with one tap of the whip, he was pushing the pace early. We like that he did not over-intensify in that scenario.

Derma Sotogake has a fairly expressive, athletic personality, and he looked very happy to us in this race. His ears were flopping as he sat in 2nd place just off the leader. He certainly has some intensity in him, but he rated kindly enough in that position.

It was three horses across the track as they turned for home, and Derma Sotogake waited until his rider went to the stick before he accessed his finishing gears. He drew off to win by 4 lengths, ears flicking. He looked uncommonly fresh as he crossed the wire.

Derma Sotogake stepped up in class to the Mochinoki Sho Stakes at Hanshin in start #5. He faced Continuar in that 1 1/8-mile dirt race. Derma did a slight stutter step at the start, then found his stride. His rider guided him inside behind horses in 5th place into the first turn.

Derma Sotogake shows good forward projection when in behind horses. He wanted to attack forward, but he had to wait until the stretch run. Continuar on the outside had the jump on him, but Derma Sotogake split horses and surged to the lead in late stretch. He seized control of that race from an unlikely

position and won by a head.

To win in that fashion in his first race vs. winners was impressive. It was the emergence of a patient, IHD-slanted attacking pattern of motion.

Derma Sotogake completed his two-year-old campaign in the \$526,600 Zennippon Nisai Yushun Stakes at Kawasaki. Derma Sotogake broke outward slightly then took position in 6th place on the inside behind horses.

He rallied 4-wide into the lane, sticking on his left lead but making up ground on the leaders. The wire for this 1-mile race came up quickly for Derma Sotogake, who was still working through his IHD transition but won by a head nonetheless. He only switched to his right lead just before the wire. This horse certainly wants more than a mile.

Derma Sotogake shipped for the Saudi Derby (G3) for his three-year-old debut. This race is run on a 1-turn mile configuration, which we think is a bit sharp for this horse. Derma Sotogake broke a hair slow, then tried to run his way into the race. That was not an easy task, as up front the Bob Baffert trainee Havnameltdown set burning fractions of :21.83, :44.98 and 1:10.23. Derma Sotogake never saw a pace like that in Japan.

The Saudi Derby was a good test and fitness sharpener. He ran a staying-on 3rd, probably a little physically tired, but gaining on the leaders late.

Derma Sotogake had the rail in the 1 3/16-mile UAE Derby (G2) and a new top international rider in Christophe Lemaire. The combination of Derma Sotogake's strong forward projection and Lemaire's soft hand urging led to a very nice break. Derma Sotogake went to the front.

Ears flopping, Derma Sotogake was soon relaxed and in control. He was truly leading that herd, dictating its rhythm of movement.

While most of the other horses were struggling, Derma

Sotogake was doing it easily. Lemaire set him down in the lane and he drew away to win by 5 ½ lengths over another good Japanese colt Dura Erede (Group 1 winner on turf). It was another 4 ½ lengths back to Continuar in 3rd place. Speaking to the strength of the Japanese horses, they filled out the first four spots in the order of finish.

Derma Sotogake held a perfect line down the lane. His internal fractions were excellent in terms of energy distribution (:24.50, 23.55, 24.03, 24.71, and a final 3/16 in 18.98 [extrapolates to :25.30]).

Lemaire, who stays on for the Kentucky Derby, complemented Derma Sotogake beautifully. He took that raw emerging power and guided it with finesse.

Derma Sotogake's form received a boost when Mandarin Hero (Jpn) finished second, beaten just a nose, in the Santa Anita Derby (G2). In Mandarin Hero's three-year-old debut he had finished 2nd by a neck to Hero Call in the Kumotori Sho Stakes. Hero Call has cross-form with Derma Sotogake, previously having finished 4th, beaten about 4 lengths by Derma Sotogake in the Zennippon Nisai Yushun Stakes. We think Derma Sotogake is easily the best of the Japanese horses who have travelled over here to compete.

The signs are there that the Japanese horses are catching up with the Americans on dirt, and we are going to trust our eyes here. Derma Sotogake is riding a fabulous Herd Dynamic growth curve, and he has not plateaued yet.

Lemaire should have options in terms of riding strategy, but we expect him to employ a stalk-and-pounce running style, trying to get first run on the Group Herd Dynamic horses. Derma Sotogake has a versatile IHD speed pattern of motion, and we think he will love 1 ¼ miles.

TAPIT TRICE

Colt by Tapit—Danzatrice, by Dunkirk

Bred in Kentucky by Gainesway Thoroughbreds Ltd.

Owner: Whisper Hill Farm LLC and Gainesway Stable
(Antony Beck)

Trainer: Todd A Pletcher



Tapit Trice is a physically talented horse that should love the stretch-out to 1 ¼ miles, but his somewhat aloof nature makes him a complicated horse to figure out, especially given the unique demands of this race.

Tapit Trice is not a good gate horse. We don't detect any sensory interpretation problems or stress associated with the gate. It appears to be a behavioral/personality trait. He lacks urgency, and it takes a few strides for everything to get in unison.

As a Group Herd Dynamic-based horse, he is not interested in asserting dominance early in herd motion. His natural pattern of motion is to settle toward the back, then use his impressive stride and stamina to gradually advance into contention.

GHD horses with good time-in-motion profiles hit the board regularly in the Kentucky Derby, and when the pace collapses, they over-perform. Three of the biggest Derby upsets in the last 20 years were GHD closers who, going into the race, didn't look good enough to win: Giacomo (2005), Mine That Bird (2009) and Rich Strike (2022).

We rank Tapit Trice way higher than those upset winners, but not as highly as GHD-based Derby winners Animal Kingdom (2011) or Orb (2013) at the same point in their careers, as those horses were stronger in their Individual Herd Dynamic and were further along in their pattern of motion development.

The good news for Tapit Trice is that he has been steadily improving. His ability to learn on the fly has been evident since his debut back on Nov. 6 at Aqueduct. He broke sluggishly and was weaving a little bit when behind horses early. His focus points looked random. But as he spun around the far turn he started to put it together, splitting horses in early stretch then competing for open space as he closed for 3rd place. It was a classic example of the most powerful learning process a horse can have – herd motion.

Tapit Trice broke very methodically again in his second start.

Rider Kendrick Carmouche made a point of steering him widest of all on the backstretch. We have seen that same move from his rider in every race since the debut. They are either trying to avoid kickback or they didn't believe in Tapit Trice's ability to run efficiently inside horses. He is a large animal, so they might be trying to avoid getting stopped.

Showing off his long stride, Tapit Trice made a sweeping 4-wide move on the far turn to catch up to the leaders. He seamlessly changed leads in early stretch, then broke his maiden via a very gradual takedown of the leader Slip Mahoney (won next start, then a distant 2nd in the G3 Gotham).

Slip Mahoney came out and bumped Tapit Trice a couple times. Tapit Trice tried to avoid the contact – he seems to anticipate the moves of other horses quite well – but Carmouche was intent on keeping him from drifting out via a right-handed whip. Tapit Trice won by a neck. His body language was very relaxed. He is barely tapping into his distance potential at 1 mile.

It was more of the same in Tapit Trice's three-year-old debut on Feb 4 at Gulfstream Park. He did not look at all stressed in the gate. He just walks out of there in nonchalant fashion.

As soon as rider Luis Saez had the opportunity, he steered Tapit Trice to the outside. Moving six-wide on the backstretch in just a six-horse field, Tapit Trice joined the leaders on the far turn. He casually drew away to win by 8 lengths. Moving powerfully through the wire, his fractions of :47.50, :24.42 and :24.53 showed very little deceleration.

Tapit Trice stretched out to two turns and 1 1/16 miles in the Tampa Derby (G2). Even by his standards he broke slowly, as he was last of 12 and gapped early. Tapit Trice and Saez started their move very early on the backstretch, but it wasn't until the far turn when he got out in the clear that he really started making progress.

In the stretch, #3 Classic Legacy came out on him. Again we saw signs of good space awareness and anticipation from

Tapit Trice, who will avoid contact with other horses if left to his own devices. Although he is methodical, there is a fluidity to his movement. His lead changes and transitions are fairly smooth.

Tapit Trice didn't catch the front horses until inside the 1/16 pole of the Tampa Derby, but he won going away by two lengths. He crossed the finish line moving purposefully, with a very casual expression. We saw no signs of mental or physical fatigue.

Tapit Trice's final prep for the Derby came in the Blue Grass Stakes (G1). Saez hand-rode him aggressively from the start, and he was able to hook into the body of the herd early. When you ask a GHD horse to show speed, you risk taking them too far out of their natural pattern of motion. It can compromise their late energy. When doing this, it is important to know how sensitive a horse is to stimulus. Some horses will put the pedal to the metal under vigorous urging, accessing their top physical and emotional gears too early.

Based on what we saw in the Blue Grass, Tapit Trice's casual reactions to stimulus and lack of urgency give his rider some leeway. Tapit Trice's response to the aggressive ride was incremental and still sensible from the standpoint of energy distribution.

The first objective achieved (better early position), Saez had to check Tapit Trice on the first turn, then he immediately steered him to the outside. With open space in front of him, Tapit Trice got all the way up to 3rd place by the time the field went six furlongs in 1:12.57. From there to the wire it was a two-horse battle with Verifying, who had enjoyed a clean, pace-pressing trip on the front end.

Those two drew clear from the field by 6 lengths in a good IHD battle that saw them bump inside the 1 1/16 pole when Verifying drifted out. Tapit Trice, who wanted to cock his head to the outside, won by a neck. That head-to-head, grinding battle could help sharpen Tapit Trice's IHD energy for the Kentucky Derby.

His internal fractions (:24.70, :23.79, :24.28, :24.86, :12.38) continued to look excellent for adding more distance. Tapit Trice should love 1 ¼ miles. He is a stamina horse, but he has underrated sustained speed.

We often talk about the sensory/mental side of the horse leading the physical side, clearing space before a horse moves into it. With Tapit Trice it appears to be the opposite. His body has been leading the mind for a good portion of these races.

He uses his powerful long stride and stamina to run his way into positions that can draw his competitive engagement to the surface. That could be a lot harder to do in the traffic of a 20-horse field. The rider is very important for a horse like this.

Tapit Trice is in great hands with Saez on his back.

Tapit Trice comes to Louisville on a gradual pattern of improvement, and there could still be more to come for this immensely talented, curiously wired horse.

TIER 3 ★★☆☆☆

KINGSBARNs

Colt by Uncle Mo—Lady Tapit, by Tapit

Bred in Kentucky by Parks Investment Group LLC

Owner: Spendthrift Farm LLC

Trainer: Todd Pletcher



Undeclared and lightly raced, Kingsbarns enters the Kentucky Derby on a promising Herd Dynamic development pattern.

He isn't as battle-tested as we would like, but he has passed a series of incrementally harder tests, building on each race while exhibiting some elite athletic traits.

Kingsbarns was an \$800,000 purchase at the 2022 Fasig-Tipton Gulfstream sale of selected two-year-olds in training, where he flew two-furlongs in :20-3. It was a breathtaking work that was both fast and controlled. As we often see, the experience of going through that early-season training sale probably cost Kingsbarns his two-year-old racing year. But once he got to trainer Todd Pletcher, things have gone very smoothly.

Kingsbarns debuted on Jan. 14 at Gulfstream in a 1-mile maiden race. A one-turn mile on dirt is a demanding first start, and adding to the challenge, Kingsbarns drew an inside post (#2) in a field of 11. He broke from the gate fairly straight and controlled, but rider Luis Saez had to tap the brakes early when the outside horses came crashing down into his path.

Kingsbarns smoothly redirected to the inside, never losing his big, natural forward projection. Under slight urging from Saez, Kingsbarns looked very fluent, accelerating with good body control and space awareness, as he ran up to 3rd place, just a length back of the pacesetter.

Kingsbarns wanted to take over the race at that point, but he was hemmed in and forced to wait behind horses all the way through the far turn.

Crying out for room at the top of the lane, Kingsbarns split horses and drew off to win by 1 ¾ lengths. The other horses, particularly #6 Weyhill Road, seemed to shy from Kingsbarns' path.

It wasn't a super fast race by Gulfstream standards, but it

was really impressive execution for a first race. Kingsbarns showed a natural forward projection and Herd Dynamic power & efficiency even after being bottled up.

Pletcher took a conservative approach to Kingsbarn's second race, sending him to Tampa Bay Downs to get two-turn experience in an allowance race. Once again, his body control and pace looked good out of the gate. With a frantic leader running the opening quarter in :22.79, Kingsbarns settled in 3rd place. The natural slant here definitely is Individual Herd Dynamic speed, but Kingsbarns is unique in that he doesn't rush into space.

