

It's easy to catch Derby fever

Brandon Vogel / FOXSports.com
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So you watched 11 hours of draft coverage last Saturday, scribbling fantasy sleeper notes on a Styrofoam take-out container for a draft that you spent more time researching than the Dolphins did.

You believed in Golden State long before those gold shirts were ever printed and Dallas was on the ropes.

You can even name at least one team still alive in the NHL playoffs.

By all accounts, you are a fanatic in the best sense of the word. But if you want to be considered a true sports fan, you have to answer one question:

Do you do the Derby?

That's the barometer. One of those questions that can instantly forge or make you forego friendship with a complete stranger. In terms of the second tier sporting events — i.e. not the Super Bowl, World Series, NCAA Tournament, Masters, BCS title game, NBA or Stanley Cup Finals — there isn't an easier event to follow than the Run for the Roses.



The spectacle isn't only on the track. If you are lucky enough to make it to the Derby, you are bound to see plenty of ladies in outrageous hats. (Jeff Haynes / Getty Images)

Being a sports fan is a particularly tricky existence. While we view ourselves as devoted, passionate individuals, those on the outside might think we're a bit foolish. All those weekends "wasted," the foul moods, the \$90 jerseys.

Watching the Kentucky Derby has none of those things. For less than \$15 and two hours of your time, you can have everything you could possibly need to know.

Unless you're going to Churchill Downs, you can get into just about any track in America for less than \$3. The form goes for five bucks. For less than the price of strawberries and cream at Wimbledon (\$3.00), you can pin your hopes to the hide of one of the finest pieces of horseflesh in the world (\$2.00). There might not be a better example of the Derby's superiority over those other fringe events than that.

Eating strawberries and cream and watching tennis on grass? Stodgy and synthetically sophisticated. Drinking minty bourbon and betting the horses? Reckless. The American Revolution and the American dream all rolled into one. Vegas would kill to provide that much residual coolness and bang for your buck into one package.

But the Derby isn't just easy on the wallet, it's also painfully easy to follow. You can't miss it. It's held the first Saturday in May, been that way for 133 years. You can count on it like you count on Thanksgiving, with the added benefit that it is always more exciting than the Lions.

Following the horses is difficult 46 weeks out of the year. The Derby prep races get their 60 seconds on SportsCenter and, if you're lucky, your local paper will run some results from the local track, and that's pretty much it. But that's fine. For the next six weeks, or as long as there is a Triple Crown contender, horse racing is a national story.

No sporting event requires less work for a fan than this. That's why you've seen Kid Rock on Millionaire's Row before. It takes wit and savvy to try to handicap the Derby, but it takes next to nothing to enjoy it.

A Derby horse's entire racing history can be found online for free, but even that's asking for extra credit. You

can just watch the hour leading up to the race, hear each entry dissected ad nauseum and feel totally prepared before the call to post. (This includes the added benefit of catching all the pre-race pomp and circumstance and getting to see a bunch of Kentucky bluebloods in hats cry at the singing of "My Old Kentucky Home." Can't beat that.)

And if all that's not enough, there's always the possibility history will be made. Nobody watches baseball's opening day with the expectation that this will be the year we finally see a Triple Crown winner, but that's always the hope after the Kentucky Derby. Did you see the first home run of Barry Bond's career or the start of Cal Ripken's streak? If you did, did it seem historical at the time?

The Derby always holds that promise. History might start at 4:30 pm ET on Saturday. It's the only sure thing in horse racing.

If you want to be considered a true Renaissance man of sport, it takes more than just following the MLS and the Indianapolis 500. Those are long, important, painful steps. This is the easiest one of them all.

You don't need to have an opinion on Hard Spun's final workout — boon or bane — you just need to be watching come Saturday.

It will only take the most exciting two minutes in sports.

Brandon Vogel was the winner of the Next Great Sportswriter 2 competition on FOXSports.com. Check out his blog, [HiPlainsDrifter](#). E-mail him at brandonlyvogel@gmail.com.