

THE OSTERMAN FILES BEATING THE "BIG" BOYS

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall". Like many colloquialisms, this old saw may be a bit tired but it's still true. It's certainly true in horse racing anyway.

Horses with big names are always over bet, always. In a recent piece for DAILY RACING FORM, columnist Dick Jerardi once again noted an ever-lasting trend that he has decided should be called "Reputation Induced Phenomenon" or R.I.P. Generally, Jerardi is a pretty boring writer because he's in love with Beyer Ratings and tends to oversimplify things when the numbers do come up right. In this instance, however, I'm on his side.

Jerardi keyed his column on Del Mar Classic day when he concentrated on the failures of Declan's Moon at 3/2 in the Pat O'Brien and Giacomo at 9/2 in the big race. He noted that both were over bet due to their reputations and he was right. However, if he had waited until last weekend at Del Mar, he would have had more ammo for his R.I.P. theory. Let's look at three examples of "Reputation Induced Phenomenon" in action:

THE EL CAJON STAKES -- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 2 -- Brother Derek screamed R.I.P. when he was entered for the first time since the Preakness (beaten 15+ lengths by Bernardini) on the heels of his disappointing run in the Kentucky Derby. All the headlines said Brother Derek would simply dominate this softer group of four rivals despite the layoff. After all, his return drills for Dan Hendricks looked fine and this was, just a non-graded stakes event against other sophomores. Win or lose, Brother Derek was going to be badly over bet in comparison to his chances of succeeding and that meant opportunity for those willing to think outside the box.

Bob and John was also in the race (his first start since being crushed in both the Belmont as the 9/2 favorite and the Kentucky Derby). He, too, was an R.I.P. type horse but he did figure to play second fiddle to Brother Derek on the tote board.

The interesting colt was Cindago, an Indian Charlie three-year-old who had run very fast on opening day at Santa Anita (December 26) when he graduated over a field that included Point Determined and two others that would return to win their next start impressively. This \$900k purchase had been given lots of time to develop since then by John Sadler and the mere fact that the barn decided to pass logical NW2 spots with allowance sprinters to run in this miler against some big names was interesting. He had worked a big mile in 1:37.1 August 27 and if he had been maturing while his primary foes had been chasing the big carrot during the spring, he might be worth a play.

Here was my "betting line" on the race (ML=Morning Line, BL=Betting Line or true value win odds and AO=Acceptable Odds, approximately 50% over the BL).

CINDAGO	ML-8/1	BL-6/1	AO-10/1
BOB AND JOHN	ML-3/1	BL-8/5	AO-3/1

Cindago was bet in half to 4/1, so there were others who felt the same way I did and made the horse a tough bet to win. Bob and John was a playable overlay at a surprising 4/1 but I've never liked the horse much and was well sold on Cindago. The proper bet, for me anyway, became an Exacta box pairing them equally. Cindago made the lead, fought off 'John to the wire and the Exacta returned a decent \$22.70 when Brother Derek finished out of the money.

THE SOLANO BEACH HANDICAP--SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3 -- No one needed to dust off the old Kelco Class Calculator to figure out Moscow Burning was the "class" of this six-horse grass race. However, she was going to be a ridiculously low price for a mare than had lost her last four races, was 0/4 at DMR and was shortening up to a mile after some longer races. The fact that she had been beaten in some races recently she was supposed to win (odds of 2/1, 3/5 and 1/1) was enough to suggest she might have lost some of that fire that helped her rise from the claiming ranks to millionaire status. On paper, she may have been the nuts but in reality, she seemed somewhat vulnerable.

River Ella and Sip One for Mom were both recent winners over the course and seemed worth a shot at inflated odds induced by the R.I.P status of Moscow Burning. Here was my line:

RIVER ELLA	ML-12/1	BL-5/1	AO-8/1
MOSCOW BURNING	ML- 3/5	BL-1/2	AO-4/5
SIP ONE FOR MOM	ML-12/1	BL-8/1	AO-12/1

River Ella was a marginal play at 7/1, Moscow Burning was a pass at 1/5 and Sip One For Mom was a qualified overlay at 19/1. She was worth a small win bet at the available odds and an Exacta box with the trio of contenders seemed a relatively safe investment with a chance at a big score if 'Ella and Mom happened to run one-two. River Ella set the pace, got winded in the lane and three of them charged to the wire with Sip One For Mom winning the miracle photo over the favorite at \$41. The Exacta came back \$41.70. There was all sorts of bumping and grinding down the lane but after a lengthy inquiry, the stewards correctly determined that it was tiring River Ella that caused all the problems and the result stood.

THE WINDY SANDS HANDICAP--MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4--Bob Baffert brought back Sinister Minister, that freak-out Bluegrass Stakes winner who had bombed so badly in the Kentucky Derby but he also entered tried-and-true older horse Preachinathebar as well. Since the public figured to go ga-ga over 'Minister and his speed, he was a probable R.I.P. horse despite the fact that he had won only twice in his career while his stablemate had scored eight times. Since the favorite seemed a reasonable bet to finish out of the money, I made Southern Africa, a well-traveled four-year-old, my second choice for the Exacta with the following line:

PREACHINATTHEBAR	ML-2/1	BL-6/5	AO-8/5
SOUTHERN AFRICA	ML-4/1	BL-7/2	AO-5/1

The fans did their thing and made Sinister Minister 4/5 while Preachinathebar went off at nearly 5/2 and was clearly a good investment on the win end. With Southern Africa at 9/2, he was an OK mate on the bottom of a one-way Exacta. Despite a poor start, Preachinathebar rallied outside to win going away at \$6.80 but Southern Africa was out-kicked by a longshot to end up third. The favorite backed up badly, another victim of R.I.P. Still, his presence made for a nice profit on the logical winner.

Three examples in three days to suggest the bigger they seem to be, the bigger they may fall.