Sitting third in a forward, competitive rating mode, he was running with control and purpose. After the leader hit the half-mile marker in :46.33, rider Antonio Gallardo gave Kingsbarns a subtle nudge. It doesn't take much, as this is a very responsive, forward-minded horse.

Kingsbarn's advanced up the inside, moving smoothly past the fading frontrunner. He had a 2-length lead into the stretch. He appeared to be feeling back for competition, and that caused a little drifting to the outside. But when Gallardo employed a couple right-handed whip strikes, Kingsbarns released from the field and won by 7 ¾ lengths.

Those first two races were perfect practice for his next start in the Louisiana Derby (G2). Starting from the 6-post in a field of 12, Kingsbarns stood poised in the gate and had another good start. There wasn't much competition for the lead, so Kingsbarns took it.

Jace's Road tried to press him from the outside, but as the field hit the backstretch, Kingsbarns held a 1-length advantage. Ears flopping and occasionally scissoring to feel back to the herd, Kingsbarns settled beautifully. He looked relaxed and confident on the lead.

Employing his lessons in patience from his first two starts,

Kingsbarns set a slow, measured pace of :24.71, :49.60, and 1:14.69. Rider Flavien Prat must have loved the response he got when he barely moved his hands at the top of the far turn. Kingsbarns immediately shifted to a higher gear.

Prat waited for the stretch to ask for more, and when he did, Kingsbarns opened up on the field. Kingsbarns averaged a very solid :12.09 per furlong over the final 3.5 furlongs (:42.64) of the Louisiana Derby. He won by 3 ½ lengths under a hand ride.

Kingsbarns' sire Uncle Mo was a brilliantly fast horse, but what made him really special was that he could set the pace and finish fast. Kingsbarns has that measured energy distribution. We think he has a good chance to handle 1 ¼ miles.

Kingsbarns is an extremely agile, athletic horse. He is competitive-minded, light on his feet and has a clean, balanced stride. His mental efficiency has looked great so far. His transitions look clean, and we haven't seen an ounce of stress in him.

It is still early in his growth curve, but Kingsbarns already has developed a versatile IHD speed pattern of motion. Despite his lack of experience, we think he is well-prepared for this race from the standpoint of running style.

The two things missing from Kingsbarns' resume are a heated battle vs a top horse and a really fast race. Those are major thresholds he is yet to pass. None of his races have been particularly quick to the 6-furlong or 1-mile marks. The Derby is likely to test him from the standpoint of physical speed.

Kingsbarns is still ascending the Herd Dynamic ladder. It is

a lot to ask of a horse to take a step forward in the Kentucky Derby, but this is the type of horse that we could see doing it.

TWO PHIL'S

Colt by *Hard Spun*—*Mia Torri*, by *General Quarters*
Bred in Kentucky by *Phillip Sagan*

Owner: Patricia's Hope LLC, Phillip Sagan and Madaket Stables LLC

Trainer: Larry Rivelli



When a horse wears blinkers in every career start, such as Two Phil's has done, it makes it harder for us to evaluate them from the sensory perspective. Without getting to see the raw horse, we don't have a base line reading of who they really are.

When blinkers work, we know what they do – they improve a horse's forward focus. What we can't see here is what has been corrected and what else lies beneath.

Further clouding this read, Two Phil's has only one race that would make him a threat to win the Kentucky Derby. That race – the Jeff Ruby Steaks Stakes (G3) -- was run on a synthetic track.

Two Phil's' sire Hard Spun won the same race in 2007 (though it was called the Lane's End Stakes then), before finishing 2nd in the Kentucky Derby behind Street Sense. Hard Spun wasn't quite as good Street Sense on the dirt, but he beat him on the synthetic track later that year in the Kentucky Cup Classic Stakes (G2).

Can Two Phil's repeat his run from Turfway under the Twin Spires on Saturday? After dissecting his previous seven races, we think probably not. But Two Phil's is a very good horse, and we wouldn't rule out a big performance from him in the Derby. He was the last horse we cut from our top five win contenders.

Two Phil's debuted early, on June 23, at Churchill Downs. He broke well and was battling for position when he almost clipped heels, was checked and lost ground. He re-rallied sharply, but got tired and finished 5th. Right away we saw he was a hard-trying horse with good forward projection.

He broke his maiden in his second start at Colonial Downs. He pressed a fast pace of :21.80 and :44.65 – there is plenty of speed here. And we liked how he was unaffected by having horses on either side of him. Two Phil's is all forward energy thanks to those blinkers. He held a very nice straight line and steady rhythm through the lane.

Next came a trip to Canterbury Park, where Two Phil's dominated the \$50,000 Shakopee Juvenile Stakes. It was another focused, hard-trying effort that saw Two Phil's win by 9 ¾ lengths.

Two Phil's stepped up to the major leagues in his fourth start in the Breeders' Futurity Stakes (G1) at Keeneland. He had the difficult 12 post in a field of 14, and got caught very wide into the first turn and was bumped.

Two Phil's body control looked a little erratic in this race. He lost ground back to 8th place, re-rallied to get up to 4th place, then tired back to 7th by the finish. There is no doubting this horse's effort level, but he wasn't good enough to overcome what he faced that day.

Two Phil's ended his two-year-old campaign on a high note in the Street Sense Stakes at Churchill Downs. That 1 1/16-mile race was run on a sloppy, sealed track.

Two Phil's bumped on the first turn, but recovered to get good stalking position in 4th place. He took over the lead turning for home and opened up on the field. Alone in open space, he lost his sensory guard rails, floating laterally and flipping back to his left lead. Two Phil's kept running and won by 5 ¼ lengths. The time was pretty slow, although the track was in rough shape.

Two Phil's joined the Derby trail in the Lecomte Stakes (G3). Despite the speed he flashed in his early sprint races, Two Phil's has become a more even-tempered horse as he gets older and goes longer. He stalked the pace from 5th place early showing some good patience in a well-bunched six-horse field.

He made a nice three-wide move on the far turn, passing Confidence Game and taking the lead mid-stretch, but couldn't close the deal. Instant Coffee, who had been sitting dead last, came running on the outside with stronger energy. Two Phil's tried to fight back but had to settle for 2nd, beaten 2 ½ lengths.

It was a solid three-year-old debut, but he needed to improve on that final 5/16 in :33.42.

Two Phil's stretched out to 1 1/8 miles in the Risen Star Stakes (G2), where again he showed us good patience, sitting a close up 7th under the line the first time. We like that he has tactical gears but does not rush or over-express. Moving between horses, he crept up to 5th place on the backside while still under a hold. We like to see that forward draw in traffic.

Two Phil's moved into 3rd place turning for home, and it looked like he had the race to win. He took the lead at the 1/16 pole but got out-closed by Angel of Empire to his outside and Sun Thunder to the inside. Mentally he did not quit, he ran through the wire with all he had, but that final furlong in :13.40 was not good enough. Two Phil's seemed to be maxing out his physical gears at 1 1/8 miles over that deep Fair Grounds surface.

But oh did he look good at that same distance when he got on the synthetic track at Turfway Park. Two Phil's executed his usual tactical closing/stalking pattern of motion and came running on the far turn.

He was rallying in unison with Major Dude, a solid turf horse from the barn of Todd Pletcher who had gotten a ground-saving trip. Two Phil's looked him in the eye (as much as those blinkers allow) and took over.

Two Phil's won by five lengths. His final three furlongs in :36.78 and a final furlong in :12.34 were much better than he had done previously on dirt.

So is Two Phil's a greatly improved horse, or did he just love the synthetic surface and run up the score against a group of non-Derby horses?

Two Phil's has very good forward focus with the blinkers on, but his space awareness is at least partially compromised. The Derby is one of the most roughly run races in the world, so rider Jareth Loveberry needs to think ahead for Two Phil's. When Two Phil's is comfortable, he runs like a machine, and he has the running style and tactical speed to get a good trip here.

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

VERIFYING

Colt by Justify—Diva Delite, by Repent

Bred in Kentucky by Hunter Valley & Mount Mellick Farm LLC

Owner: Westerberg, Mrs. John Magnier, Jonathan Poulin, Derek Smith & Michael B. Tabor

Trainer: Brad Cox



Verifying is a very talented, athletic horse, but concerns about his sensory profile drag him down our rankings for the Kentucky Derby slightly.

The issue here is blinkers. Verifying has worn them in all six of his lifetime starts, and they make him more one-dimensional than we like to see in a Kentucky Derby contender.

When a horse races a few times, makes some mistakes, then blinkers are added, we usually can see in the race videos why it was done. In cases like Verifying, we don't know what he did wrong or what his growth curve might have looked like without them.

Blinkers can make a horse more focused and forward. They also can change how a horse expresses physical and emotional energy. Depending on the specific model, blinkers cut off vision to some portion of a horse's rear and oblique sensory fields. Every horse reacts differently to that change, but there is almost always a trade-off.

The main thing blinkers have done for Verifying is isolate his physical ability. That is not a terrible idea, as Verifying is a very clean, athletic moving horse with a great mix of speed and stamina. But they have limited his environmental awareness and versatility. We classify Verifying as an Individual Herd Dynamic speed type with a single-target focus.

Verifying debuted at Saratoga on August 27 in a 6-furlong maiden race. He broke efficiently and went to the lead, showing good body control through a first quarter in :22.90 and half mile in :46.04. This colt has plenty of raw speed.

The #2 horse Trackmate tried to sneak up the rail on the turn and challenge him, and we liked the response from Verifying. He showed good competitive nature, even crowding and intimidating Trackmate before drawing off to win by 1 3/4 lengths in 1:10.26.

Verifying showed good fluency from start to finish, and looked like a strong, purposeful mover. He also showed good energy distribution, running his final quarter in :24.22 while holding a nice straight line.

Trainer Brad Cox obviously thought a lot of Verifying, placing him in the Champagne Stakes (G1) in his second start. This 1-turn mile race was run over a sloppy-sealed track.

Verifying is certainly IHD-shifted, but he showed good patience sitting 2nd on the inside. There was room for him to advance inside the pacesetter Andiamo a Firenze, but Verifying was willing to wait. This is not a reckless horse who rushes into space. He is controlled in his movements.

Verifying did come through the inside in the lane, and although he was the best of the IHD speed types, he could not contain Blazing Sevens' rally on the outside.

Verifying was getting a little tired (:23.66, :23.62, :24.84, :25.51), but we liked the body control he exhibited as he finished 2nd, beaten three lengths.

It was a solid first run vs. winners, good enough for Cox to send Verifying to the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1) at Keeneland. Here we got to see what happens to Verifying when he doesn't get his trip.

Sandwiched and shuffled at the start of the Breeders' Cup, Verifying was 8th early on the inside, then up into 6th place, tracking eventual juvenile champion Forte. Verifying got up alongside Forte and was ahead of him briefly, but as soon as Forte kicked into his IHD transition, it was apparent Verifying's energy had already peaked.

He didn't finish with much focus or interest, as Curly Jack got him for 5th place. He finished 6th, beaten 12 lengths.

Verifying made his 3yo debut at Oaklawn Park in a 1-mile

Optional claiming/allowance race. He had a good start and was pressing for the lead outside of Gun Pilot early. He got an advantage over that foe entering the lane, and with his head slightly cocked to the inside, Verifying was trying to reach out and feel if Gun Pilot would come back at him. That is an expression of the single-target focus we alluded to earlier.

Verifying won the IHD speed battle and drew away to win by 5 lengths. The performance was flattered when Gun Pilot and third-place Two Eagles River both won allowance races in their next starts.

Next came the Rebel Stakes (G2), where Verifying had the rail post in field of 11. He was standing wide in the gate, and he stabbed with his first step, slightly missing the break. In third place on the inside early, Verifying never got the open space and clean sensory path that makes him the most comfortable.

He ran into a wall of horses at the top of the lane, got beat to the first opening and was stuck looking for room. When he got clear late, he did finish up the inside for 4th. Once the navigation process worked out, he still had fight in him.

Verifying finished 4th, beaten 5 lengths by Confidence Game in the Rebel. It was a very good hidden effort, although it also showed how blinkers compromise his Group Herd Dynamic awareness.

In his final Derby prep, Verifying got the trip he wants in the Blue Grass Stakes (G1). Sent at the start, he got to sit 2nd off the big longshot Clear the Air.

Verifying took control through 6 furlongs in 1:12.59, but Tapit Trice was right behind him to the outside. These two drew off on the field, bumping as Verifying drifted out after a left-handed whip strike. Tapit Trice stayed on a little better and won by a neck.

It was a good run, but it was also Verifying's best-case scenario – he broke well, got to the front, tracked a reasonable pace and had minimal stimulus to interpret.

Verifying's fractions looked solid (:23.75, :24.47, :24.38, :25.01, :12.44), though we classify him as a horse who will be trying to hang on at 1 ¼ miles, as opposed to one for whom the distance will help.

