

# Derby day revisited: hangovers blot memory

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*(Editor's note: Canonero II's Kentucky Derby win seems less shock to you that he has also claimed the Preakness. Former Collegen Assistant Sports Editor Jay Finegan was at the Derby—his impressions of that hectic week follow.)*

It was either Mark Twain or N. Athew Brady who said that the camera is the root of all evil. This is true at race tracks, at least, where a blazer or an instant in a spectator's hand licenses him to push, punch, elbow and shove into position for a prize shot of the finish.

Photographs make pleasant souvenirs, but even the best lack the life they were intended to capture. The most treasured memories come from the vivid mental snapshots the mind takes. These are developed instantly, come in full color and can never be misplaced. They save for you the emotions, the seasons of the year, the feel of the wind in your face, the smell of early morning, the sun shining down, the faces of friends. They live.

The best way to convey the flavor of a Kentucky Derby weekend might be to write some scenes that are credible in at least one mind.

For this sort of writing you need a typewriter, a sunny spring morning, a quiet spot — on the porch if possible — and the smell of coffee and bacon in the air. These smells carry the imagination to the grandstand area of Churchill Downs, the underside of which houses green and white betting and cashier windows, closed circuit television sets, open air draft beer bars and the track kitchen.

### Follow the leader

Under the grandstand you are never far from the smell of coffee and horses. A gentle breeze brings these to you and brings also the smell of the trees standing in shady groves in the clearings. Near the \$50 WIN window, a knot of young people wait for someone to place a bet. If the bet is large enough, they figure someone knows something, and they will rush over to the \$2 PLACE window and drop their cash on the same horse. If they have seen a man spot over \$1000 on a horse to win, they figure it is a sure thing and they may even stick \$5 on him. For many people at Churchill Downs on Derby Day, \$5 is a great deal of money and if you lose you are considered by your friends to have lost "big." So when you play this game of race track follow-the-leader, you play with caution.

Out of the shaded clubhouse, down the stairs past the blue-uniformed track attendants, walks a country gentleman. In a four button navy blazer, light gray trousers, wearing a gold watch fob and chain suspended from his lapel, the gray haired man with a patrician profile moves directly to the \$50 WIN window.

"Eighteen on the four horse," he says quietly to the man behind the screen. Trying to appear uninterested, the group playing the game strains to hear his bet. The seller matter-of-factly pulls the nine one hundred dollar bills across the counter, a machine whirs and coughs 18 yellow tickets forward, and the transaction is completed. Casually, for \$900 is small change to him, the country gentleman folds the strip and sticks it inside his blazer pocket, content

with his tidy little wager on a 9-5 shot named Sunburn in the fourth race.

"Did you hear it?" someone will ask.  
"The four horse," he is told, and several people go off through the crowd to bet that a 9-5 shot will finish in the money. With those odds, this is not looked upon as high gambling, and after Sunburn won by eight lengths those who bet him to show collected a 40 cent profit. But the game goes on.

The elegance of the clubhouse set stands in direct contrast to the wild commotion of the infield gang, which assembles for five hours every year, 100,000 kids from across the country, and gets utterly out of control.

One Penn Stater, Doug Chance, got slightly further out of control than the rest. Resolved to enjoy himself at his first Derby, Mr. Chance drank himself into a stupor and nearly into a coma at a party Friday night. On Derby Eve the majority of students who flood into Louisville for the weekend pitch camp in the track vicinity. Mr. Chance's crowd established its bridgehead on the front lawn of a lady who lives across the street from the Downs. Others, seeing this, believed the lawn to be an official camp ground, and by midnight more than 40 cars and vans covered the lawn. People unrolled sleeping bags, pitched tents and built fires to roast hot dogs. A kid from Kansas ran a Budweiser speakeasy from his van. An outfit from Oklahoma traded hot beef stew for joints.

The lady eventually gave up and decided to completely devastate her property. She charged \$3 a car: this entitled the passengers to use her bathroom to shower and clean up. By Saturday night her bathroom had been fouled so it was not just a sewage nightmare but a health hazard, too. Only the brave dared venture in there, and then only when absolutely necessary.

### Doug takes a chance

Mr. Chance, who maintained a semi-conscious state all weekend, earned a great deal of respect from the crowd camped there when, on Saturday night, he not only dared enter this bathroom but showered and changed clothes there as well. He has testified since that he does not remember this act.

At any horse race, there is always someone who wants to give you a tip. One memorable scene came on Friday night, when Mr. Chance was talking to a kid who had come in his Volkswagen from California to be on Unconscious, a California horse. Chance had just finished his second bottle of Boone's Farm apple wine and was

going to work on a case of beer. A stranger happened by, a student from Southern Illinois, but who, sensing Chance's condition, claimed to be a Churchill Downs stable boy.

"Who's gonna win the race tomorrow?" Chance asked him between beers.

"Well," he said, earnestly pretending, "we've worked them hard all week and I would say Saigon Warrior should take it."

Chance was no horse follower and the only information he had on the Derby he'd gotten from an article in Sports Illustrated.

"Saigon Warrior," Chance repeated. "Jesus, I never heard of him. You like him though, huh?"

"He's the best horse in the race," the Southern Illinois kid said.

### Waits until sunrise

All of this Chance believed and he pondered it through the night as he finished his case of beer. Most people got to sleep around four o'clock but Chance held on until dawn. In the morning a kid from Notre Dame said he saw Chance stagger across the lawn at sunrise and he said Chance was the scariest sight he's ever seen. Three people took pictures of him as reminders of what alcohol can do to you.

The sun beat down hot and strong on Saturday. By the five-thirty p.m. post time for the Derby, a good number of spectators had been beaten by the sun and the beer and their bodies lay strewn throughout the infield. Surprisingly, Chance was still conscious, though he thought for a while he was going blind. "Must have been something I drank," he said, and shrugged it off.

Until the Derby race, hardly anyone in the infield had even seen a horse. But for the Derby itself, the procedure consists of placing your bet early, then fighting for position along the fence so you can glimpse the thoroughbreds as they thunder past. Just at post time, Chance wandered by the fence.

"Who'd you bet, Doug?" someone asked him.

"I put it all on Saigon Warrior," he said.

Saigon Warrior went off at 60-1, the highest odds of the day.

"I can't understand it," Chance said. "The best horse in the race going off like that."

The horses began to run and the announcer listed off the names as they strung out on the first turn. He mentioned them all except Fouralls and Saigon Warrior.

"Where the hell's Saigon Warrior?" Chance said. "He must be hanging back, just waiting."

Saigon Warrior was the kind of horse who should have been pulling a starting gate instead of leaving one. He hung back so far that the winner, Canonero II, would have lapped him had the race been any longer. He ran like a milk truck with flat tires, totally outclassed, and turned in a time that would shame a dairy nag.

"I don't get it," Chance said. "The best horse in the race and he ran like that."

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