

KENTUCKY DERBY

INSIDE THE RUN FOR THE ROSES



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"All these big hats is what's killing me. I thought they weren't going to let me in because my hat was too small."

Rapper/actor Chris "Ludacris" Bridges

DIARY OF A DERBY NEWBIE*



The Enquirer/Ernest Coleman

Enquirer reporter Shannon Russell smiles as she tastes her first mint julep in a cool collectors' cup. The drink tastes, well ... gross.

A hat, mint julep and wagering all part of the experience

By Shannon Russell
Enquirer staff writer

LOUISVILLE - My alarm sounds at 5:36 a.m. I suppress the urge to hit snooze, remembering one thing: It's Derby day.

While the 132nd edition of the Run for the Roses spotlights Churchill Downs and the horse racing industry on a national stage, I couldn't help but feel like this day, this 68-degree first Saturday in May, was just for me.

It was my first Derby, and my assignment for the Commonwealth's unofficial holiday was writing about my experiences.

Now it must be said that I'm a rookie*, because I did go to the Derby eight years ago. But I didn't drink a mint julep. I didn't wear a hat. I don't think I even bet on the race. I was, in a word, lame.

I completely forgot this tragic episode until a kind friend reminded me and threatened to tell all. So there it is. I'm a rookie,* and I'm not afraid to admit it.

I put on a straw hat because a.) it's tradition and b.) it's a bad hair day.

I'm off.
9:25 a.m. - I stop at a light near the University of Louisville's campus. The dude in the SUV next to me honks.

"Heeeeeeeeeeeeeeyyy! DERB-AAAAAY!" He and his fellow college-aged male whoop and holler with reckless abandon and encourage me to do the same.

What's a Derby lady to do? Raise the roof? Flash a peace sign? I'm eight years out of college and not sure how to properly be cool.

I settle on a thumbs-up.
"Yeahhhhh!" they say, speeding away as the light changes.

Yeah is right. Still got it.
9:26 a.m. - While navigating the Derby's route to the media parking lot, I attempt a left turn onto a street I believe will take me to the promised land.

I slow, roll down the window and ask the traffic coordinator if I could turn.

"NO!" she shouts.
"But -"

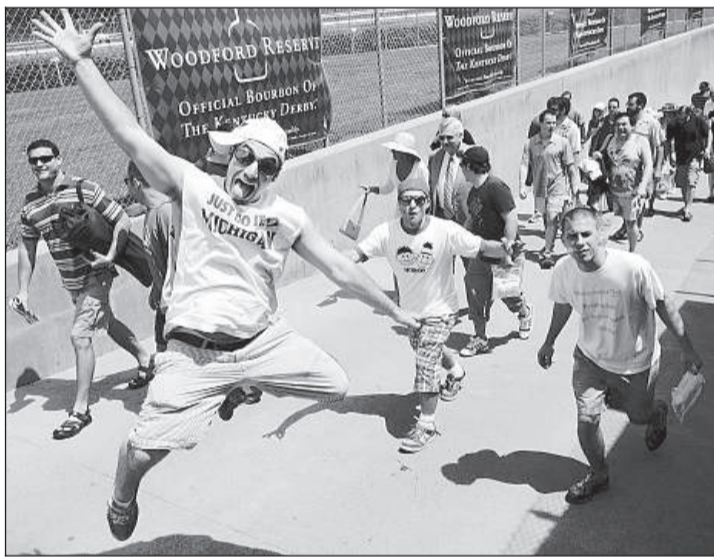
"You gots to GO!" She waves me on, irritated.

I drive aimlessly around Louisville for 40 minutes trying to find access to the lot. Re-tracing my steps backward, I encounter different traffic coordinators in the SAME SPOT.

"Yes, this is the way to the media lot," they say, motioning me through.

10:06 a.m. - I arrive at Churchill Downs via media shuttle. The weather is gorgeous, the hats are in full effect (I see an intricate one replicating the twin spires) and the ladies' fashions are a show to behold.

10:07 a.m. - The baggage checkers tell me media need to go to Gate 10 to have their laptops checked. Ah, yes. Gate 10.



The Associated Press/Charlie Riedel

Infield crazies are ready for a day of partying as they enter the hallowed ground at Churchill Downs on Saturday.



