

## "You've Got Mail"

It's been said that if you tell 100 people something bad is going to happen 50 of them will hate you immediately, and if you are right, the other 50 will hate you as well. Over the years I have found that axiom devastatingly true and last week was no exception. Indeed, shortly after releasing my strategy report last Tuesday I received a number of emails. This one was typical:

"Mr. Saut: In my life I do not believe I have encountered a larger burst of hot air than regularly shows up in your weekly so called commentary. More importantly, every time you have gotten bearish since your admittedly good 'call' of the market's bottom last March, the stock market has rallied. The beginning of 2010 is just the latest example. Why don't you get another job?!"

Over the years I have learned that such emails tend to coincide with "inflection points;" and maybe last week's malicious mail will again prove that point. For the record, however, while it's true I have gotten cautious a number of times since the March "lows," I have never turned bearish. Indeed, getting cautious at the beginning of May 2009 was a pretty good "call," especially since during the first week of July we wrote that the cautionary period was over and it felt like stage two of the rally was about to begin. Getting cautious at the end of September (3Q09), worried that the vacuum created by the July to September "melt up" might get "filled" to the downside with the start of the new quarter, was a "bad call" that we had to quickly correct. Similarly, turning cautious coming into 2010 looked wrong-footed, at least until last week.

Nevertheless, we clung to our new year's cautionary stance since history shows that the first few weeks of the year are littered with examples of head fakes, both to the upside as well as the downside. In past letters we mentioned the biggest upside head fake chronicled in our notes was 1973 when the DJIA rallied to a new all-time high of 1051.70 during the first three weeks of the year, only to peak and begin a slide that would leave the senior index at 851.90 by August. To be sure, leaning against "conventional wisdom" is a lonely stance that often evokes "hate mail," but as Yale University's investment guru David Swensen writes:

"Contrarian investing poses extraordinary challenges under the best of circumstances. . . . Unfortunately, overcoming the tendency to follow the crowd, while necessary, proves insufficient to guarantee investment success. . . . While courage to take a different path enhances the chances for success, investors face likely failure unless a thoughtful set of investment principals undergirds their courage."

Then there is this from legendary investor Seth Klarman:

"Risk control to us is a careful aligning of interests, a proper balance in our investing between greed and fear, experienced and collaborative senior management and investment teams that have worked together for quite some time, a consistent and disciplined investment approach where every opportunity is individually and meticulously evaluated on its fundamentals, a strict sell discipline, **a willingness to hold cash when opportunity is scarce**, a complete avoidance of recourse leverage, and a healthy level of fear."

Speaking to this "willingness to hold cash" point, readers of our work know that we too are unafraid to hold cash. Indeed, we consider cash an asset class because to assume that the investment, or trading, opportunity "sets" that present themselves today are as good (or better) than any that will present themselves next week, next month, next quarter, etc. is naïve. And to take advantage of those future opportunity "sets," you need to have some cash. Accordingly, in last week's strategy report we wrote:

"The solar eclipse came and went in 'Neverland' between 11:06 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. last Friday with an attendant stock slide that should have stopped participants out of our remaining index recommendations. And, despite all the 'Tinkerbell clapping,' the S&P 500 is virtually no higher now than it was after the rally of January 4th."

Consequently, trading accounts should have been back in cash early last week, thus avoiding the late week wilt. Still, our phones rang off the hook Thursday afternoon with the ubiquitous question, "After this two-day drubbing is it time to buy stocks?" In response to those queries, we had this to say in Friday's verbal strategy comments:

"Never on a Friday – is a mantra that has served us well over the years, implying that markets in a downtrend rarely bottom on a Friday. Verily, participants usually brood about their losses over the weekend and show up Monday morning in 'sell mode.' And, I don't know if it's a Grecian default, a Chinese rate rape (read: monetary