Verifying has a lot of quality to him, but his current pattern of motion is one-dimensional. You cannot put this horse in traffic and expect him to anticipate and outmaneuver other horses. We think it is imperative he is sent at the start of the Derby to avoid trouble.

In choosing to develop Verifying with blinkers, Cox is isolating his physical ability while minimizing his environmental awareness. The result has been good, but our sense is that it won't be quite good enough to handle the extraordinary demands of this race.

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

MAGE

Colt by Good Magic—Puca, by Big Brown
Bred in Kentucky by Grandview Equine

Owner: OGMA Investments LLC, Ramiro Restrepo, Sterling Racing LLC and CMNWLTH

Trainer: Gustavo Delgado



Mage is one of the most talented members of this three-year-old crop, but he enters the Kentucky Derby as a still unrefined athlete.

Mage is one of two members of this Derby with only three lifetime starts (Kingsbarns being the other). Just like Kingsbarns, Mage went through a two-year-old in training sale and did not make his racetrack debut until January of his three-year-old season.

Mage sold for \$290,000 at the 2022 Fasig-Tipton Mid-Atlantic May sale of two-year-olds in training. Outfitted with blinkers, he worked one furlong in 10-flat. Mage showed good forward extension and notable intensity. He completed the entire work on his left lead, never attempting to change even through the gallop-out.

The intensity and speed he showed at the sale has carried over to his racetrack career. Mage debuted in a 7-furlong maiden race at Gulfstream Park on Jan. 28. Now wearing no headgear, he lurched slightly as the gate opened then went right into an aggressive drive for the lead. Mage has a strong Individual Herd Dynamic slant and impressive speed.

He set fractions of :22.78, :45.88 and 1:10.17 en route to a final time of 1:22.54. Everything about his debut was fast. Ears pinned start to finish, Mage was all business, painting the rail through the lane and winning by 3 ¾ lengths. His body control looked good as he employed what we call a single-platform, IHD-speed pattern of motion (break from gate, get to the front, rate, single kick to the wire when asked).

Trainer Gustavo Delgado entered Mage in the 1 1/16-mile Fountain of Youth Stakes (G2) in his second start. When a horse goes wire-to-wire in a debut sprint race, they are expected show speed again when stretched out to a route. That plan went out the window when Mage delayed at the start, hit his hind end on the starting gate and was cut off by Rocket Can in early traffic.

Mage was in 7th place early, and he took the first turn way out in the 5-path. He made an early move on the back side to get up to 4th place, just 1 ½ lengths off the lead. Wide again on the far turn, Mage made a valiant run but couldn't quite get past Rocket Can and Cyclone Mischief, while getting passed by the winner Forte on his outside.

Mage didn't pack it in after being passed, and his 4th-place finish, beaten 6 ¾ lengths, was not that bad considering his trouble at the start and that he was running in a Grade 2 race in his second career start.

Mage ran in the Florida Derby (G1) in his third start, and again we saw an issue at the start. Oddly, the inefficiency we saw in the gate in his first two races seemed related to him being overly intense in the starting gate. In the Florida Derby, Mage was too relaxed at the start, breaking sluggishly. He was last of 12 early while running his opening quarter in :24.98!

There is something going on with Mage's stop-to-start sequence, and it probably involves his sensory interpretations while standing in the gate.

Unlike his second start, where Mage rushed up to try to get tactical position, this time he tried to execute a sustained closing pattern of motion. Incredibly, he nearly pulled it off.

Mage launched 5-wide as the field hit the top of the far turn. Running undeterred by clouds of kickback, he began passing horses. Mage ran by Forte, who was under a ride at the time in a pocket to his inside. With his face covered in dirt, Mage surged toward the lead while in the 5-path turning for home.

Mage got the better of Cyclone Mischief and hit the front around the sixteenth pole. Forte, who was following Mage after being passed on the turn, stayed on better and rallied late to win by a length.

Mage ran huge in the Florida Derby, but his final furlong in

:13.19 wasn't strong enough to hold off Forte (:12.59). He appeared to be shortening stride significantly.

Mage is a tenacious, competitive minded horse. He has put together some very impressive sequences within his races. There is major physical talent here. The problem we see for him in the Kentucky Derby is that his Herd Dynamic growth pattern and running style remain undefined.

Mage has been thrown into the fire very quickly. He has been learning on the fly, showing impressive ability and competitive resilience. We are still very early in his growth curve. If he can iron out his gate issues, he could take another step forward in the Kentucky Derby.

But without a defined pattern of motion to fall back on, he is going to be winging it in perhaps the hardest race in the world to do so in. This is an enormous task for a horse who is still figuring out who he is.

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

MANDARIN HERO (JPN)

(also eligible list)

Colt by Shanghai Bobby—Namura Nadeshiko (Jpn),
by Fuji Kiseki (Jpn)

Bred in Japan by Hirano Bokujo

Owner: Hiroaki Arai

Trainer: Terunoba Fujita



We are admittedly neophytes to Japanese racing, but we know Mandarin Hero's sire – 2012 U.S. champion two-year-old colt and ex-patriate stallion Shanghai Bobby – very well.

Shanghai Bobby was talented and gritty, but also a fast-rhythmed and quirky horse who wore blinkers to address focus problems. That is a pretty good description of Santa Anita Derby (G1) runner-up Mandarin Hero, who is stranded on the also-eligible list for this Kentucky Derby field, with a stated backup plan to run in the Preakness Stakes (G1).

We inspected several crops of Shanghai Bobby's progeny at the U.S. sales before he was sold to Japanese interests in 2018. Shanghai Bobby consistently stamps his progeny with his dark bay almost black coloration and most of his sensory/behavioral traits too. He is a very consistent speed influence and a transmitter of Individual Herd Dynamic competitive energy, though in America he didn't produce anything nearly as classy or accomplished as himself.

Mandarin Hero isn't quite as good as Shanghai Bobby, but he is a Shanghai Bobby all the way. We also sense he is a product of a coaching mindset that is different from anything we have studied here in America.

Mandarin Hero won his first three starts at age two, then progressed to the \$268,500 Haiseiko Kinen Stakes, a 1-mile dirt race. He broke ok, then settled in 7th place. The race hadn't even hit the half-mile marker when his rider went to work, urging and pushing on Mandarin Hero very aggressively.

Mandarin Hero went from 7th all the way up to 2nd place as the field hit the far turn. He briefly stalled off the leader Polygon Wave's flank, but his Japanese cowboy-style jockey never gave him a break, continuing to hand urge.

Polygon Wave had enjoyed an easy trip, setting a slow unchallenged pace up front and had conserved energy.

Mandarin Hero would need to make a strong second move in order to win the race. He briefly looked like he started going up and down just inside the 200m pole, then he surged again. Showing very good target focus and continuation, Mandarin Hero doggedly ran down the leader and won by a neck.

Mandarin Hero made his three-year-old debut in the 1 1/8-mile Kumotori Sho Stakes on February 23. He broke on top – this is actually an IHD-shifted horse who has been taught to run as a stalker/closer – then was pulled back behind horses by his rider.

A solid Japanese stakes horse named Hero Call had taken the lead at the 200-meter pole, and he veered out slightly into Mandarin Hero's path. Mandarin Hero corrected and was in the process of re-targeting the leader but ran out of ground and finished 2nd.

Mandarin Hero came to America for his second start this year in the Santa Anita Derby (G1), and this race was an eye-opener.

His body control was questionable at the start as he broke inwards and banged into Skinner, but then corrected. Mandarin Hero does a good job in the early portion of his races running into a tactical position before settling. He is running with intensity at all times. There are no breaks for this horse.

He settled in 5th place about 3 1/2 lengths off the lead, but soon his forward focus, no doubt amplified by the blinkers, kicked in.

Between horses, inside of horses, or with horses directly in front of him – Mandarin Hero appears unfazed by tight quarters. He was sticking his nose into miniscule openings, looking to see if he could squeeze the rest of his body through! This is a tactically opportunistic horse to say the least.

He spun into the lane in 4th place, just behind the leader

Practical Move. In need of room, he came off the rail and doggedly pushed Skinner out a path so he could join a three-way battle to the wire. Skinner was taken aback by the intensity of the smaller, brazen colt. Mandarin Hero won his path then set his sights on Practical Move.

If the Santa Anita Derby had been a few steps longer, we think Mandarin Hero would have gotten the win. Instead he finished second by a nose. Mandarin Hero is not the best dirt three-year-old in Japan, but he nearly took down the best Derby prep in Southern California.

Normally that performance would have been good enough to get into the Kentucky Derby, but in 2022 Churchill Downs modified the qualifying points system, devaluing what has historically been one of the most important prep races. Two of the last three Kentucky Derby winners finished second in the Santa Anita Derby! (Although 2021 winner Medina Spirit was later disqualified due to a drug positive).

The list of Kentucky Derby winners who finished 2nd in the Santa Anita Derby also includes Silver Charm and Real Quiet.

Mandarin Hero will need two scratches to get into this field. If he gets in, we think he will make his presence felt. It would be entertaining to see how this fearless horse reacts to the chaos of the 20-horse Kentucky Derby field.

Although Mandarin Hero is proven at 1 1/8 miles, we do have a slight concern about him adding much more distance due to the amazing amount of effort he is putting out from start to finish. Everything this horse does is intense. There are very few moments in his races where he is getting a breather. He must have an uncommonly deep well of emotional energy.

Mandarin Hero is a gritty, fearless horse who looks like he would run through a brick wall if his rider asked. We look forward to seeing him compete in the American Triple Crown.

PRACTICAL MOVE

Colt by *Practical Joke*—*Ack Naughty*, by *Afleet Alex*
Bred in Kentucky by *Chad Brown & Head of Plains Partners*

Owner: Leslie Amestoy, Pierre Jean Amestoy Jr., and Roger K. Beasley

Trainer: Tim Yakteen



Practical Move has used an excellent combination of early speed and finishing ability to win three graded stakes in a row, but our instincts tell us he has reached the apex of his current growth pattern.

A big part of the reason we don't trust him in the Kentucky Derby is the amount of equipment he wears that is designed to alter his sensory interpretations.

Trainer Tim Yakteen outfitted Practical Move with blinkers and a shadow roll for his first race back on August 13. That is a lot of equipment for a young horse on debut. We don't know what behaviors Practical Move exhibited that led to Yakteen's decision, but you can bet there were some issues in his early training.

It took Practical Move five races to cross the finish line first (his maiden win in start #3 was via a disqualification). He had the misfortune of running into some really fast Bob Baffert-trained two-year-olds, but there were also growing pains from the sensory perspective.

Practical Move finished 2nd, beaten 6 lengths by Cave Rock in his debut race. There was no shame in losing to the second-best two-year-old in America, but we noted Practical Move looked encapsulated by the head gear and was stuck on his left lead through the lane.

He ran into another tough Baffert two-year-old in start #2 (National Treasure). Practical Move entered the stretch just a neck back, but he was unable to interpret his rider's cues to change leads again. Practical Move has a good athletic stride, but he looked a little rough when stuck on his left lead, toiling late to finish 3rd.

Yakteen stretched Practical Move out to a mile in his third race. He stumbled at the start – he has a pattern of minor body control issues right when the gate opens. Under a strong hold early, he made a 4-wide move on the far turn. The leader and unofficial winner Fort Bragg fouled Practical Move egregiously

through the stretch run, and Practical Move was elevated to 1st by the stewards.

Practical Move was back around one turn again in the 7-furlong Bob Hope Stakes (G3). He broke outward and bumped at the start. He looked a little discombobulated, and there was a series of hitches in his sensory lead changes again. He finished 3rd of five.

Practical Move's growth pattern finally got going when he stretched out to 1 1/16 miles in the Los Alamitos Futurity (G2). Facing another 5-horse field, he fought his old rival Fort Bragg for space early and earned a good stalking position.

Moving inside of pacesetter Carmel Road turning for home, Practical Move changed leads mid-stretch. He wanted to get out as he took the lead, but rider Ramon Vazquez used the right-handed whip to control his path. With all that equipment on, this horse probably needs a strong rider who will provide leadership in areas his sensory system is weak.

Practical Move won by 3 ¼ lengths. He has sprint speed, but the sensory and physical demands of those 6 and 7-furlong races were stressing him. He looked much more comfortable at a route tempo.

Practical Move made his three-year-old debut in the San Felipe (G2) at Santa Anita, and he picked up right where he left off. He worked out an inside stalking trip, and when the rail opened up for him in the lane, he took advantage.

Practical Move changed leads and ran strongly through the wire to win by 2 ½ lengths. It was the best Individual Herd Dynamic drive and forward extension we have seen from him. His fractions paint the picture of a horse with very good cruising gears and a strong finish (23.57, 23.81, 23.96, 30.68).