The Enquirer/Ernest Coleman

Shannon flashes her losing Derby ticket. See ya, \$41!

10:17 a.m. - Where the blazes is Gate 10? I walk around Churchill Downs' entrance and haul my computer nearly a half-mile away. Suspiciously, there are no other media types around, yet a dozen were on my shuttle.

10:27 a.m. - By the grace of God, I find Gate 10. Stupid Gate 10.

10:33 a.m. - This will make me sound like a complete newbie, but ... the media room rules. It has two giant-screen TVs, 16 smaller TVs and - get this - you can even bet in here. AND we get a free backpack. And a pen. I love the Derby.

10:35 a.m. - Time to place a bet. After wandering around the paddock and trying to get glimpses of horses, I chance upon a betting window.

"I'd like to place a bet on the next carrel, where a woman is unloading some major coin and looking at her program. I ask her to flip to the page I need.

I put \$2 on Brother Derek to win because he is favored. I heard Lawyer Ron won his last seven races, so I put \$2 on him to win, too. Sinister Minister has killer silks - a basketball on jockey Vic-

"One step onto the grassy knoll, known for its youthful coeds and 'anything goes' attitude, and I realize what I'm in for."

Enquirer reporter Shannon Russell

tor Espinoza's shirt - so I plunk down another \$2 to win.

And in a completely random choice, I put \$5 on Steppenwolf to win. It's like Teen Wolf's stepbrother. Can't go wrong there.

10:40 a.m. - I go for the trifecta (Steppenwolf, Lawyer Ron and Brother Derek). The lady behind the counter asks if I want it as a box.

What does that mean? She explains. If those horses place first, second or third in any order, I win. Sounds good to me.

"That's a \$30 bet," the Lady Behind the Counter said.

My heart stops beating. But I will not fold. I will not tuck my tail between my legs. I will fork over \$41 for gambling, knowing that I just might return a millionaire.

If not, The Enquirer surely will reimburse me. Right, guys? Right?

10:41 a.m. - I need a drink. I want the mother of all Derby traditions: The Mint Julep.

After doing extensive pre-Derby research, I can confidently say the beverage is made of bourbon, mint and sugar syrup. Take out the bourbon and it's like a mint milkshake. A mint milkshake without milk.

I pay \$9 for a julep, but only because it comes in a cool collectors' cup. I prepare to take a sip. A woman actually stops to watch. "I want to see her face when she tastes it for the first time!"

The pressure's on, so I take a

drink. It is a taste to behold. Fresh. Bourbon-y. Gross.

A friend, equally disgusted by the drink, said Churchill Downs should offer spittoons for julep disposal. Sick.

10:48 a.m. - A man in a purple dress and derby hat walks by.

11 a.m. - I dig into a delicious Derby lunch that includes roll-and-cut sugar cookies decorated like the jockeys' silks.

Noon - Celebrity sighting! I run at breakneck speed to the landing outside the media room to catch a glimpse of Jerry O'Connell of "Jerry Maguire" fame (and other stuff, but that's what I like him in). I hear I can get to the celebrity landing with my press pass, so I dash down four flights of stairs.

12:03 p.m. - Security denied. I return to my stalking post on the media landing. I see a glimpse of Smokey Robinson. And ... Smokey Robinson. Where are the celebrities of my generation? What, Nick Lachey's too busy?

2:30 p.m. - The infield. One step onto the grassy knoll, known for its youthful coeds and "anything goes" attitude, and I realize what I'm in for. Girls are wearing Santa hats and tube tops; boys are wearing beer boxes and afro wigs.

One man, resembling an NFL lineman in size and girth, is dressed in makeshift jockey silks.

2:31 p.m. - Someone spills beer on my shoe. It's on.

2:45 p.m. - The smell of something sweet fills the air and the ground is a wasteland of beer bottles, shaved ice cups, flattened French fries and broken glass. I miss my media seat. My personal-space-regulated, clean, media seat.

6 p.m. - From the media overlook, parallel to the finish line, the track is a sight to see. Spectators are on their feet, roaring, as thoroughbreds trot to the gate for the big race. Infield fans are dozens of people deep, pressed against a fence. The stir of excitement is contagious.

