

# The doc, a jockey and the minister's wife

Picking winners does not have to involve a complicated system

By Jude Feld

I hopped into the driver's seat of my father's avocado green Chevy Malibu on a Friday night in March 1972 to drive him to the newsstand so he could get the Saturday edition of *Daily Racing Form* and I could use my learner's permit. As soon as he got back in the car, Dad opened the *Form* and ripped the perforations at the top, freeing the pages for handicapping.

Once home, he headed to his leather recliner, red Flair Pen in hand, and for two solid hours, he made note after note on the past performance charts, preparing to assault Santa Anita the next afternoon with my mom and Dr. and Mrs. Coleman.

A small-scale Thoroughbred owner, Dad was considered a "racing expert" by many of his friends. He was an excellent handicapper, albeit a \$2 bettor, who spent his whole adult life refining his handicapping skills and theories.



Photo by Z

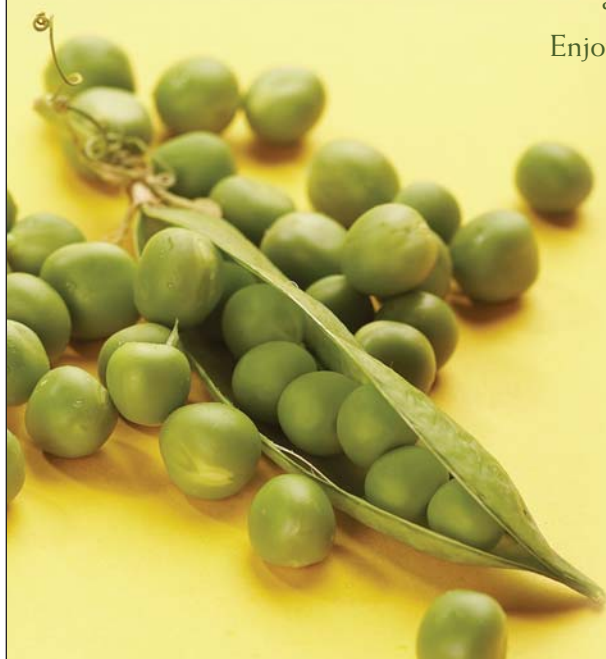
Dr. Coleman was a prominent orthopedic surgeon, married to my mother's best friend from college. He could piece together the most mangled motorcycle casualty but what he knew about horse racing you could put into a thimble.

Back at our house for martinis after the races, my parents and their friends

recounted the day at the track as I listened, cross-legged on the floor, eating Spanish peanuts from the pineapple-shaped bowl on the coffee table and stealing sips of Mom's cocktail. Dad had started out with a winner evidently but tanked the rest of the way. Dr. Coleman had a huge day howev-

*continued on page 22*

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continued from page 20

er—three longshot winners—all picked with his “surefire system.”

“A surgeon friend of mine, who goes to the races quite often, told me to bet any horse whose name has the third letter an ‘R,’ preceded by a vowel,” he said.

When the John Canty-trained Nor II romped home in the San Luis Rey Handicap, paying double-digits, Doc Coleman was all over him, while Dad’s top selection, Hill Run, finished second.

Doc Coleman’s success illustrates that having a winning day at the races is not predicated on understanding the hieroglyphics between these program pages. Ferreting out winners that light up the tote board can be done by studious handicapping, but there are other much less complicated ways to have a winning afternoon.

### Pick a favorite jockey

It is a published fact that more longshots win at Keeneland than any other track in the United States. The great purses and large fields mean more quality horses are competing, and some of those talented individuals get overlooked by the wagering public, paying big prices when they win.

Top jockeys often lead the way to winners. For years, many Keeneland fans just wagered on any horse ridden by Pat Day. This was a great way to cash tickets because Day won 918 races here during his Racing Hall of Fame career. The bulk of those winners were favorites—many on account of “Pay Day” riding them—so it wasn’t uncommon to bet four winners in nine races and lose money on the day.

Since Day’s retirement, top mounts have been spread around a handful of riders and the odds have become much more generous. Rafael Bejarano, Julien Leparoux, Robby Albarado, John Velazquez and Mark Guidry are all jockeys worth putting your two bucks on, especially at a price. I would also strongly consider any horse being ridden by Brice Blanc on the turf.



### Pick a good-looking horse

Another way to find a solid animal to play is to look at the horses themselves. Many people who visit Keeneland have other equine interests: show jumping, eventing, barrel racing, etc. Knowing about horses can be used for profit. During the course of the day, you might hear some gal in the cashier’s line say about her 20-1 winner, “I bet on him because he was so pretty.”

Don’t roll your eyes. Press box handicappers often lament after missing a longshot, “That horse looked best on the track.” If you have equine knowledge, use it. If you don’t, go to the paddock anyway. Check out the post parade and bet on the grand-looking horse that catches your eye.

This sport is all about the equine athletes. Spending some time around the horses on your visit to the track will certainly make your day much more enjoyable and maybe more profitable too.

### Play the numbers

If simultaneously holding a beer, a bowl of burgoo and a program presents a challenge, you can bet the hands-free “Minister’s Wife” system.

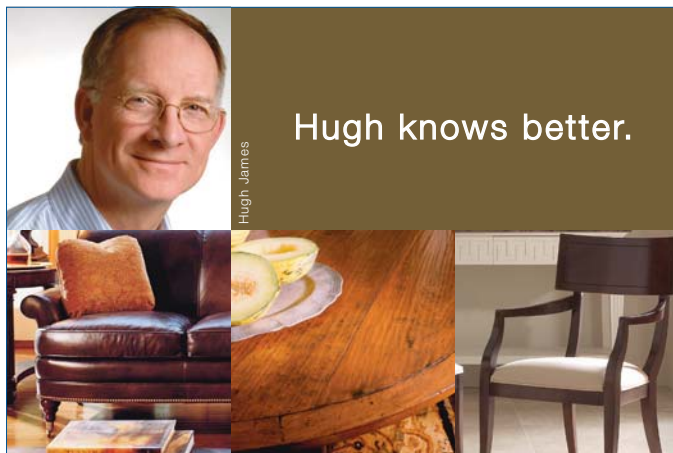
The story goes that a minister’s wife was headed to Keeneland for a charity event. Unaccustomed to wagering, she asked a parishioner who owned a Thoroughbred farm how she should bet her \$40 bankroll on the 10-race Friday card.

“Take a look at the tote board five minutes before the race is going to run and bet the two horses whose odds are closest to 10-1 and over,” her adviser said. “If you hit two winners during the day, you should make a modest profit. If you hit three, you might double your money and if the longshots are hitting, you’ll win enough for a nice dinner for you and the Reverend. The worst thing that can happen is you’ll lose your 40 bucks.”

Five payoffs from \$26.80 to \$38.40 in 10 races sent the minister’s wife and her husband to Dudley’s for dinner with a little left over for the church’s building fund.

A casual day at the races doesn’t need to be work. It isn’t brain surgery ... or even orthopedic surgery. Just make your selections and head to the mutuel window with confidence. In betting as in life, “Be bold and mighty forces will come to your aid.” 🐾

Jude Feld, who won 23 stakes as a trainer, is a racing publicist and bloodstock consultant in Lexington who develops simulcast promotions for Keeneland.



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