Practical Move executed almost the exact same inside stalking trip in the Santa Anita Derby, although the finish was much closer this time, as he held off Mandarin Hero (Jpn) by a nose.

Practical Move was drifting out late while under a left-handed whip from Vazquez, but he did a good job staying on task in extended IHD battle.

Vazquez is a strong rider, and he anticipates things for this horse. Combined with the blinkers and shadow roll, they have done a good job managing Practical Move's sensory interpretation issues. That job gets a lot tougher now.

We put Practical Move in the category of horses for whom 10 furlongs will not help, but he has a chance to keep it together another furlong.

Probably more significantly, Practical Move has faced a 10-horse field just once. He has had some minor body control issues at the start of his races. So far he has been able to recover, but a 20-horse field can magnify gate inefficiency greatly.

Practical Move has won three in a row while getting ground-saving, stimulus-minimizing trips. Given the underlying issues we have seen in his psychology, we have doubts about his ability to handle the Derby chaos. The potential for variation in his pattern of motion looms a major obstacle. We respect the talent, but we think his win streak probably ends here.

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

KING RUSSELL

(also eligible list)

*Colt by Creative Cause—Believe You Will, by Proud Citizen
Bred in Kentucky by Brereton C. Jones*

Owner: Brereton C. Jones and Naber Racing LLC

Trainer: Ron Moquett



Coady Photo

It took King Russell a few races to put it all together, but once he did, he won us over with his undeniable competitive drive and mental fortitude.

King Russell doesn't look like a very big horse on video. His stride is more short and quick than long, but he tries to make up for it with relentless effort.

If you watch King Russell's three most recent races, starting with his 2nd-place finish at Oaklawn Park on January 28, you will see all you need to know about him.

King Russell is a Group Herd Dynamic-based closer. He relaxes early, then slowly builds into a furious, focused drive.

The Jan. 28 race was run on a wet fast track, and King Russell was in 3rd place, still 4 or 5 lengths back at the stretch call. The target focus, mind-to-body fluency and grit he showed running at those horses was palpable. He finished 2nd by a half-length, but he ran by the winner in another two jumps. King Russell thought he won that race no doubt.

King Russell caught another sloppy track at Oaklawn on Feb. 25. The sequence he put together from the far turn to the wire was awesome.

King Russell was on the rail in 6th place when #1 Tahoe Run started backing up in his face. Rider Rafael Bejarano guided him out to the 4-path. We really like how King Russell moves laterally. This is an agile horse with a high-functioning sensory system.

With the front-runners weaving in front of him, holes opening and closing, Bejarano guided King Russell back down toward the rail. He then mounted a relentless rally inside of the leader Seeking Unity to win by a neck. Not many horses are mentally and physically agile enough to be redirected twice and retain enough forward focus to execute that maneuver. That was an example of great sensory lead changes. He negotiated a changing environment skillfully and with great competitive edge.

King Russell earned his way into Kentucky Derby consideration with a hard-fought 2nd-place finish in the Arkansas Derby (G1).

Angel of Empire blew the race open on the turn for home, but a separate race unfolded behind the impressive winner, and King Russell won it. Rallying widest of all in the lane, he and Bejarano gave everything they had to run down Reincarnate and Rocket Can just before the wire.

Bejarano has ridden King Russell in his most recent four races, and we were happy to see he was named on him in the Kentucky Derby. This is a very cool partnership between rider and horse.

King Russell is not as physically gifted as some of the top horses in the Kentucky Derby, but he has one of the best Herd Dynamics in the race. We would love to see him get in from the also-eligible list.

Regardless of position, we envision him using his athletic tenacity and independent nature to run down as many horses as his body is capable of doing before the wire. We love this horse's mentality.

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

CONTINUAR (JPN)

Colt by Drefong—Pan De Ring (Jpn), by Kamehameha
Bred in Japan by Lake Villa Farm

Owner: Lion Race Horse Co. Ltd..

Trainer: Yoshito Yahagi



The Japanese invader Continuar is a Group Herd Dynamic closer with a stamina-based, slightly heavy feel to his Herd Dynamic.

Continuar has a lot of traits that play well in the Kentucky Derby. He has a good sensory system in terms of his ability to identify and interpret stimulus. He rates highly on mind-to-body fluency, and we think the Derby distance of 1 ¼ miles will be no problem for him.

Continuar's battle is not between himself and the environment. The struggle here is between his natural Herd Dynamic – which lacks some urgency -- and the tactical demands of racing.

Continuar's first three career races came in Japan. Following a debut victory against maidens, he lined up in the Mochinoki Sho Stakes, a 1 1/8-mile dirt race at Hanshin. Fellow Derby starter Derma Sotogake was also in this race.

Continuar broke ok, then settled in 3rd place early. Ears flopping, he looked very comfortable and relaxed in GHD cruise control. The leaders ran their opening 200-meter segments in :13 and change. That is a slower pace than Continuar would encounter later in the Middle East and now America.

A controlled horse with mostly subdued body language, Continuar gradually builds into his Individual Herd Dynamic competing energy. We call this type of IHD "on a dial." Some horses are push-button – the rider flips the switch, the horse ignites. Continuar's energy is attached to a dimmer switch that you have to slowly turn up. It's a very smooth, even distribution of energy.

He was still in 3rd place on the outside turning for home as he gradually worked through his competing gears. As Continuar was grinding his way to the front, Derma Sotogake shot between horses on the inside and surged to the lead. Continuar reacted to that move by digging in – there is competitive energy here.

He was gaining at the wire, but he missed by a nose. Just a little more urgency through the stretch might have gotten the job done there.

Continuar's third career start came in the Cattleya Stakes at Tokyo, a 1-mile dirt race. In 6th place early on the outside, again he looked very relaxed – ears flopping and showing no signs of competitive stress. Moving 5-wide turning for home, Continuar was in no hurry to pass horses, but his even, rhythmic stride propelled him to the lead late to win by ¾ of a length.

Continuar hit the road in early 2023, running twice in the Middle East before making his way to America.

The 1- turn mile Saudi Derby (G3) was our first chance to see Continuar in a fast-paced, more American style race, as the Bob Baffert trainee Havnameltdown set hot fractions of :21.83, :44.98 and 1:10.23.

Continuar had to increase his intensity to keep up. His ears weren't flopping like they were in Japan; they were pinned. Dipping his toes into IHD too early does not come natural for Continuar, and that took him out of his comfort zone a little.

This race should have set up well for a closer, but Continuar looked stretched in the lane. He was slowing down late, but mentally kept it together as he crossed the finish line in 5th place.

In the 1 3/16-mile UAE Derby (G2), Continuar had the 12-post in a field of 13. He was ridden very aggressively from the instant the gate opened all the way into the first turn.

Continuar did what was asked. He was in 3rd place midway through the far turn, just 1 ½ lengths behind front-running Derma Sotogake, but he had expended a lot of energy to get to the point. Ears pinned, he started losing ground as the field entered the stretch.

When it was time to transition into IHD, Continuar stuck on his left lead as he continued to lose ground to the winner. He had used all his best gears up. Continuar finished third, beaten 10 lengths. It was an honest effort, but we think they took him out of his game asking for that much early speed.

This type of Herd Dynamic lends itself to more protracted growth patterns. The desired tightening up of space between Continuar's GHD base and his IHD competing gears is still a work in progress.

Riding strategy will be crucial in the Kentucky Derby. We think a blend between his natural, more relaxed pattern of motion and what they did in Dubai would be the best approach here. The Derby distance should be right up Continuar's alley if they allow him to distribute his energy naturally.

You don't want to take too much away from a horse to make them what you want them to be. That is the edge they are dancing on with Continuar in his historic quest to be the first Japanese Kentucky Derby winner. If they let him be himself, we could see him passing horses late.

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

SKINNER

Colt by Curlin—Winding Way, by Malibu Moon
Bred in Kentucky by Stonestreet Thoroughbred Holdings
LLC

Owner: CRK Stables LLC

Trainer: John A. Shirreffs



Skinner has been on a big Herd Dynamic growth pattern at age three, but we think this physically talented colt still has some sensory efficiency issues to work out.

It appears trainer John Shirreffs solved part of the puzzle when he put a shadow roll on Skinner earlier this year. Skinner's fluency of movement improved significantly with the new equipment.

If you watch the head-on replay of Skinner's first race, you will see an example of what it looks like when a horse's sensory system can't keep up with the environment. After being bumped at the start (not his fault), Skinner was running a little head high back in 10th place.

He was over-reactive to stimulus. If a horse drifted out one path at him, he moved two paths the other way. And he was not holding a straight line; we call that "floaty in space."

Skinner never really settled, but he still launched into Individual Herd Dynamic competing mode on the far turn. He readily intensified. The IHD is in this horse, it was just not strong enough yet. There was more weaving, but Skinner showed he has a turn of foot. He ran his final furlong like a rocket (:10.95), nabbing 5th place at the wire.

Shirreffs ambitiously placed Skinner in the Del Mar Futurity (G1) in his second start. He broke last again, but everything looked a little better. He still overreacted to some stimulus, but he launched a decent rally to finish a distant 3rd place in the graded stake.

Still a maiden, Skinner ended his two-year-old campaign with a disastrous run in the American Pharoah Stakes (G1). He broke with the leaders and tried to use his speed early, but he isn't cut out for that running style. Prominent for 5 furlongs of the 1 1/16-mile race, he came under a ride then faded to finish 6th beaten 28 1/2 lengths by Cave Rock.

Shirreffs wisely backed Skinner up in class to the maiden ranks and added a shadow roll for his three-year-old debut.

The combination of maturity and new equipment produced a fairly dramatic change.

Sitting 6th, about 4 lengths off the early pace, Skinner showed a more comfortable forward projection. A shadow roll can minimize the interpretive demands in a horse's front sensory field, and that is what we think clicked here.

Skinner launched a 4-wide move on the turn and hit the lead in the stretch. His lead change was still slightly delayed, but after a few strides he got on his right lead and drew away to win by three lengths. He held a fairly good line in open space. Overall he looked more confident.

Skinner stepped back up the graded stakes level in the San Felipe Stakes (G2). He broke ok, but he has learned to wait to engage his IHD competing energy. That is more comfortable for him.

Skinner's launch on the far turn looked good. He came into the lane 6-wide in position to attack, but his transition was very drawn out and rocky. He had difficulty switching leads. He finally levelled off late and finished in a good drive to get 3rd, beaten 3 3/4 lengths by Practical Move. He was finishing well, but that transitional delay cost him.

Skinner got closer to Practical Move in the Santa Anita Derby (G1), but we still saw issues that need improvement. His launch on the far turn looked good, and he was moving strongly in tandem with the Japanese invader Mandarin Hero to his inside.

Skinner is almost always the widest horse turning for home. His riders choose that path, perhaps they have been told he isn't good inside/among horses. We can't say for sure, because we haven't seen him try it, but it would make sense if there are some sensory impediments there.

Skinner was with a length of the lead at the top of the lane, and he had Mandarin Hero in a tough spot, hemmed to his inside. Mandarin Hero is quite a bit smaller than Skinner, but he simply

wanted that space more. Moving with superior conviction, he pushed Skinner out a path to make it three horses across the track.

Looking at the pan and head-on views of this stretch run, we don't think Skinner was attacking space from that point on. He was running with those horses. The process of identifying and interpreting stimulus was still being sorted out in his head when they hit the wire. That leads us to question Skinner's Herd Dynamic strength, because when a horse is trying to sort it out, it is not influencing the environment, and the other horses know that. The Santa Anita Derby was Skinner's best race to date, but he couldn't close the deal in IHD combat.

One of the interesting things about Skinner is that although he employs a Group Herd Dynamic closing pattern of motion, this is not your typical methodical GHD closer. This is a high energy horse who spins pretty fast mentally. He has good speed, but for sensory/behavioral reasons, he doesn't use it until later in herd motion.

Skinner is improving, and he actually has the physical ability to compete for the win in this Derby. But we still see potential potholes in the areas of sensory efficiency and Herd Dynamic strength. With only a maiden win, this is a profile we can't trust to get the job done in this race.

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

DISARM

Colt by Gun Runner—Easy Tap, Tapit

Bred in Kentucky by Winchell Thoroughbreds LLC

Owner: Winchell Thoroughbreds LLC

Trainer: Steve Asmussen



Disarm was thrown into the final Kentucky Derby points race in a bid to leap-frog his way back into the top 20. He did just enough, running third in Lexington Stakes (G3) to clinch his Derby spot.

We like Disarm's efficiency and pattern of motion reinforcement, but we're still waiting for him to show the speed or Herd Dynamic power of the top horses in this class.