(around) 6:15 p.m. - And they're off! Pandemonium erupts.

6:20 p.m. - BARBARO!
6:21 p.m. - What the \$@#@\$! I LOST?

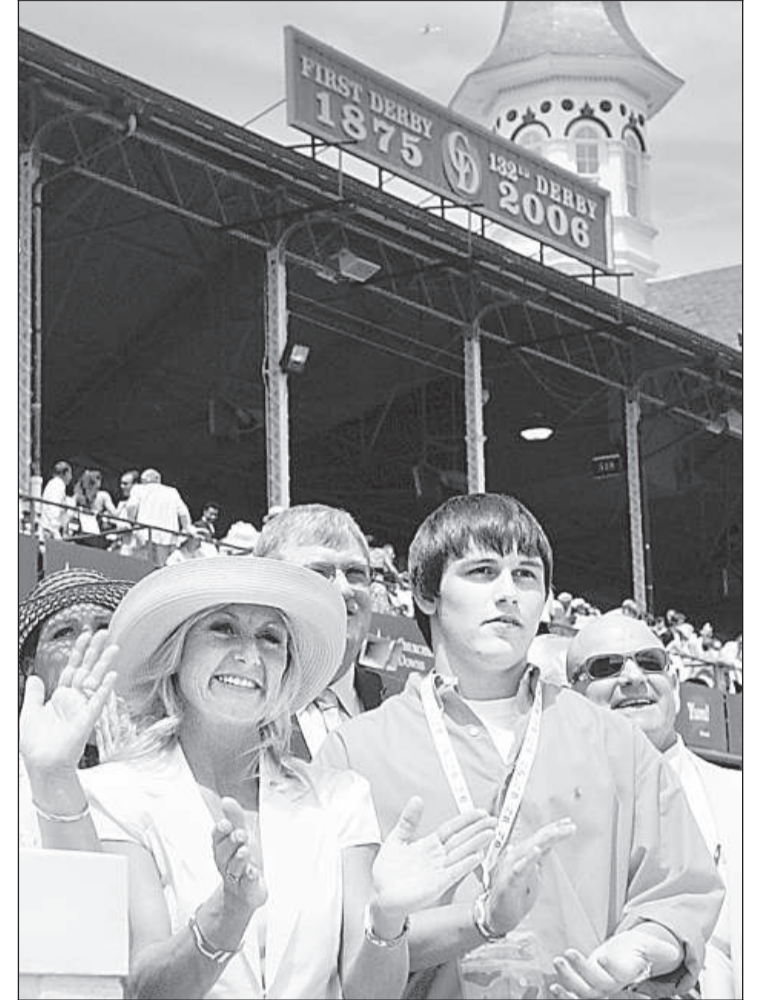
6:22 p.m. - As jockey Edgar Prado is interviewed atop Barbaro, fans toss losing tickets into the air. They flutter like confetti into clubhouse seats. Shannon fans throw down their hats in disgust. The \$41 is gone forever.

6:22 p.m. - Do you understand? Forever.

7 p.m. - What a day. With the second-largest crowd in Derby history (157,536) rooting for the big race, it's almost a surreal experience. As I pack up, I think of the sporting venues I've visited. I've been to Bengals and Reds games, Great American Ball Park, the NCAA Tournament and Rupp Arena when it has been rocking.

And now the Kentucky Derby. Is it the most exciting two minutes in sports?

I think it just might be.



The Enquirer/Gary Landers

Before the races, Lisa Godsey and her son, Cody, had a teleconference with Godsey's daughter, Jessica, who is in Afghanistan.

The fans

Family, friends unite over races

Locals have fun in sun at Derby

By Shannon Russell
Enquirer staff writer

LOUISVILLE - Lisa Godsey asked her daughter, Jessica Godsey-Olson, if she liked her new shoes. Jessica asked her mom if she liked her dirty boots.

An ordinary mother-daughter conversation. Except Godsey was at Churchill Downs and her daughter was in Afghanistan.

The two Fort Mitchell residents communicated through Operation Iraqi Freedom's live video teleconference from the winner's circle at Saturday's Kentucky Derby.

Marine LCpl. Godsey-Olson, 20, was one of five service members selected to meet with their families. For 30 minutes she talked to her mom, brother Cody, and family friend Jessica Preston.

