



Tim Tam was one of few favorites to win.



Sensational Silky Sullivan disappointed fans in '58 run.



Favored Gallant Man is nosed out in '57 Run for the Roses by Iron Liege.



Top jockies like Hartack, Shoemaker had their woes.



In another Derby duel, Dark Star reaches wire first, upsetting great Native Dancer.

Anything Can Happen at the Derby

by Dave Warner and Bill Beesey

About the only "sure thing" at Churchill Downs next Saturday will be some two minutes of top thoroughbred racing.

REMEMBER when Gallahadion won the Kentucky Derby in 1940? He was an out-of-the-blue long shot. The favorite, Bimelech, finished second. Or when Dark Star upset the favored Native Dancer in the 1953 Derby?

You can see the same pattern in more recent years, too: Swaps winning over Nashua in 1955; Iron Liege turning the trick against his favored stablemate, Gallant Man, in 1957; and last year, Tim Tam leaving the sentimental favorite, Silky Sullivan, up the track in 12th place. And you'll probably see it again next Saturday in the 85th running of the classic at Louisville.

In the last six Derbies only one favorite has won. Why is it that the favorite so often fails to live up to expectations in this glamour race?

There are a number of reasons, almost any of which can plague the public choice in this 1¼-mile blue-ribbon event for 3-year-olds at tradition-steeped Churchill Downs.

Thoroughbred horses are unique animals. They weigh about 1,000 pounds in racing trim, have long light bones, long flat muscles, and are high-strung creatures. They have fighting hearts and a special kind of integrity uncommon to other four-footed animals. All this contributes to the adage that "anything can happen at the Derby."

The people who buy the \$2 pari-mutuel tickets at the track Saturday will create the favorite. He is the horse on which the greatest amount of money is bet. Whether he deserves that role in terms of ability is beside the point.

Because the Derby is in a class by itself as a sports spectacle, attracting thousands of people who rarely attend another race during the year, there's apt to be less professional appraisal of horse flesh evident in Derby betting than in a routine race. The public's support of a particular horse often is a matter of pure romantic appeal.

One merely has to go back to last

year's Derby for the perfect example. Silky Sullivan, the come-from-far-behind horse, had the kind of late-rush tactics which captured the imagination of racing fans. Pre-race stories of Silky's fabled stretch runs whetted public appeal so that bettors backed the California lagging nag into a favored role. Alas, as has happened in many another Derby, Silky let his backers down.

There's another reason why it's difficult for the public to pick the horse that correctly should be the favorite.

One jockey put it this way: "The Kentucky Derby is run the first week of May. Some of the horses in the field may have been running during the Winter season. Others have been brought to condition expressly for the Derby. The difficulty is in getting a good 'line' on the field.

"You know how the Winter horses have been performing, but you don't know enough about the others because there is no recent 'form' on them. After the Derby, in the Preakness and Belmont stakes, there's a better line on the horses, particularly because the same horses that have competed in the Derby usually go for the other two races."

Most horses have to have a few races under their saddles before they reach competitive peak. Sometimes the horse expected to win the Derby hasn't reached the required edge his trainer expected; he shows better form in the next few weeks. An example is 1940's Bimelech, a favorite which lost the Derby but won the Belmont and Preakness, the other two jewels in racing's Triple Crown.

THE FEELING among jockeys is that a great many "bad" horses win the Derby. This doesn't mean that they're not fine animals; any Derby winner must be rated highly in the record books, but not necessarily tops.

One reason for this is that many

owners believe having a horse running under his colors in the Kentucky Derby is the ultimate in racing thrills. Every year the Derby field includes horses which have no business there, competitively speaking. And because you never can tell what will happen in a horse race, quite often one of these lesser-regarded horses will upset the field and win the "Run for the Roses."

In the anything-can-happen category is the embarrassing case of Willie Shoemaker, the luckless jock aboard Gallant Man in the 1957 Derby. "The Shoe," rated one-two with Willie Hartack as the best of the younger saddlesmiths, misjudged the finish line. He stood up in the saddle before the finish line had been reached. By the time he realized his mistake a second or two later, Gallant Man had eased his stride just enough so that he couldn't recoup in time to catch underrated Iron Liege.

"It's one of those things that can happen to anybody," said Teddy Atkinson, who won more than \$17 million in purses before his recent retirement. "No one feels worse about these incidents than the jockey himself. There's no excuse for it, of course, but I was guilty of a similar thing myself once.

"I was wearing a crash helmet that didn't fit tightly enough. I was in the stretch, leading, when all of a sudden the visor of the helmet slipped down in front of my eyes. With a reflex action, I

sort of pulled up momentarily to adjust the helmet. That did it. I blew the lead, and the race. There was no excuse for me, either; it just happened."

Jockey Job Dean Jessop pulled a boner similar to Shoemaker's in the 1946 Derby. He became confused over the exact location of the finish line and lost second place aboard Hampden by a head to Spy Song.

Even the horses themselves seem to realize Derby Day is different.

In the 1947 Derby, Jet Pilot plowed through the drying mud to thrust his unspattered chestnut countenance into the camera's eye just ahead of favored Phalanx. He was led into the horseshoe of geraniums in front of the tote board to receive his corsage of roses, and they delivered the winning swag (\$92,000) to Mrs. Elizabeth Arden Graham, the beauty-salon lady.

Then the colt started back across the track toward the paddock, frisking and dancing in a tight little convoy of policemen. Too tight a convoy, for as they reached the outside rail, Jet Pilot upped with his hind hoof and planted it firmly in the rear of one officer's lap. Jet Pilot seemed to enjoy the kick as much as the victory; so did the spectators, both winners and losers.

And why not? How many horses get a chance to score an upset for a Derby victory and get to boot a cop in his seat, all in the same afternoon?



Perhaps not the best race track, Churchill Downs is surely most famous, historic.