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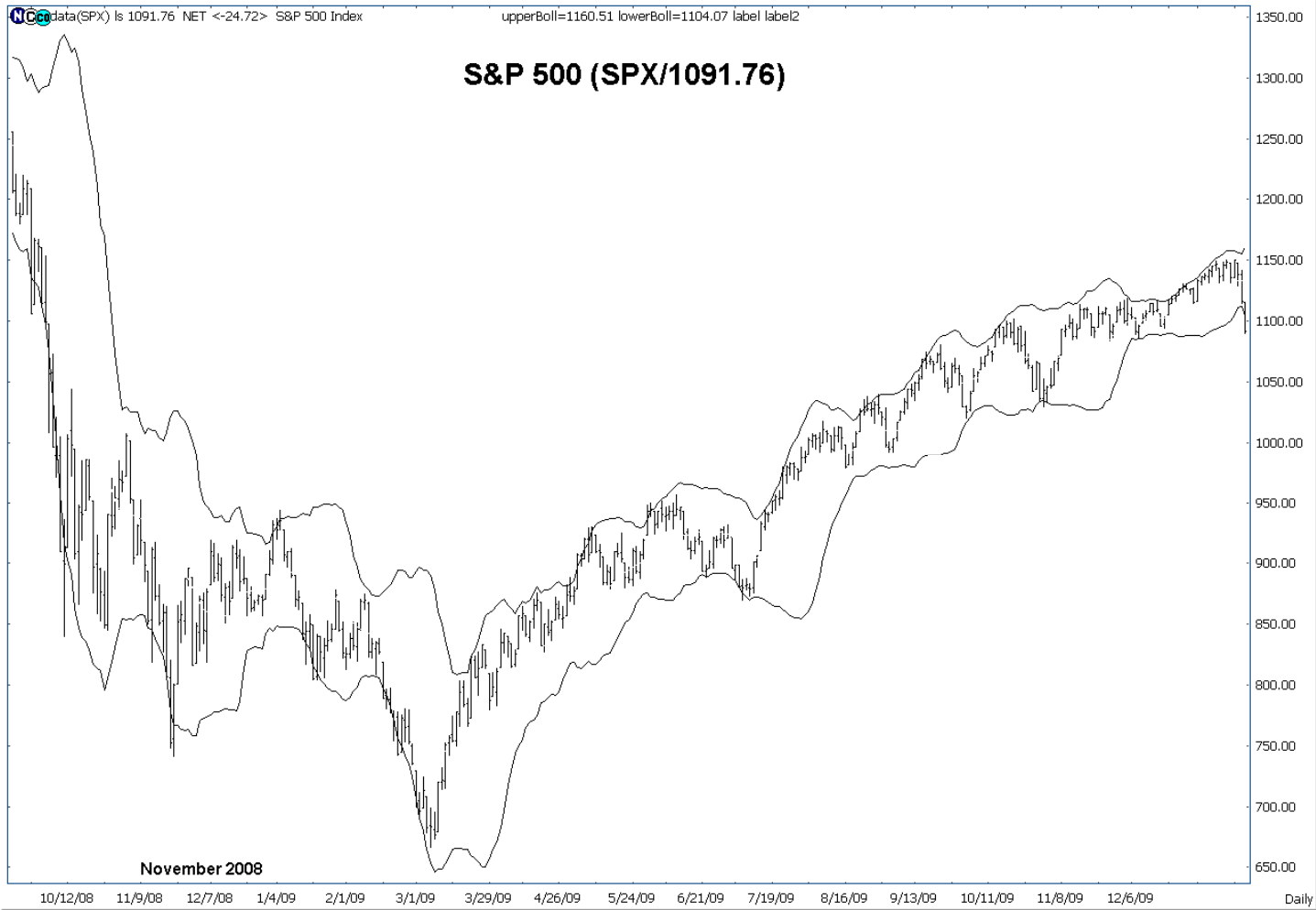
tightening cycle), a dollar delight that is causing an unwinding of the U.S. dollar carry-trade, a geopolitical gotcha', etc.; something is lurking out there that trumped what should have been a decent rally attempt on Scott Brown's victory. I mean Senator-elect Brown even won 61% of the Kennedy stronghold Hyannis Port for gosh sakes! So the fact that we didn't even get the hint of a rally from the 'Massachusetts Massive' is worrisome. Now I am certainly not predicting it, but I remember July 1998 when the DJIA peaked around 9338 and began to slide. That Dow slide turned into a mini-crash and NOBODY knew why. And then b-a-n-g, out of the blue came Long Term Capital Management that almost ended financial life as we knew it. Accordingly, we remain cautious."

One good thing about market declines is that they give us a chance to see which stocks hold up better than others. Those stocks go on our "watch list" for potential future purchase, or for additional purchase if we already own them. Some of the names, all of which are rated Strong Buy by the respective fundamental analyst team, that held up include: NCI, Inc. (NCIT/\$30.04); O'Charley's (CHUX/\$7.41); Radiant Systems (RADS/\$11.29); Select Comfort (SCSS/\$6.80); Cogent (COGT/\$10.97); Phase Forward (PFWD/\$15.65); Stanley (SXE/\$27.74); Dine Equity (DIN/\$24.33); Wintrust Financial (WTFC/\$34.77); CVS (CVS/\$33.24); and Nuance (NUAN/\$16.12).

One stock that did not hold up was A-Power (APWR/\$12.31/Outperform), which declined 25% for the holiday-shortened week. As our fundamental analyst wrote last Thursday:

"A-Power announced a 5.8 million share private placement, with proceeds totaling \$83 million. The deal was priced at \$14.37 per share, a ~15% discount relative to yesterday's close. Additionally, the company issued warrants adding up to nearly 2.9 million shares. . . . Collectively, the placement represents approximately 22% dilution based on the current shares outstanding (15% of this being immediate, and the rest upon warrant exercise), and accordingly, we are reducing our EPS estimates for 2010 and 2011. . . . We are also reducing our target price from \$20.00 to \$17.00, based on ~13x our new 2011 EPS estimate, which we view as conservative given our three-year earnings CAGR assumption of at least 25%. With the conversion of its notes (issued last June) on December 31, leaving essentially no debt, we believed A-Power had gotten all its ducks lined up in a row when it comes to its balance sheet. As such, this private placement struck us as a major surprise, especially considering the hefty size of the deal. . . . Notwithstanding (the) disappointing news, we remain positive on A-Power's leverage to the robust long-term growth potential of the Chinese wind market, the world's largest."

**The call for this week:** They don't call 'em surprises because you expect them; and, clearly A-Power's announcement was a complete surprise. It does, however, demonstrate why we never recommend buying an entire position all at once, but rather tranching "in" using three or four purchases. Speaking to the equity markets, for the first time since the March 2009 "lows" the S&P 500 (SPX/1091.76) has experienced three consecutive 1% downside days. The result has left the SPX below its 50-day moving average (1114). It has also left all of the macro sectors pretty oversold and therefore probably set for a rally attempt. That view is buttressed by the fact that the SPX is below its lower Bollinger Band for the first time since November 2008, as can be seen in the nearby chart. However, just like a heart attack patient doesn't get right up off of the gurney and run the 100-yard dash, we think the equity markets will need time to convalesce after an initial recoil rally. As the Lowry's service writes, "Attempting to gauge how long a correction might persist, and what losses it might entail, is generally an exercise in futility." Plainly, we agree and merely hope we will be able to identify when the next rally "leg" begins within this ongoing cyclical bull market.



Source: Thomson Reuters.

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