By Herd Dynamic standards, Disarm was a fairly advanced two-year-old. He debuted early, on June 19 at Churchill Downs in a 5 ½-furlong maiden dash. He was bumped at the start but handled it pretty well, quickly finding engagement while dealing with traffic and kickback.

In 8th place early, he came running to finish 3rd, beaten 2 lengths. This was a condensed version of the tactical Group Herd Dynamic closing pattern of motion he has employed in all his subsequent races. We liked that he immediately showed competitive nature against a good group of two-year-olds – the race contained four next-out winners, including Sanford Stakes (G3) winner Mo Strike. When a horse is outclassed, that competitive flame will disappear or only flicker briefly. Disarm looked like a racehorse from the beginning.

He made his second start in a 7-furlong maiden race at Saratoga and had the rail in a field of nine. He had a good start, then rated in 5th place, covered up on the inside. Disarm is very comfortable in positions like that, speaking to his GHD core.

Disarm's Individual Herd Dynamic competitive energy doesn't take too long to dial in. He advanced into third place approaching the stretch, then went into a drive to win by 6 lengths, showing good body control and space awareness. His ears scissoring through the wire spoke to his sharp environmental awareness.

Disarm did not work back after his maiden win, and trainer Steve Asmussen shut him down for the year.

Disarm made his three-year-old debut in an optional claiming/allowance race at Oaklawn Park on February 19. The race was run at the 1-mile distance and used Oaklawn's short stretch/first-finish wire configuration.

Disarm looked efficient breaking from the gate again. He settled in 4th place on the inside. We like how this horse moves. We don't sense any stress in him, and his mind-to-body fluency looks very good.

Disarm came up the rail on the far turn and closed for 2nd, 4 lengths back of the loose-on-the-lead frontrunner Two Eagles River. Disarm was finishing well mentally, but he couldn't catch the leader physically. Nevertheless, it was a fine seasonal debut.

Joel Rosario, who will ride Disarm in the Kentucky Derby, got on board him in the Louisiana Derby (G2). This race featured a slow pace, and for the first time we saw Disarm getting a little aggressive – he wanted to go faster than that herd was moving. Rosario convinced him to settle in 6th place, along the rail.

Rosario had to check Disarm lightly on the far turn, and they had to wait a little bit longer than they wanted to launch. But when the rail opened up for them in the lane, Disarm got a clean path through from there. Disarm took down Jace's Road for a clear 2nd, but never got close to the loose-on-the-lead frontrunner Kingsbarns.

Mentally and physically, Disarm was finishing well. His final 3 ½ furlongs in :42.52 was solid, though we would expect good finishing energy from a GHD horse whose 6-furlong split was 1:15.40 and had saved every inch of ground.

It looked like Disarm had enough points to make the Derby at that time, but after a trio of big qualifying races on April 8, he was narrowly pushed out of the field. Asmussen wheeled him back on three weeks rest to run in the Lexington at Keeneland. A third-place finish would put Disarm back in the starting gate, and that is exactly what he got.

After an alert break, Disarm slid back to 7th while dealing with some minor early traffic and kickback. He made an early advance on the backside and split horses on the far turn to move into 3rd place.

The top two horses – First Mission and Arabian Lion – ran way with the race in the stretch. Disarm's final 5/16 in :31.56 was good enough to hold third, but he was losing ground on the leaders through the wire. We expect to see the winner back in the Preakness Stakes (G1).

Disarm is an honest, consistent horse. He has never not fired, always finishing in the top three. But what we haven't seen him do this year is take command of a race.

Disarm's physical speed and Herd Dynamic power aren't in league with the big boys yet, but his foundation for improvement is solid. He has been roughly the same horse since his debut. We are still waiting to see a major growth race.

We think Disarm will probably handle the move to 1 ¼ miles just fine, and his environmental awareness and sensory efficiency should help him handle the challenging Derby day stimulus. He hasn't gotten to close into a fast pace yet, a scenario that could make his pattern of motion look a lot better. We don't view him as a win contender, but we think his overall solid profile makes him a contender for an underneath spot.

REINCARNATE

Colt by Good Magic—Allanah, by Scat Daddy

Bred in Kentucky by Woods Edge Farm LLC

Owner: SF Racing LLC, Starlight Racing, Madaket Stables LLC, Robert E. Masterson, Stonestreet Stables LLC, Jay A. Schoenfarber, Waves Edge Capital LLC and Catherine Donovan

Trainer: Tim Yakteen



With Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert serving the second year of his two-year suspension from the Kentucky Derby, Reincarnate will race for former Baffert assistant Tim Yakteen.

Last year Baffert had to transfer Taiba and Messier to Yakteen. Undefeated Taiba went off as the 5.80-to-1 second choice but was not a factor in the race and finished 12th. Messier was the 4th choice in the wagering at 7.10-to-1 and ran 15th.

Reincarnate was transferred out of Baffert's care sometime after winning the Sham Stakes (G3) on Jan. 8. We see an interesting Herd Dynamic growth pattern here that although it has stalled out, still has potential going forward.

Reincarnate was a \$775,000 yearling, but Baffert chose to race him on turf in his first two starts, an unusual choice for a trainer who is famous for his prowess on dirt. Baffert also outfitted Reincarnate with blinkers and a shadow roll, a sign this horse needed some sensory assistance early on.

Reincarnate ran 2nd in both turf races, showing good gate speed and a clear slant to the Individual Herd Dynamic. In both races he was 1st or 2nd at every step, using a sustained speed running style. Our trip notes were pretty clean, although we noted rider J.J. Hernandez had to work to steer Reincarnate in the stretch of his second race. Reincarnate has a slightly heavy feel to us.

Baffert got Reincarnate on the dirt in his third start, a 1 1/16-mile maiden race at Santa Anita on Nov. 4. He broke well – Reincarnate is a very efficient gate horse – and tried stalking the pace from 3rd position. Rider Drayden Van Dyke went to the whip before the field hit the far turn (!), and Reincarnate did not respond. Van Dyke also had trouble steering Reincarnate in the lane, and the colt seemed to be running in spots, his focus coming in and out during the stretch run. He finished second by ¾ length to stablemate Fort Bragg.

Reincarnate got his maiden win in start #4, a 1-mile dirt race at Del Mar. Breaking well and employing his IHD speed pattern of motion again, he beat next-out maiden winner Mr. Fisk by ¾ of a length. His internal fractions (:23.12, :24.04, :24.52, :25.73) were solid but unexciting.

Reincarnate ran in the Sham Stakes (G3) in his three-year-old debut, and he was one of three Baffert trainees in the five-horse field. Reincarnate was the longest shot in the field at 16.50-to-1. This was the day the light bulb turned on.

Following another strong break from the gate, Reincarnate dueled with Spun Intended to his outside through fast fractions of :22.28, :45.57 and 1:09.55. His emotional energy seemed sharper in this race, and after winning a hot pace duel, he dug in through the lane to hold off his more highly regarded stablemates Newgate and National Treasure to win by a neck.

Reincarnate showed excellent body control through the wire while completing the mile in 1:35.87. The Sham was a bigtime growth race.

After being transferred to Yakteen, Reincarnate travelled to Oaklawn for the Rebel Stakes (G2). The race was run on a sloppy/sealed track. Reincarnate was just a hair slow at the start and then got cut off early and shuffled back to 9th place.

This was a totally new experience for him, but it helped that the horses up front set a very fast pace for the closers to run into. On the backside rider John Velazquez was asking Reincarnate to pick up the pace, but he didn't get much response at first. But then in the lane, Reincarnate made his transition into IHD and he was finishing with interest in traffic when Bourbon Bash drifted out and slammed into him.

Reincarnate recovered and stayed on to get 3rd place behind Confidence Game and Red Route One. This was a good effort and it was very interesting to see him run that well when

forced into a completely different pattern of motion. His energy distribution also shifted in that race (less front-loaded).

That experience put Reincarnate in an interesting place in his Herd Dynamic growth curve heading into the Arkansas Derby (G1).

Reincarnate broke well and was pushing the pace from 2nd place early. The whole field got their doors blown off by Angel of Empire on the far turn, and Reincarnate was in a cluster of horses who battled on for the minor awards.

His body control and emotional effort looked solid, but King Russell caught Reincarnate just before the wire for 2nd place.

Reverting to his IHD speed pattern of motion, Reincarnate stayed the 1 1/8 miles (:23.53, :23.82, :25.07, :25.58, 12.50), though with this energy distribution he is slowing down with each subsequent quarter. Reincarnate has a pretty good mix of speed and stamina, but if he sticks with this run style, we put him in the category of horses who will be “trying to hold it together” at 1 1/4 miles.

Reincarnate has made some nice strides at age three and proven his competitive sustainability. There is definitely some intensity and physical talent here. We think he might be a little better than he looks on paper, but his Herd Dynamic growth curve has flattened since his breakthrough win in the Sham.

Although he has worn blinkers in all his races, we haven't seen any behavioral over-compensations that we can directly link to the equipment. On video, they appear to be cheater blinkers or at least some version that gives Reincarnate a healthy field of vision. Still, we would be interested to see if Reincarnate could experience a secondary growth curve if the blinkers were removed or a different running style experimented with.

Reincarnate is a solid horse, but if he is going to be a top level horse, they're going to need to find something to unlock his ceiling.

ROCKET CAN

Colt by Into Mischief—Tension, by Tapit

Bred in Kentucky by Woodford Thoroughbreds LLC

Owner: Frank Fletcher Racing Operations Inc.

Trainer: William I. Mott



In wild herds of horses, there is a role that we call the adjunct. It ranks below the lead horse but above the mid-level herd members and acts as a go-between for those tiers.

Note that the “lead horse” does not imply a front-runner. The herd leader can be positioned anywhere in the herd, and often will conceal themselves, especially early in motion.

The adjunct helps the herd hold its rhythm and maintain forward pace. It needs to have a somewhat balanced mix of Individual and Group Herd Dynamics, good awareness and a relatively high-functioning sensory system. The adjunct helps steady the herd's ship through changing environments.

What the adjuncts don't have is a strong sense of independent nature. They will typically back down in the presence of the herd leader.

In three of his last four races, Rocket Can exhibited the traits of an adjunct horse. That doesn't bode well for his chances of winning the Kentucky Derby, but he is a solid horse who could still play an important role in this race.

We didn't draw many conclusions from Rocket Can's first two races last summer at Saratoga. His debut 5th looked like a purely experiential learning race, the typical break, settle, let-him-finish debut. They were probably a little disappointed after he ran 7th in his second start, but those sprint races were too rapid fire for Rocket Can.

His growth pattern began in his third start when he was stretched out to 1 1/16 miles at Churchill Downs. The race was run on a sloppy track, and Rocket Can had no trouble with that footing.

He broke well from the 10-post and placed himself tactically in 3rd. Working out a three-wide, pace-pressing trip, Rocket Can showed us a smooth, rhythmic, fairly quiet expression of IHD energy. He won by two lengths while holding a good line through the lane, only drifting outward slightly in reaction to a left-handed whip from his rider.

His fractions (24.77, 24.68, 24.98, 31.90) matched our visual impressions. Rocket Can is athletic and IHD slanted, but he runs evenly.

Trainer Bill Mott chose to run Rocket Can in an allowance race next, and he encountered two other Derby horses – Confidence Game and Hit Show -- in that Nov. 26 affair at Churchill Downs.

Following a slight stumble at the start (better competition = more gate pressure), Rocket Can still attained good stalking position in 3rd place. He was looking to execute the exact same pattern of motion as his maiden win.

He advanced on the far turn and came to even terms with pacesetter Confidence Game at the top of the lane. Rocket Can even had the advantage mid-stretch, but Confidence Game fought back on the inside, re-rallying to win by a half length.

Confidence Game had the superior resolve and competitive urgency. We hate getting re-rallied on. This was the first instance of Rocket Can looking content to play the adjunct role.

Just because a horse goes adjunct in one race, that does not mean it is doomed to be adjunct forever. Unlike in nature, where a horse can stay in the same herd for years, each race is like joining a new herd.

Rocket Can got his three-year-old campaign off to a promising start in the Holy Bull Stakes (G3) at Gulfstream Park. He showed good efficiency and body control at the start, but breaking from the outside post in a field of eight still led to him being 5-wide around the first turn.

Rocket Can attacked 4-wide on the second turn, grabbed the lead and held it to win by ¾ length over his New York-bred stablemate Shadow Dragon. Rocket Can overcame ground loss while running with purpose and control. He produced another very even energy distribution (24.28, 24.92, 24.67, 31.11). Physically and emotionally, there isn't a big difference between his mid-race cruising gears and his IHD finish.

Rocket Can returned to his adjunct role in the Fountain of Youth Stakes (G2). He is a good gate horse, but he does not rush into space early. He calmly moves into that stalking/pressing position that suits him.

