

Ashley's Take

Before I say anything, I want to preface this by saying that I do like Fierceness. Additionally, I would love for Mike Repole to finally get a Kentucky Derby winner as Uncle Mo and Forte both missed the race due to medical issues and Stay Thirsty finished 12th in 2011.

The biggest detraction on Fierceness is that he either looks sublime or throws an absolute clunker. He won his debut by a whopping 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ -lengths. He then was never seriously involved in the Grade 1 Champagne in his second start. He didn't have the best of starts, and the mud probably did him no favors either. He finished 7th of eight, beaten 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ -lengths by Timberlake.

Next up, Fierceness pressed the pace from second in the Grade 1 Breeders' Cup Juvenile. He gained the advantage around the quarter pole and then drew off to a 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ -length victory. It was an excellent effort against a field that has graded stakes wins both before and after the Championship, or at least ran second in graded events in the case of Wine Me Up.

Fierceness made his 3-year-old debut just two months after winning the Breeders' Cup Juvenile in the Grade 3 Holy Bull Stakes. Again, he pressed the pace and then gained the advantage, but instead of running away from the field like he theoretically should have done, he flattened out to finish 3rd, beaten by 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -lengths. Hades, the winner, hasn't done anything since, finishing 5th in the Grade 1 Florida Derby and 7th in the Grade 3 Lexington Stakes. Runner-up Domestic Product did bounce back to win the Grade 3 Tampa Bay Derby next out; however, of the rest of the Holy Bull field, only Inveigled has done anything of note, finishing 2nd in the \$100,000 Private Terms, beaten by just a neck.

As already mentioned, Fierceness turned in a monster performance in the Grade 1 Florida Derby in his final prep for the Run for the Roses. However, it was suspect field. Of the eight rivals that lined up to take on Fierceness, only Hades had a graded stakes victory to his name. Three others were graded stakes placed, but the rest of the field was comprised of maiden and allowance winners.

When Hades won the Grade 3 Holy Bull Stakes, he was assigned a 90 Beyer Speed Figure. Fierceness earned the best Beyer figure of any 3-year-old, an impressive 110, in winning the Grade 1 Florida Derby. A dazzling number without a doubt, but that was an improvement of over twenty points, setting him up to bounce in a big way come May 4th.

Fierceness has established a win-lose-win-lose-win racing pattern. He has yet to string together a pair of victories, and if this pattern holds, then he won't be wearing the roses on the first Saturday in May. The fields he faced at Gulfstream were overall incredibly weak, meaning Fierceness hasn't faced any of the other major contenders this year. For me, as much I as do like the colt, he's a **pass**.

Laura's Take

We are definitely on the same page when it comes to wanting to see Repole get that Derby win. I was a big Uncle Mo fan, and believe that he could have done it, if not for being plagued by hoof and GI issues during the early parts of his 3-year-old season.

When it comes to Fierceness though, I think he has a huge shot win the roses. For one, I don't think it will be a torrid pace. Quick yes, but I'd say about as fast as we saw in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile, and we all know that is well within Fierceness' scope.

When it comes to his "clunkers" I only see one race that I'd call that. The Champagne, which was run over a sloppy track, a condition Fierceness clearly didn't take to. His Holy Bull, while definitely lesser than his most dominant performances, is not a race I'd describe as a clunker, as he did come in third. In that race, he got "pinballed" at the start, which takes a lot out of a horse. He then was strangled into sitting behind an extremely slow pace, which isn't his wheelhouse.

Being forced to sit behind that type of a pace takes away the best weapon of any free running type of horse... their high cruising speed. When they are forced to go slowly, it allows the rest of the field to come into contact with them, and then outkick them turning for home, as many free running horses don't have the strongest late kicks. This is what happened in the Holy Bull.

I'm also not convinced that Hades is a dud. A horse that went 3 for 3, threw two clunkers in races he didn't get to run on or near the lead. Yes, he won his maiden by closing, but he was never far from the lead that day, and the pace came back to him. His figure in that race also closely mirrors the figures from the Florida Derby and Lexington, which suggests that even with the win in the maiden, closing is not his preferred style. He needs to be on or pushing the lead to run his best.

I'm not going to pretend that the field for the Holy Bull was an all-star one. However, Hades got his his preferred trip, and Domestic Product returned to win the Tampa Bay Derby.

This is a matter of opinion but looking at his pre-Holy Bull works vs his post Holy Bull works, I am of the mindset that Fierceness was short going into that race. When you put that with getting the wind knocked out of him at that start, and having his best weapon taken from him, I actually think his 3rd was not nearly as bad as people think. He still made a move, but flattened out in the lane, which lends more validity to my belief that he was short. Despite that, he was only beaten 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ lengths.

The Florida Derby was a massive improvement off of his Holy Bull, and if he came back looking subpar in his works, I would be worried about a bounce too. However, he's looked even better in his works. I had thought he looked good in his works leading up to the Florida Derby, but he's been looking even better since that race. Leading me to believe that he could be sitting on an even bigger effort for the Kentucky Derby.

As with all horses, the post will likely make or break the Pletcher trainee. However, should he get a decent post and come away cleanly, I think he has every shot to notch his first set of back-to-back victories.
Making him a 100% PLAY for the win in my books.