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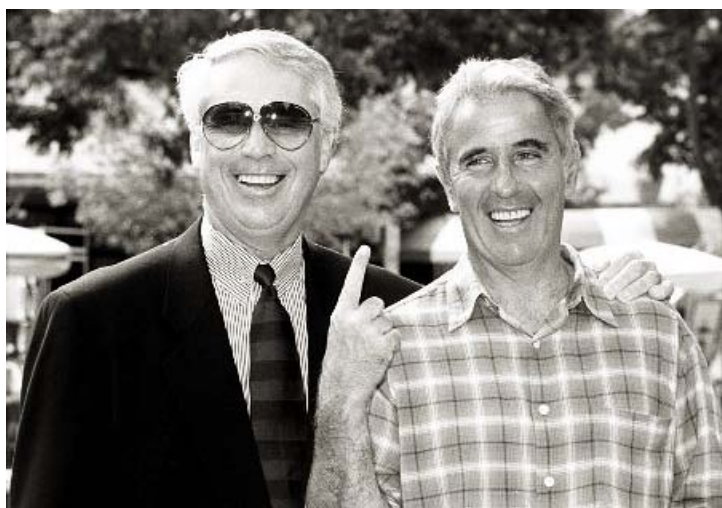
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## At Kentucky Derby, Wayne Lukas, Nick Zito and Bob Baffert are a Triple Crown

Friday, May 1st 2009, 9:57 PM



Farrell/News

Kentucky Derby heavyweights Wayne Lukas and Nick Zito in 1995.

LOUISVILLE - How tough is it to get here? I take a plane to Cincinnati, more nonstop flights, and drive 95 miles to my hotel, a room with a moody bathroom faucet. No stars, no bars, no Turner Classic Movies channel, no USA Today outside my door, nobody telling me we're out of half-and-half.

It's a longer trip for the horses. Of the 37,939 thoroughbreds born in 2006, the obligatory year to qualify for this 135th Kentucky Derby, only 20 will step into the starting gate Saturday. What happened to the other 37,919? That's right, wise guy, I bet on every one of them.

Most of these 20 have no hope of winning. No hope, that's me being kind. But they are here. Can't win if you're not here, the Daily News has learned. There are many other 3-year-olds, wonderful runners, a million miles away, munching hay, gamboling in verdant meadows. Suggestion: Don't try telling them wait till next year.



Smith for News

Bob Baffert hopes to have a winner with Pioneerof the Nile.

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#### Yankeegate mess

Hundreds of irate fans stormed away from Yankee Stadium before Monday's game against the Red Sox even got underway and couldn't get back in.



#### No Yankee tipper

Teammates and opposing players have said they find it hard to believe that Alex Rodriguez would deliberately tip pitches to opposing batters.



#### That empty feeling

Madden: The Yankees waited two hours and 17 minutes only to get more of the same of what they got in Boston last week.



#### Still waiting

For the fourth straight time, the Yankees fell to their rivals, taking a 6-4 loss that followed a two-hour and 17-minute rain delay.



#### Beltran blasts Braves

Carlos Beltran slugged a pair of two-run homers and David Wright also had a two-run shot as the Mets beat the Braves, 6-4, Monday at Turner Field.

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There are a super-serious four in the race: Pioneerof the Nile, I Want Revenge, Friesan Fire, Dunkirk. The numbers keep going down. Three trainers have smelled the roses - [Bob Baffert](#) (Pioneerof the Nile, 4-1 in the morning line), [Wayne Lukas](#) (Flying Private, 50-1) and [Nick Zito](#) (Nowhere to Hide, 50-1). What else they have in common, besides a swell selection of zipper jackets, is their hair, gray for the last two and an eye-catching white for Baffert. (Does Just for Men do white?) Only Baffert has a Derby win this century.

### The Run for the Roses

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Lukas, 73, first showed show up in 1981. The only year without one of those sunshine boys was 2007. Zito, 61, wasn't going to make it this time until a colt was scratched a few hours before the entries closed. Zito's thing got that spot.

Don't ask if he can win. The good question is why he's here. "When you get a chance," Zito said, "I think you owe it to yourself and the game to take it." No doubt about it, sweet Nick has a bad case of Derby fever.

The horse broke his maiden at Calder in his fifth try. He's run three races this year and finished fourth every time. "If he ran fourth in the Derby it would be all right with me," Zito said. How's that for reaching for the stars?

So you look at his breeding - the horse, not Zito's - and among his ancestors is the great [Seattle Slew](#). Go back far enough, of course, and you'd find National Velvet.

When it comes to the no-shame game, nobody comes close to Lukas. At least his conversation is always first-rate. His Flying Private is another whose only win, in 10 starts, came in a maiden race. "He's a better horse than some I've won with," he said. "He's in the Charismatic mold." Ah, Charismatic, Lukas' last Derby winner. He paid \$64.60 in 1999.

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It was a historic day Thursday in the Bronx as the Yankees opened their brand new stadium. Here's a front-row view.



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