Turning for home there were four Derby horses across the track – Cyclone Mischief, Rocket Can, Mage and Forte. Forte looked like he was in a different league, leaving the rest behind while winning by 4 ½ lengths. Rocket Can stayed within himself and outstayed Cyclone Mischief and Mage (who had a troubled trip) for 2nd place.

Rocket Can shipped to Oaklawn Park for his final prep in the Arkansas Derby (G1). His consistency gives us a nice gauge to compare the Florida and Arkansas horses.

Following another solid start, Rocket Can entered the first turn in 6th place but in good close stalking position. He was moving 4-wide on the far turn when Angel of Empire passed him and took over the race with authority. Rocket Can didn't change his countenance one iota.

Content to serve the adjunct role again, he ran to the wire with the rest of the pack and finished 4th beaten 4 ¾ lengths. He stayed on at 1 1/8 miles fine, showing no outward signs of emptying the tank (23.75, 23.87, 25.00, 25.42, 12.47).

Because of his efficiency and even temperament, we give Rocket Can a fighter's chance to run well in the Kentucky Derby. He is a very good athlete, but his tendency to serve as the adjunct vs. some of the top horses in this class prevents us from seeing him as a potential winner at this point in his growth curve.

UPDATE BLINKERS ON:

After we completed his profile, we learned that Rocket Can will race with blinkers for the first time in the Kentucky Derby. This will be a learning opportunity for us.

Blinkers are typically added to horses who have sensory interpretation issues, but Rocket Can has a good sensory system. So, what they are attempting to alter is a behavioral/Herd Dynamic role issue.

They are trying to bypass his adjunct behavior by causing a delay or block in sensory recognition. They are asking him to release from some of his herd attachment and put more of his energy into the forward aspect.

We think there is a chance this could make Rocket Can more willing to pass horses, but it could change a lot of other things too, including environmental/space awareness, energy distribution and his overall pattern of motion. Adding blinkers in the Kentucky Derby is a wildcard gamble!

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

CONFIDENCE GAME

Colt by Candy Ride (ARG)—Eblouissante, by Bernardini
Bred in Kentucky by Summer Wind Equine LLC

Owner: Don't Tell My Wife Stables and Ocean Reef Racing

Trainer: J. Keith Desormeaux



Coady Photo

Confidence Game is a gritty, competitive-minded colt that unfortunately comes to the Kentucky Derby having not raced since winning the Rebel Stakes (G2) on Feb. 25.

His breakthrough victory was a step in the right direction, but the race contained a couple potential red flags. We wanted to see if Confidence Game could build on that effort in the final round of Derby preps.

We suspect there were problems coming out of the Rebel, and at some point trainer Keith Desormeaux decided he would be risking the Derby if he squeezed another start in.

Desormeaux purchased Confidence Game for the heavily discounted price of \$25,000 at the 2021 Keeneland September yearling sale. That price for a strongly made colt like Confidence Game doesn't add up. His sire Candy Ride stood for \$80,000 in 2019 when Confidence Game was conceived, and Confidence Game's dam Eblouissante is a half-sister to Grade 1 winner Balance and one of the greatest mares of all time Zenyatta. You can bet Confidence Game had veterinary issues that scared the other buyers off.

Desormeaux is a master of buying good physicals for cheap prices, and whatever the problems were, they didn't stop Confidence Game from getting to the races on July 2 of his two-year-old season. He made five starts as a juvenile and two starts already at age three. You can buy horses with perfect X-rays and throats and not get that much action!

Confidence Game's development to this point has been fairly linear. We identified many of his defining traits in his first race, a 6-furlong maiden race at Churchill Downs back on July 2.

Confidence Game was a little keyed up in the gate, and just missed the break. After being in 8th place early, checked in traffic, Confidence Game was soon looking for a path to advance. His head turning left and right, he probably would have run over the backs of those horses if rider James Graham let him.

Wearing no head gear, Confidence Game showed a big natural forward projection and strong competitive instincts. He rallied for a distant third behind the very fast early season two-year-

old Damon's Mound. It was a good debut race.

Confidence Game checked off more boxes with us when he won his second start. This time he flew out of the gate, expressing his Individual Herd Dynamic energy. He was the lead inside horse through a first quarter in :21.65, but he handled the pressure of being down on the rail beautifully. Ears flopping, his competitive nature being expressed very smoothly, Confidence Game was cutting through forward space. He showed good independent nature as he drew off to win by 5 lengths.

Confidence Game's first race vs. winners and first around two turns resulted in a 5th-place finish in the Iroquois Stakes (G3). He had a slight hitch at the start, was jostled in early traffic and caught 5-wide on the first turn. He tried to make a run turning for home but again was pushed around in traffic a bit.

He was laboring in the lane but fighting through the wire with everything he had. This is a gritty horse who will tire physically before he gives out mentally.

Desormeaux dropped Confidence Game back to the allowance ranks for his final two runs at age two. Following a distant 2nd-place finish at Keeneland, Confidence Game climbed another rung on the Herd Dynamic ladder in a Nov. 26 allowance race at Churchill Downs.

Confidence Game broke on top that day, and he showed again how much he likes being on the lead. His ears were flopping, then feeling back to the herd as he led them through a half-mile in :47.21. Confidence Game appears to have a pretty complete sensory system, adept at reading rear and oblique stimulus while still clearing space out in front.

One challenger emerged from the pack on the far turn – fellow Derby entrant Rocket Can – who passed Confidence Game mid-stretch. But Confidence Game dug in and kept fighting! He simply wanted it more than Rocket Can, and by the wire he had re-established his leadership to win by a half-length. This was a signature win. Confidence Game showed good sustained speed and emotional energy from start to finish, along with solid physical fractions (:23.57, :23.64, :24.81, :31.65).

Confidence Game ran in the Lecomte Stakes (G3) at Fair Grounds in his three-year-old debut. The race drew just a 6-horse field but three were Derby level horses: Instant Coffee, Two Phil's and Confidence Game.

Confidence Game got off to a good start, then was 3-wide pressing the pace. He submitted his primary pace foe Echo Again but that left him vulnerable, as Instant Coffee and Two Phil's went by him pretty easily. Physically tiring (final 5/16 in :34.33), Confidence Game battled on mentally while finishing third, beaten 7 ¾ lengths.

Fourth-place Denington and 6th-place Echo Again won allowance races in their next starts, while Confidence Game moved on to the Rebel Stakes (G2).

The Rebel was run over a sloppy, sealed track, and featured a fast pace up front. Here we saw a variation of Confidence Game's IHD speed pattern of motion – stalking the pace from 5th place early. He is able to relax just enough off fast fractions and use his forward projection to stay involved until the time is right to advance.

Rider James Graham sent Confidence Game 4-wide on the far turn. He bumped with Giant Mischief as he moved to the lead. Confidence Game continued gamely to the wire, but there were a couple things that concerned us.

Confidence Game was getting out through the stretch of the Rebel. His sensory guard rails had always looked sound to us in the past, so it was unusual to see him unable to hold a straight line. This was potentially a sign of a physical problem. Confidence Game also was stuck on his left lead through the stretch run, another issue we had not seen from him previously. When Confidence Game is feeling good, he is a very fluid mover, even in intense competition.

Combine those observations with Desormeaux's decision not to race Confidence Game again before the Derby, and we have mounting evidence suggesting this colt is dealing with a physical issue.

We admire Confidence Game very much. He is an athletic mover with a good sensory system, he is competitive minded, and he tries extremely hard even when physically tired. But he enters the Kentucky Derby having never raced beyond 1 1/16 miles and having missed the opportunity for a final prep race.

The timeline of development a horse must undergo to win a Kentucky Derby is extremely tight and unforgiving. Confidence Game is attempting to skip a step while making a gigantic move forward. We love this colt's character, but that seems like a lot to ask.

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

HIT SHOW

Colt by *Candy Ride* (Arg)—*Actress*, by *Tapit*
Bred in Kentucky by Gary & Mary West Stables Inc.

Owner: Gary and Mary West

Trainer: Brad Cox



Anyone who watched the Wood Memorial Stakes (G2) and saw Hit Show sandwiched between horses, bumping off his opponents the length of the stretch, probably thought he got a terrible trip.

Make no mistake -- being stuck between horses and having to deal with physical contact is not ideal for any horse. But after we studied Hit Show's races and got to know him, we realized something funny. This rugged colt probably enjoyed it!

Hit Show is an aggressive, close-space fighter with a gritty mentality.

The signs were there in his debut race at Keeneland back on Oct. 9. Hit Show bumped twice at the start. Even with his hind end swinging out sideways, his front end stayed straight as he fought to keep his position. He wanted to keep his nose in the fight at all costs.

Rider Florent Geroux had to check him, but Hit Show lost the minimal amount of ground, quickly regaining forward focus. He ran his way right back into a tight position within the front herd.

The top seven horses were in a cluster, within two lengths of each other. Soon there was more bumping and crowding, but even in behind horses, Hit Show's forward efficiency never wavered. He stayed glued to the backside of the lead horses, waiting for a way through.

He split horses turning for home, and on the head-on replay we saw a couple of the other horses shied from him. We can feel this colt's presence, and so could the other horses. Hit Show ran his final furlong of the 7-furlong race in a solid :12.65, drawing off late to win by 5 lengths. It was a fearless, youthful debut.

Trainer Brad Cox stretched Hit Show out to 1 1/16 miles in his second start, an optional claiming/allowance race at Churchill Downs on Nov. 26. The race drew a good field, including fellow Derby horses Confidence Game and Rocket Can. But other than getting bumped by Confidence Game at the start, Hit Show disappointingly never engaged with the top two.

He broke slowly and showing his customary stiff tail (just a way he expresses himself), looked a little out of sorts at the start. Confidence Game bumped him and bounded out to the lead. Hit Show got stuck between horses, then was checked off heels when trying to run into the top group in the first turn. He settled in 7th place, 8 1/2 lengths back.

Hit Show got a little lost during the middle of this race. Rider Florent Geroux moved him out 4-wide on the far turn, and Hit Show appeared to launch, then briefly stalled out between horses.

He got going again in the stretch, separating from the rear herd while rallying mildly to finish 4th, beaten 7 lengths. His final 5/16 in :31.42 was solid, but he never got into the same space as Confidence Game and Rocket Can.

Hit Show's assimilation process vs. winners took a step forward in start #3, a 1-mile allowance race at Oaklawn Park. He broke slowly again, but was still able to attain a good stalking spot from 4th place, within 2-3 lengths of the lead. We like this tactical positioning for him.

He advanced 4-wide on the far turn and gradually ground down the leader Invulnerable before bursting away late to win by 3 1/2 lengths. Close-space fighters sometimes like to take their time asserting dominance, spending a few extra strides alongside a beaten opponent before releasing and moving forward.

We liked how Hit Show responded to added distance in the 1 1/8-mile Withers Stakes (G3). He broke inward and bumped at the start, but it didn't affect him. Contact is immaterial to this tank of a horse, as is rear stimulus. Hit Show's world is next to him and out in front of him. His emotional energy is fairly condensed.

Sitting 5th on the rail early about 3 lengths behind the lead, he patiently advanced along the inside. Hit Show has excellent space awareness. He is comfortable in tight quarters.

This was what we call a stair-climber sequence. He is methodically tackling one task at a time, then moving to the next "step." As the field turned for home, he pushed #2 Prove

Right out of the way so he could get off the inside and tackle the leader Arctic Arrogance.

Hit Show changed leads on time as he approached Arctic Arrogance, who only offered brief resistance. Hit Show drew off to win the Withers by 5 ½ lengths. He is more a bulldozer than a graceful athlete, and without a target for his Individual Herd Dynamic energy, he wandered laterally back and forth a bit to the wire.

Hit Show's final Derby prep came in the Wood Memorial (G2). He had the challenge of the 12 post in a field of 12. He broke well, then was crowding the horses inside of him to get over into the first turn. He certainly has his bull in the China shop moments.

Hit Show got a good stalking position in 5th place, just three lengths off the early lead. He began his methodical IHD transition on the far turn while inside of Lord Miles. Those two would compete for space all the way to the wire, with Hit Show initially pushing Lord Miles out in early stretch.

With the maiden Dreamlike on the inside, Hit Show in the middle, and Lord Miles on the outside, the Wood featured a grueling, physical stretch battle. Hit Show was being sandwiched at one point, but he refused to be squeezed back, initiating contact with Lord Miles at least twice and also being bumped into Dreamlike. Hit Show was being pinballed, but he kept fighting back. Although Lord Miles won the race by a nose, Hit Show wanted to keep going on the gallop-out. That Herd Dynamic battle was not fully resolved at the wire.

