



By Jack Mansour

Below are my thoughts about the 138th Run For The Roses. I am writing my thoughts again this year for the many who have asked. This analysis has called the winner three of the last four years, so don't expect another one. It's due to be completely wrong. Here's my standard disclaimer... this analysis is FREE and you get what you pay for.

This year's Derby field is very unique in that it includes 9 of the 13 horses who competed in last year's Breeders' Cup Juvenile Championship here at Churchill Downs including the top 5 finishers. That's unprecedented. This is a sturdy bunch. 8 of the 9 horses have gone on to win a graded stakes since competing in the Breeders' Cup making this a very accomplished and formidable field. On that day, HANSEN set a fairly soft pace and surprised the field by going wire to wire. UNION RAGS was forced 6 wide and just missed in second with CREATIVE CAUSE a close third. It was 5 lengths back to DULLAHAN who was the only horse that was able to close ground from way back into the soft pace. The top three finishers have continued to do well in races since, but none of the horses from last year's race have really shown the expected step up in form from their two year old season to now. While they are a very deep group, they are not a historically fast group. That leaves the door open for a late developing new shooter to take on the established leaders and take control of the division. Enter BODEMEISTER.

BODEMEISTER (named after Bob Baffert's son by his owner, Ahmed Zayat, much to Baffert's chagrin –Baffert thinks it's a jinx and all but ignored the horse as a Derby contender) is the fastest horse in the field and could prove to be the class of the generation. He exploded with a HUGE performance in his last race and skies over this field if he can even come close to that performance. If he does, he's the first Triple Crown winner in 34 years. There are a couple chinks in his armor that worry me... 1) he needed to win the Arkansas Derby to make it into the Kentucky Derby field based on earnings, so jockey Mike Smith took no chances and asked him for run at the top of the stretch; and, boy, did he respond. He blew the field away by 9 ½ lengths. Did he leave his best on that track in Arkansas three weeks ago? Horses typically need at least 30 days to recover from such an effort in order to repeat or improve upon a performance. Three weeks may be too soon of a turnaround after such a blowout performance. Like CURLIN a few years ago, he may be the most talented horse in the field but CURLIN settled for third in the Derby and came back to win the Preakness (likely on his lack of seasoning). BODEMEISTER has been training well and shows no ill effects of that race so he could simply be a freak of nature and we're looking at the next coming of SECRETARIAT. Saturday will tell. 2) the other concern is that BODE likes to run on or near the lead and performs best when he's allowed to have open space and not be in tight quarters. His post position draw of #6 puts him inside of the other speed of TRINNIBERG and

HANSEN who will both be flying early. BODE will get dirt kicked in his face or will need to really fly out of the gate to maintain his position, which could hurt his chances in the stretch. How will he respond? The last horse to win the Kentucky Derby without having a start as a two year old was Apollo in 1882 (yes, 130 years ago). Will he buck that trend? You're only going to get 4 or 5 to 1 to find out. If you're a BODE fan, it's tough to justify a bet at those odds.

UNION RAGS is the other favorite who is also doing extremely well at Churchill Downs this week. UNION has the look of a champion. His appearance very much reminds me of 2006 when his trainer, Michael Matz, brought BARBARO to Churchill Downs and wowed everyone with his looks and athleticism. UNION RAGS is the best of the returning two year olds and could prove to be the best of his generation with a win here and a run at the Triple Crown. One concern is his post position at #4. UNION RAGS runs his best from the outside. In his last race he really didn't kick into gear until he got clear with no one on his outside but it was too late to catch TAKE CHARGE INDY. He's going to need to find a hole and squeeze through it at some point in the race to get some running room. That's not his game. He has a long, smooth stride that needs to go uninterrupted as he picks up speed. He's not necessarily a "push button" horse who can accelerate through a hole quickly when it opens up. He may have a rough trip. CREATIVE CAUSE is a consistent horse who has been handled perfectly to date by his trainer, Mike Harrington, with this goal in mind. He's well bred for the distance and has the ability. One worry is that he's had shoe issues this week with the flight over and came out of his last work a little stiff. That may be nothing, but a horse needs to be at his absolute peak form to win this race. I love him on paper but have my concerns.

TRINNIBERG and HANSEN will both be on the lead. TRINNIBERG is strictly a sprinter. He's bred to sprint and has never run further than 7 furlongs. He'll lead the field into the first turn but won't last all the way around. HANSEN is a strong headed colt who wants to run. He's been a bit rank in the mornings to the extent that his exercise rider needed help pulling him up the other day. He's not going to let TRINNIBERG outspurt him in the early going which will spell his downfall. If BODEMEISTER or TAKE CHARGE INDY could rate just behind these two, they'll get first run on the rest of the field. DADDY LONG LEGS, GEMOLOGIST, I'LL HAVE ANOTHER and EL PADRINO will be sitting in the next flight of horses waiting for the right time to make their moves. Their collective chances could be hurt with a hot pace if they're too close. TAKE CHARGE INDY is the best bred horse in this race (by the legendary stallion A.P. Indy out of a very nice race mare TAKE CHARGE LADY) and will get some betting action because of his jockey, Calvin Borel, who has had recent success in this race. He faded in the Breeders' Cup after not being able to keep up with HANSEN. His best chance would be for Calvin to teach him to rate and make one run at the leaders, but this is