"It was just like she was in the room. It was amazing," Godsey said. "I haven't seen her since January since we took her to San Diego to be deployed."

The emotional connection brought tears to Godsey's eyes, prompting Godsey-Olson to joke: "This is why I don't like to call!"

The Derby experience, a first for Godsey, reinforced how much she missed her daughter, who is expected to return in September.

The 132nd Derby united dozens of other Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky residents from the clubhouse to the infield, with many enjoying the day's sun and fun on a lighter note.

Fort Mitchell residents Nathan and Mary Lee Smith entertained friends from California, Arkansas and Illinois in a cordoned section of the clubhouse.

The Smiths started their Derby celebration Friday with the Kentucky Oaks, mingling afterward at a party with singers Nick Lachey, Travis Tritt and Smokey Robinson.

Nathan Smith said Saturday's weather was the best of the nine Derbys he has attended.

"It's perfect," he said. "It doesn't get any better than this: 68 and sunny. It's a great day for the races."



Touville

Evendale resident Steve Touville thought it was a great day, too, until he lost his buddy in the infield. Not an ideal situation at a Derby that drew the second-largest crowd in history with 157,536 spectators.

Touville, 43, said he's probably "too old" to be hanging out in the infield, but he keeps coming back. It was his fifth Derby.

"It's like one big frat party," he said.

Finneytown's Brian Stoehr, 32, and Colerain's Kevin Scherz, 32, could relate. They were part of an eight-man group that began celebrating Todd Stoehr's 30th birthday with 9 a.m. tailgating.

All eight men wore Bengals jerseys. They were greeted by shouts of "Who dey!" on their journey to make bets in the infield.

Scherz, who frequents Turfway Park, wanted to expand his horse-racing repertoire by attending the Derby for the first time. And he had a hunch who would win the Run for the Roses.

"Barbaro," he said. "I saw him race before and, as he came around the last turn, he stumbled. But he still won the race. That horse has a lot of heart."

Florence's Mike Kemper, 23, decided not to bet at all. The last time three times he bet on a horse, it finished last.

"I decided to save my money for beer instead," Kemper said.

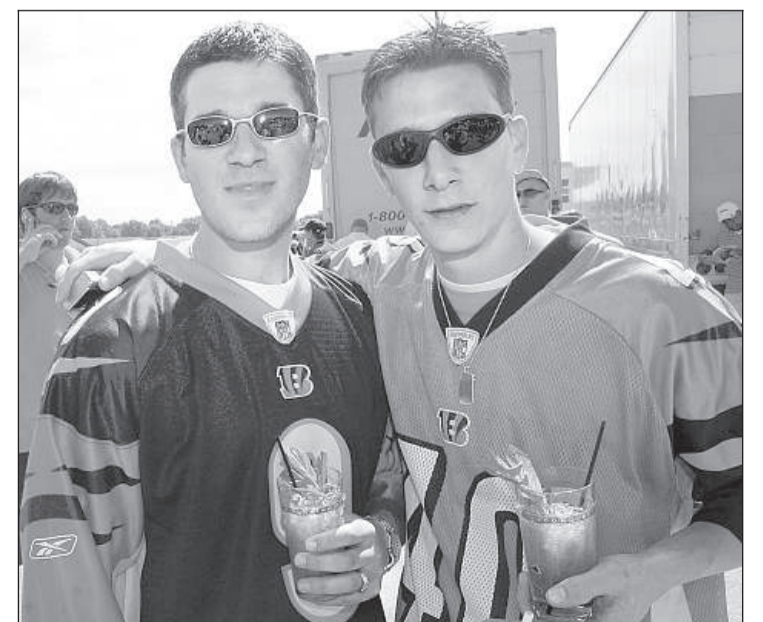
Hebron resident Ryan McMath was also in the mood for liquid refreshments.

The 24-year-old mutual teller said he worked Friday's Oaks.

When he returned Saturday to work the Derby, he said he had been fired for sipping a beer behind the counter.

"I decided to stay," he said, "and have fun at the Derby anyway."

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The Enquirer/Ernest Coleman

Kevin Scherz (left) of Colerain and Brian Stoehr of Finneytown brought Bengals spirit to the Derby with six other friends.