Hit Show is a fearless, strong-willed horse who wears his heart on his sleeve. He is a gritty, methodical, Individual Herd Dynamic-shifted colt who is naturally drawn to close-space targets.

We like him stalking the pace from up close, a pattern of motion he has employed in four of his five starts. The closer he is to the front, the better, because it is important for a horse like this to pick his battles. The jockey can help in that regard.

Hit Show is on a gradual pattern of improvement. We admire his competitive nature and consistency, but we couldn't rank him any higher for two reasons. He hasn't yet faced any of the top Herd Dynamics in this class. And as much as we appreciate his character traits, we haven't seen a horse with this Herd Dynamic profile take down a Kentucky Derby.

Post Position Update: The rail was a very bad draw for this horse. We think they either have to send hard or try a new pattern of motion in the Kentucky Derby. Either way, emotional energy distribution is a concern.

TIER 4 ★★☆☆☆

LORD MILES

Colt by Curlin—Lady Esme, by Majestic Warrior
Bred in Kentucky by Vegso Racing Stable

Owner: Vegso Racing Stable

Trainer: Saffie Joseph Jr.



Lord Miles' growth pattern initially looked disjointed, but a breakthrough performance in the Wood Memorial (G2) came just in time for this Curlin colt to crash the Kentucky Derby party.

Lord Miles is a Group Herd Dynamic based grinder. He lacks top-end speed, is comfortable running with the herd, and has a good time-in-motion profile for longer distance.

Trainer Saffie Joseph Jr. no doubt sensed some of those traits, and he has been seeking to alter Lord Miles' running style to make him a more tactical horse.

In the Wood Memorial, it all came together in the form of a nose victory at odds of 59-to-1! We went through Lord Miles' five career races to figure out how he got here and what may lie ahead.

Lord Miles debuted in a 6-furlong maiden race at Gulfstream Park on Nov. 19. He popped out of the gate great – he actually had his head in front at the start. However he abruptly dropped back and was shuffled to 6th place on the far turn.

Jockey Edgard Zayas asked him to run and initially got no response. But after #4 Big Data sprinted away from Lord Miles and toward the leaders, Lord Miles got going. He spun into the lane in 5th place, about three lengths back of the leader.

Out in the 8-path, Lord Miles passed them all and drew off to win by 5 ¾ lengths. He held a nice strong line while running his final furlong in :12.50. His forward projection was inconsistent during this race, but once he put it together, he looked good.

Lord Miles stretched out to a 1-turn mile in the Mucho Macho Man Stakes in start #2. Zayas asked him to show speed at the start, but Lord Miles dropped back to 8th place after the opening quarter mile.

The pace was very fast (:22.79, :45.20, :1:10.03) and Lord Miles came running late to finish 3rd, beaten just ¾ of a length. His Individual Herd Dynamic was starting to emerge in the

lane, but looking at the fractions, his strong late move was a bit of a mirage. His final quarter mile in :26.53 looked better than it was because the front-runners were stopping badly.

Joseph added blinkers to Lord Miles in the Holy Bull Stakes (G3). He was probably trying to speed him up and get him to hold his position better. Jockey Irad Ortiz Jr. asked Lord Miles at the start, and it did look like the blinkers had an effect on his running style. Although in 7th place early, he stayed attached to the front herd.

We refer to Lord Miles' blinkers experience to "running in a tunnel." He was forward focused but not aware of much else, and his energy distribution was too front-loaded. He ran his final 5/16 in a slow :32.58 while finishing 6th, beaten 11 lengths by Rocket Can.

Joseph took the blinkers off for the Tampa Derby (G2). Lord Miles largely reverted to his previous pattern of motion. Sitting a close-up 4th through the first turn, then still in touch in 6th place on the backside, he initially did not respond when asked on the far turn, drifting back to 8th place.

Lord Miles re-rallied in the lane, passing tired horses while riding a wave behind the winner Tapit Trice, to finish 5th, beaten 5 ¾ lengths.

In the Wood Memorial, Paco Lopez hustled Lord Miles out of the gate to a good start. He slid back to 4th place on the backstretch, but was still very much in touch with the leaders. He began his rally in tandem with favored Hit Show on the far turn.

With the maiden Dreamlike on the inside, Lord Miles on the outside, and Hit Show sandwiched between, those three horses battled the length of the stretch. There was a lot of bumping, and Lord Miles did a very good job holding his forward projection.

Running his final furlong in a respectable :13.00, Lord Miles won by a nose. It was the best competitive engagement we have seen from him.

Lord Miles enters the Derby off a breakthrough race, and he has a chance to begin a new growth curve now. He has some traits that could help him outrun his odds again in Kentucky. Lord Miles is good in a crowd, can handle some contact, has competitive grit, and he wants to run long.

Our biggest concern for Lord Miles is that we haven't seen a lot of independent nature in him. Somewhat anchored in GHD, he has shown willingness to rally with other horses or after a superior horse has cleared space, but moving independently of the herd does not come natural to him. In the Derby, a pace collapse is his best chance to hit the board.

SUN THUNDER

Colt by Into Mischief—Greenfield D’Oro, by Medaglia D’Oro
Bred in Kentucky by Southern Equine Stables LLC

Owner: Kenneth G. McPeek

Trainer: RT Racing Stable and Cypress Creek Equine



Coady Photo

Sun Thunder is a big, strong, hard-trying horse who runs with a steady rhythm. He is more mentally gritty than physically fast, but trainer Ken McPeek is looking to change that ratio by adding blinkers in the Kentucky Derby.

It’s a big gamble to alter a horse’s sensory interpretations for this race. Let’s dive into Sun Thunder’s body of work to see why McPeek, whom we don’t consider a blinkers trainer, is making this change.

Sun Thunder debuted going 7 furlongs at Churchill Downs on Nov. 26. In 11th place early, he looked like a very big two-year-old, appearing massive next to the other horses!

Sun Thunder employed a Group Herd Dynamic closing pattern of motion in his debut. He was building some momentum when he was blocked in early stretch. He split horses and rallied to finish 3rd, beaten 7 ½ lengths. Forward projection, space awareness and body control all looked solid.

Sun Thunder stretched out to 1 mile in his second start, which took place on Oaklawn Park on Dec. 31. He got cut off in early traffic, then he and rider David Cabrera went rodeo style and were mixing it up for space early. This is a big tough horse who doesn’t mind physical contact.

The pattern of motion looked similar to the debut, but the Group Herd Dynamic portion settle was more competitively expressed. Sun Thunder appears GHD-based, but he is a bit of a bully. He pushed horses out of his way when he wanted to get out on the backstretch.

Launching a 4-wide move on the turn, he went from 7th place to 1st place in a single furlong! He won by 6 ½ lengths, holding a pretty good line in open space. Interestingly, his fractions were a bit front-loaded for a GHD closer (24.31, 24.04, 24.63, 26.43).

Sun Thunder joined the Derby trail in his next start in the

Southwest Stakes (G3). This 1 1/16-mile race was run on a sloppy sealed track and was dominated on the front end by the brilliant Bob Baffert trainee Arabian Knight.

Sun Thunder got out of the gate in lumbering but purposeful manner. In 7th place early, he would close to finish 4th. No one in that field could stay with Arabian Knight, who won by 5 ½ lengths, but Sun Thunder gave an honest emotional effort in his first start vs. winners.

Sun Thunder travelled to Louisiana next to run in the Risen Star Stakes (G2). In 12th place early in a big field of 14, he shifted to the inside at the top of the far turn. With the front-end speed collapsing, he got a dream trip through the inside. He passed Two Phil’s approaching the wire, briefly holding the lead, but couldn’t hold off Angel of Empire and finished 2nd.

Sun Thunder’s rhythm rarely changes, regardless of what is going on around him. That is mostly a positive trait. When you don’t have those very top gears, you are just trying not to slow down.

That strategy works pretty well in most dirt races, but not when the frontrunners are able to quicken. That is what happened in the Louisiana Derby (G2). In 8th place early, it looked like Sun Thunder wanted to advance between horses early, but rider Brian Hernandez Jr. took a hold.

As usual Sun Thunder tried very hard, but he could only finish 5th, beaten 8 ½ lengths. The winner Kingsbarns made things very hard on the closers by setting a slow pace and then re-breaking the final 3 ½ furlongs.

Sun Thunder’s final Derby prep came in the Blue Grass Stakes (G1), where he again waited, then tried to come running in the stretch. The top two, Tapit Trice and Verifying, were 6 lengths clear of the field. Sun Thunder was in the next cluster of horses, rallying through some traffic.

Sun Thunder was outfinished by Blazing Sevens (who decided to bypass the Derby and wait for the Preakness) for third place, but he was able to finish a neck in front of Raise Cain. His internals (:25.04, 24.01, 24.16, 25.18, 12.72) were solid, but there isn't any one part of the race where he held an advantage.

One of the primary things we look at is how well a horse's sensory system clears space for the body to run into, and whether stimulus in the oblique and rear sensory fields are slowing a horse down. An efficient sensory system facilitates efficient mind-to-body expression.

With Sun Thunder, we visualize his sensory system working like a snow plow, the mind steadily clearing a wide path for his big body to move through. It is a unique profile, but there is not much to fix here. What blinkers could do is change how he sees things, thereby changing how he expresses his energy.

By putting blinkers on Sun Thunder, McPeck is trying to convert a snow plow to a spear.

Given the competitive nature Sun Thunder shows within his GHD – and internal fractions that look more front-loaded than most GHD horses operate with -- we think there is a chance it could work. Sun Thunder could show a little more speed with blinkers, making his job a little easier when it comes time to finish. Or he could keep the same pattern of motion, but sharpen his finish.

But when you change how a horse distributes its energy, there is usually a tradeoff. A sharper expression of speed can expose further deceleration late. There is also risk in changing a horse's sensory perception for the race that offers the single most challenging stimulus puzzle of all.

RAISE CAIN

Colt by Violence—Lemon Belle, by Lemon Drop Kid
Bred in Kentucky by Rock Ridge Thoroughbreds LLC

Owner: Andrew N. Warren and Rania Warren

Trainer: Ben Colebrook



Raise Cain qualified for the Kentucky Derby (G1) with a victory in the Gotham Stakes (G3), but he is still relatively early in his Herd Dynamic growth pattern.

The biggest unresolved issues we see are his reactions to stimulus and his strength in Individual Herd Dynamic competing mode. Those are major concerns for a race like the Kentucky Derby.

His development so far has been a bit wandering.

There wasn't much to take from Raise Cain's debut back on September 17 at Churchill Downs. It looked like the makings of a Group Herd Dynamic closing pattern of motion, with a brief attempt at a bid. He finished 8th, beaten 18 lengths by Loggins, one of the better two-year-olds we saw last year.

Raise Cain made his second start on Oct. 9 at Keeneland and this time he broke well and produced a much more tactical pattern of motion than we expected. He had his head in front early, then pressed the pace from the outside in 3rd position.

He drew away to win by 5 lengths, though we noted he was a little high-headed and floating laterally as he moved into open space. His body was a little ahead of his mind's capacity to interpret. This Individual Herd Dynamic speed pattern of motion turned out to be a pump fake.

Raise Cain ran back at Keeneland in the 6-furlong Bowman Mill Stakes, and although he broke well, he began losing ground. With his rider repeatedly asking for run, Raise Cain fell all the way back to last place during the middle portion of the race. Again he was running just a little head-high and didn't look confident to us. After retreating to last, he found his comfort zone and put in a decent rally to finish 3rd, beaten 6 ¾ lengths.

Raise Cain finished his two-year-old season off with a try in the Gun Runner Stakes at Fair Grounds in Louisiana. This

was his first two-turn race, and he faced fellow Derby hopeful/outsider Jace's Road.

He broke well, then settled in 5th place early. Raise Cain looked a little more comfortable with this route race tempo. He did a good job splitting horses on the far turn, and his initial launch into IHD competing mode looked good.

But he was a little bit floaty in the lane again, with bouncy focus points. He looked unsure of himself, slightly worried about being passed instead of attacking forward. Raise Cain got 2nd just before the wire but was beaten 5 ½ lengths by Jace's Road.

Trainer Ben Colebrook changed course after the Gun Runner and took Raise Cain to Turfway Park for a run over the synthetic surface in the Leonatus Stakes on January 21. Raise Cain looked fine early, tracking the pace in 4th. He launched on the far turn and got as high as 2nd place, but then he started looking reactive to stimulus instead of attacking.

Oblique stimulus in particular – for example a horse coming up on him -- seems to make Raise Cain uncomfortable. He faded in the final furlong and finished 5th, beaten 7 ½ lengths.

Raise Cain got his Derby points in the Gotham Stakes. Run on a muddy track, it was a very strange race that featured an extremely fast early pace (including a loose horse) and an apparent breakthrough performance by Raise Cain.