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not the right time to be teaching a horse new tricks. DADDY LONG LEGS came over from Ireland for the Breeders' Cup and finished 12th before going to Dubai and winning the UAE Derby (pronounced "Darby") five weeks ago. He's won 3 of 5 races and is a nice horse, but all the travel is asking too much of a horse (better horses have tried and failed). His post position (#1) hurts his chances further. EL PADRINO has been highly regarded and got into a shoot out two races back with MARK VALESKI which took too much out of him for his last race. He has the right to round back into form and make his presence felt. GEMOLOGIST is undefeated and has won over this track and has TIZNOW's (his dad) competitive spirit. Another contender, ALPHA, came at him in the Wood Memorial and he just wouldn't let him by. GEMOLOGIST could become the SEATTLE SLEW of this bunch. He's a big muscular horse and will physically intimidate a competitor if they get into a head to head battle down the stretch. I'll HAVE ANOTHER just beat CREATIVE CAUSE in the Santa Anita Derby and has done everything right for his California connections of Doug O'Neill and Paul Reddam. He's a tough customer too. Both are well bred for the distance and will be well positioned in the race just behind the leaders and ahead of the closers. They may team up early and make a move together into the stretch, take on BODEMEISTER mid-stretch after BODE puts away the other speed and battle it out to the wire.

UNION RAGS, CREATIVE CAUSE, DADDY NOSE BEST, ALPHA, WENT THE DAY WELL and LIAISON should be positioned in the next flight of horses. UNION RAGS is the class of this group but may get stuck on the inside with no where to go. DADDY NOSE BEST is an interesting horse who competed in the Breeders' Cup Turf race last year but he is bred for the dirt. His granddaddy, THUNDER GULCH, won this race in 1995 and his best race was his last when he finally returned to the dirt in New Mexico. New Mexico??? Yup, the same prep race that MINE THAT BIRD used has his prep before upsetting the Derby field in 2009. His trainer, Steve Asmussen ran second in this race last year with NEHRO and his jockey, Garrett Gomez would make a great story as he's recovering from a shattered ankle a few months ago at Santa Anita. DADDY loves to compete, is improving at the right time and will be flying down the stretch. He's my longshot pick. WENT THE DAY WELL is trying to bottle the same magic as ANIMAL KINGDOM last year for his owner, trainer and jockey. He even won the same prep race as ANIMAL, but he's no ANIMAL KINGDOM. He may be better suited in a NW2X Allowance Race. ALPHA is a very talented horse. He's tall, lean and doesn't have a lot of meat on his bones. He'll get knocked around a few times and may not like it. He came out of his last race with a terrible cut on his hoof that got infected and he lost some training time. Although he's fully recovered, the training time lost could be a concern as he's got

to be firing on all cylinders to get the job done here. He also is a nervous horse who could lose the race at the starting gate like he did at the Breeders' Cup. If he's matured and handles the gate well and can avoid getting knocked around, watch out. He does have a ton of talent. LIAISON is "the other Baffert" horse, which makes him dangerous. LIAISON won the Grade 1 Hollywood Futurity last year on a synthetic track but reportedly didn't like Santa Anita. He has the right to find new life at Churchill Downs. It could also be a mental thing. The horse clipped heels and fell in the Bob Lewis Stakes at Santa Anita in February and came back to run in the next two prep races at Santa Anita without a break. He hasn't been able to re-engage. Is it simply that he hasn't recovered mentally from that fall? I'd rather see the horse given a break and be able to recover from it properly (but I'm not his trainer) rather than being thrown into a brawl with 19 other horses. He doesn't have the mental make up to win this race.

Of the deep closers (OPTIMIZER, DULLAHAN, ROUSING SERMON, PROSPECTIVE, DONE TALKING and SABERCAT), DULLAHAN is the most accomplished. But DULLAHAN has done his best running on synthetic and turf surfaces. He just beat HANSEN on the synthetic track at Keeneland. On the positive side, he was the only horse to close ground on this track in the Breeders' Cup last year (so he can close for a piece) and his trainer, Dale Romans, is very high on him. His rounded action is best suited for the turf or synthetics but he can get rolling well enough to get into the back end of the exotics. The other closers simply don't seem fast enough but neither was GIACOMO or MINE THAT BIRD. If TRINNIBERG's fast pace melts down this field, one of these guys could shock the field.

SUMMARY: Analyzing this Derby field is interesting given that so many are coming out of the Breeders' Cup race last year. Do you go with the old guard (Hansen, Union Rags and Creative Cause) or one of the new shooters? Outside of BODEMEISTER, who towers over this field, it's a pretty balanced bunch, so don't let me or anyone else talk you off a horse. Any one of these horses can win. If BODE doesn't fire his best shot, then GEMOLOGIST and I'LL HAVE ANOTHER will be right there to pick up the running. All three are doing well. DADDY NOSE BEST is a very live longshot from a little further back in the field and he'll be flying late.

JACK'S PICKS:

1. GEMOLOGIST (15)
2. I'LL HAVE ANOTHER (19)
3. BODEMEISTER (6)

LONGSHOT PICK: DADDY NOSE BEST (10)