As the frontrunners cut out quick fractions of :22.52 and :45.53, Raise Cain was rating back in 12th place. He seems able to dial in better given a little filtering time near the back of the pack, where there is less pressure.

He started moving up the rail nicely on the far turn, then was checked hard approaching the stretch when he ran up on heels. Rider Jose Lezcano redirected him outside, and with

most of the field stopping, Raise Cain took the lead in mid-stretch while still stuck on his left lead.

Raise Cain changed leads late and won by 7 ½ lengths (not counting the loose horse that was running with him to the wire). This was not a strong field -- there were no other Kentucky Derby qualifiers -- and Raise Cain was aided by a total pace collapse. The horses who were 11th, 12th, and 13th early finished 1-2-3.

Raise Cain faced legitimate Kentucky Derby hopefuls in the Blue Grass Stakes (G1), and we got some good data on where he is at.

With a new rider Joel Rosario onboard, Raise Cain threw his head up sharply at the start. He looked a little anxious early, but Rosario got him down to the inside and settled in 10th place at the back of the main herd.

Rosario does a good job getting horses to relax and go through their transitions in proper sequence, and that is what he did here. He guided Raise Cain out wide on the far turn and asked him to launch. He rallied decently for 5th, beaten 6 ¼ lengths by Tapit Trice. He did his best work late, running his final furlong in :12.49

We like the idea of getting Raise Cain to settle early, diffusing his anxiety, before building into a late run in the Derby. We don't see distance as a major issue here if they continue to explore this deep closing GHD pattern of motion.

But there are other issues, namely his reactions to stimulus and his strength and transitions in IHD combat. If he doesn't improve in these areas, they may want to consider blinkers for him in the future.

Raise Cain is improving slowly, still finding where he fits in this three-year-old class. His sensory system, mind-to-body fluency and Herd Dynamic strength are going to be put to the test in the Derby.

CYCLONE MISCHIEF

(also eligible list)

Colt by *Into Mischief*—*Areyoucominghere*, by *Bernardini*
Bred in Kentucky by *Castleton Lyons & Kilboy Estate*

Owner: Albaugh Family Stables LLC & Castleton Lyons

Trainer: Dale Romans



Cyclone Mischief is an Individual Herd Dynamic speed type, and to us, it looks like a mile could be his optimum distance when all is said and done.

His connections have experimented with rating him, including in his most recent race the Florida Derby (G1). It will be interesting to see if they continue down that path and if it can lead to him staying longer or perhaps lead to a secondary growth pattern in his Group Herd Dynamic.

So far his Herd Dynamic has been quite straight forward. Cyclone Mischief showed who he is in his first race, as many horses do.

Cyclone Mischief debuted at Churchill Downs on September 16 going 1 mile. He jumped outward slightly at the start then quickly recovered to press for the lead between horses. Ears flopping, with his nose in front through fractions of :22.78, :46.50 and 1:10.98, speed expression looked very natural to him.

Cyclone Mischief seemed to have his debut won when he spurted away mid-stretch, only to give it up late. His stride efficiency, which is a little less than perfect to begin with (wide action left front and hitting hard), was breaking down as he tired. He finished 3rd, beaten $\frac{3}{4}$ of a length.

Cyclone Mischief got his maiden win when stretched out to 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles at Keeneland in start #2. Under a hold from rider Joe Talamo at the start, Cyclone Mischief pressed slow fractions, then kicked away to win by 5 lengths. This is a strong, efficient, forward mentality.

He tried to employ that same game plan in the Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes (G2). Sitting 2nd this time, he pressed on the leader Gigante through slow fractions. For a while, everything looked good to us – sensory clearance, mind-to-body fluency, and no stress. This pattern of motion is totally natural to Cyclone Mischief.

He took the lead on the far turn through six furlongs in a very slow 1:15, but he could not get any separation from the field and was swallowed up late to finish 7th, beaten 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ lengths. Cyclone Mischief's final 5/16 in :30.69 is more than fine for a frontrunner,

but we didn't like the head-on replay. He was drifting out in the lane and not fighting for space.

Cyclone Mischief spent the winter in Florida at Gulfstream Park. He started off in an allowance race going a 1-turn mile. He had a nice purposeful start -- this is a good gate horse -- then showed control sitting in third place early. He looks a little more patient as a three-year-old.

Cyclone Mischief took the lead through six furlongs in 1:10.17 and drew away to win by 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ lengths in fast time. This was a nice run, perhaps his best to date. The runner-up Litigate won the Sam F. Davis Stakes (G3) in his next start.

Cyclone Mischief then joined the Derby trail, running in Gulfstream's trio of Derby prep races.

In the Holy Bull Stakes (G3), he sat a close-up 5th place behind a slow pace. He was covered up by horses the entire way, and he might not have liked being bottled up like that. He was empty when he got out in the clear and finished 7th, beaten 12 lengths by Rocket Can.

Cyclone Mischief returned to his front-running ways in the Fountain of Youth (G2). He flew out to the lead early and set solid fractions of :24.05, :47.65 and 1:11.84. He was headed by Rocket Can at the top of stretch, then Forte flew by everyone on the outside and drew away to win. Cyclone Mischief finished 3rd, beaten 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ lengths.

Stretching out to 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ miles in the Florida Derby (G1) they did not send Cyclone Mischief at the start, but he at least got good position in the clear in 4th place on the outside. They tried to stalk and pounce here.

Cyclone Mischief may have held the lead briefly in early stretch, but Mage and Forte were on top of him, and he couldn't match their closing power. His final furlong in :13.51 made us think he does not want to go any further than 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ miles in top company.

Cyclone Mischief has some very good Herd Dynamic traits, but the 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile Kentucky Derby does not look like a great spot for him.

JACE'S ROAD

*Colt by Quality Road—Out Post, by Silver Deputy
Bred in Kentucky by Colts Necks Stable LLC*

Owner: Albaugh Family Stables LLC & West Point Thoroughbreds

Trainer: Brad Cox



The problem we have with Jace's Road in the Kentucky Derby (G1) is that it is hard for us to envision a scenario where he wins the race.

The Derby has had its share of Group Herd Dynamic closers who have won at shocking odds (Giacomo, Mine That Bird, Rich Strike). This is an extremely demanding race, and when the pace melts down, late-running horses with stamina can get the ultimate setup at glory.

Jace's Road is not that type of horse. He is an Individual Herd Dynamic speed type. When you are a speed horse, no one does the job for you. And only one speed horse can win the battle up front.

Jace's Road exits a third-place finish in the Louisiana Derby (G2), a race that featured the slowest pace of all this year's preps. If Jace's Road couldn't get the job done that day, how is he going to fare against additional faster, more aggressive horses who want to do the same thing he does?

Jace's Road is not without quality. He has a very athletic Herd Dynamic. He showed that when he won his debut race at Ellis Park last summer.

Jace's Road had the IHD speed pattern of motion down right away. Running very fluidly and free, he pressed the pace three-wide then drew off to win by 6 lengths. He looked solid and smooth down the lane, stopping the clock in 1:09.80 for six furlongs over Ellis' quick surface.

Trainer Brad Cox put Jace's Road in the 1 1/16-mile Iroquois Stakes (G3) at Churchill Downs in his second start. He was feeling a little bit of pressure in the gate that day. He bobbled just slightly at the start but recovered quickly and had his head in front between horses the first time under the wire. Jace's Road finds his rhythm quickly once he is in motion. He wants to lead the herd, and that instinct is a helpful forward draw.

Jace's Road was the middle horse in a 3-horse pace duel against Damon's Mound and Echo Again on the backside. Then Jace's

Road was temporarily outpaced by the other speed into the far turn and got shuffled back. The thing we liked the most about this effort was that Jace's Road re-rallied through the lane and passed both those speed horses to finish 3rd behind Curly Jack and Honed.

His late speed was just ok (:23.70, 24.04, 24.54, final 5/16 in :33.60), but he didn't give up mentally. We thought that was a solid effort in his first race against winners while trying a new distance.

Unfortunately, Jace's Road did not build on that effort in his next run in the Street Sense Stakes (G3). The race was run on a sloppy sealed track, and it seemed to us that Jace's Road did not handle his environment that day.

He actually broke very well and was pressing for the lead early, but he began to fade on the backside after Frosted Departure and Two Phil's passed him. Rider Florent Geroux stood up on him in the lane and did not persevere. We don't know if there were any physical problems. Jace's Road might be picky about footing.

Jace's Road got back on track in his final start of 2022 when he shipped down to Fair Grounds for the Gun Runner Stakes.

He experienced a little down pressure stumble at the start. There is usually a little hitch out of the gate with this horse --a quick pressure release -- but he recovers well once he gets going. Jace's Road had things his way in the Gun Runner, as he led through comfortable fractions of :24.46, :48.18 and 1:12.54. This horse likes being out front. He moves freely into open space with no one around him.

Jace's Road drew off late to win by 5 ½ lengths over Raise Cain. He held a nice straight line through the wire.

That was a promising finish to his juvenile campaign, but things haven't gone that well for Jace's Road at age three. In the Southwest Stakes (G3) he caught a sloppy/sealed track again. He seemed very sensitive and aware of the surface that day, and was unable to keep up with the fast early fractions set by Arabian Knight.

Jace's Road did put in a bid on the far turn and got up to 3rd place on the outside, just 1 ½ lengths back of Arabian Knight, but he flattened out and finished 5th beaten 12 ¾ lengths.

Jace's Road was back on a fast track in the Louisiana Derby (G2), and we thought he had an opportunity in this race, as there was very little speed in the field. Jace's Road bobbed slightly at the start but then was quickly into his IHD cruising gear, pressing on the leader Kingsbarns from the outside.

Jace's Road had his head in front the first time under the wire, but Kingsbarns quickly fought back and charge of the race. Ears flopping, Jace's Road looked very comfortable on Kingsbarns' hip through a slow half mile in :49.60. The 6-furlong split was extremely slow (1:14.69), and Jace's Road was in an advantageous position turning for home, sitting a length off the lead.

But he couldn't quite collar the lightly raced Kingsbarns, who had additional gears in reserve. Jace's Road stayed the trip, but he was passed by Disarm and finished 3rd, beaten 6 lengths.

Jace's Road is a big, strong athletic horse, but he seems to be up against it when he is not the dominant IHD speed horse in a race. And he certainly is not that in the Kentucky Derby.

We don't think they have too many options with this horse on race strategy. Both of Jace's Road's wins have come when he dominated on the front end, and so far there isn't much of Group Herd Dynamic growth curve to speak of.

Further adding to our belief that this horse will be sent for the lead, Jace's Road's majority owner is Albaugh Family Stables. Albaugh also owns the GHD-based closer Angel of Empire, who would love a healthy pace to close into. Brad Cox trains both horses.

About the Authors

Kerry M. Thomas is a pioneering researcher of equine athletic psychology. His work began with the study of wild horse social structures and communication, and how those areas affect herd motion. He is the founder of the Thomas Herding Technique (THT) and author of *Horse Profiling: The Secret to Motivating Equine Athletes*. Kerry co-founded THT Bloodstock with Pete Denk. For more information, visit www.thtbloodstock.com or follow Kerry on Twitter @thomasherding.

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GLOSSARY

Behavioral Overcompensation: Occurs when one sensory avenue either by physical limitation or psychological aberration overcompensates, resulting in body language eruption and/or loss of mental and physical efficiency.

Buddy-Up: Occurs when a horse seeks the comfort of movement with another horse. When a horse buddies up, it is depending on another horse for environmental reads involving safety, direction and rhythm of motion.

Group Herd Dynamic (GHD): GHD encompasses a horse's awareness of the environment, including the herd around them and its overall ability to interpret stimuli. A horse with a good GHD can see/feel the big picture of herd motion (a race) and where the horse itself fits into that picture.

A healthy GHD usually is integral for a horse to consistently run well through traffic. Many horses with big group herd dynamic slants will prefer to be near the back of the field early in a race in order to read the other members of the groups' intentions. GHD horses can literally feed off of the energy of herd motion and are comfortable letting it unfold over time and distance.

Horses with high-functioning GHDs usually have the ability to travel with a herd while rating/conserving energy. For this reason, horses with good GHDs tend to get the most out of their physical bodies in terms of distance aptitude.

Herd Dynamic: a general term we use to describe a horse's overall herd level (its GHD and IHD combined with physical ability)

Individual Herd Dynamic (IHD): IHD is the dynamic that involves the self and a singular target. IHD mode is one-on-one competing mode, hence it is very important in racing.

A good IHD is integral to being a racehorse. IHD is the ability to turn on the intensity, fight for space, and vanquish an opponent.

Pattern Of Motion: A naturally occurring or learned response to the stimulus of a horse race that forms the basis of a running style.