

Expert Analysis

By Brad Free

BEST BET: Yellow Card (7th race)

First Race

1. Hey Lil Lady

2. Not A Sinner

3. Deep Blue

Super Bowl Sunday, Santa Anita first post 11 a.m. ~HEY LIL LADY^ confirmed her sprint ability when she shortened from a route to six furlongs and finished second after being shuffled early. She rallied from last to miss by a half-length, and now gets another half-furlong. She can rally for the win at six and a half. ~NOT A SINNER^ returns from an eight-month layoff; her races last spring are fast enough. She has more speed than the top choice, and should get the jump on that rival. But victory is not a priority for the habitual bridesmaid. 'SINNER has one win, and seven seconds. Her comeback works are only okay. Second preference, regardless. ~DEEP BLUE^ drops from N1X to N2L starter, shortens from a route to a sprint, adds blinkers and tries turf. Her maiden win last fall on dirt earned a figure that makes her a threat; progeny of Echo Town have won 17 percent of turf sprints.

Second Race

1. Voldemort

2. Clooney

3. Cowboy Mike

~VOLDEMORT^ and ~CLOONEY^, third and first last out, meet again in this N1X dirt mile. The call is VOLDEMORT to turn the tables. He was under pressure setting the pace last out, battled to deep stretch, and tired. Now he meets a field with less speed, he is drawn outside (post 5 of 5), and can either press the pace in the clear, or make the lead outright. Third start back from a layoff, VOLDEMORT is set for his second career victory with an up-front trip. CLOONEY is already a four-time winner. He ran the best race of his career last month defeating the top choice. Because he ran for a claim tag in that race, he retains N1X eligibility. It is possible he is simply better than VOLDEMORT, but that rival will be in front of him early. Comebacker ~COWBOY MIKE^ has been working in company with promising 3yo Secured Freedom, who entered the G3 Robert B. Lewis Stakes on Saturday. COWBOY MIKE tailed off last spring, but he runs well fresh and is expected to contest the pace in his first start since August. 'MIKE is entered for the optional \$50k claim tag.

Third Race

1. Romantic Ride

2. Benny and the Jet

3. Booked Clubhouse

~ROMANTIC RIDE^ and ~BENNY AND THE JET^ are the principals in this main-oval turf sprint for Cal-bred maiden 3yo. The local debut by ROMANTIC RIDE stamps him the one to beat. Claimed for \$50k from a runner-up debut in Kentucky, he switched to turf and ran well at SA. He broke in and bumped a rival at the start, finished fast, and was more than three lengths clear of third. He gets another half-furlong to flatter his closing kick in this six and one-half furlong race. BENNY AND THE JET returned from a five-month layoff as an improved horse. Despite a spotty work pattern into that Jan. 8 race (no recorded works since Dec. 19), he rallied to second. Since then, he worked regularly, his pedigree (Clubhouse Ride) suggests turf is fine. ~BOOKED CLUBHOUSE^ misfired on dirt last out, his first three races on turf give him an upset chance rallying from behind. This race is tricky due to the murky pace scenario. There really is no apparent speed in the field.

Fourth Race

1. Tee N Off

2. Broadway Unions

3. Mighty Kai

~TEE N OFF^ stretched out and ran the race of his career last out, an upset over heavily favored Bowtie Boys in a \$16k claiming N2L dirt mile. Up slightly in class to N3L claiming, TEE N OFF has a forwardly placed style employed by most dirt-mile winners this winter. Back to back? ~BROADWAY UNIONS^ might prefer to sprint, but his pace-pressing sprint style translates to a forwardly placed trip at this mile distance. Claimed from a third-place finish last out, 'UNIONS is likely to contest the pace. ~MIGHTY KAI^, runner-up as the favorite at this class level, makes his first start since being claimed by Doug O'Neill. The late-runner will be rolling late as one of the favorites. CUPID'S CRUSADER is not impossible stretching out from sprints.

Fifth Race

1. One of These Days

2. Jimmy Blue Jeans

3. Ah Jeez

A deep field entered this \$25k claiming starter turf mile; the call is dropper ~ONE OF THESE DAYS^. He returns to a claiming-caliber race after finishing off the board in three N1Xs; he won his last two SA starts at this mile turf distance. The deep-closing dropper can rally for the win in a race likely to unfold at a legitimate pace. ~JIMMY BLUE JEANS^ won a fast-pace \$25k claiming turf mile last month, his seventh victory. The pace-pressing veteran has speed but also is versatile. He could get another pressing trip just off the leaders. ~AH JEEZ^ ran well finishing fourth behind 'JEANS while making his first start in five months. AH JEEZ is eligible to improve second start back. He will be rolling late. RUSSELLS HUSTLE and CASTLE LEOCH finished two-three the same race. PHOSPHORESCENCE and DEL MAR JERRY are speed. Lots of choices in this competitive field.

Sixth Race

1. Vronaway

2. Greta's Ghost

3. Blame Eve

A soft field of maiden-20 fillies and mares go a mile on dirt, the tepid choice is ~VRONAWAY^ based on back-to-back runner-up finishes vs. similar. She has a forwardly placed style that matches the speed-friendly track profile. ~GRETA'S GHOST^ is a late-runner who finished third in four successive starts. The 10-start maiden will be grinding away late. ~BLAME EVE^ drops from maiden-50 turf races to maiden-20 on dirt. She also rallies from behind. THATSALRIGHTMAMA might be listed too low. She takes a huge class drop from MSW.

Seventh Race

1. Yellow Card

2. Sumter

3. Flyover

Turf sprinter ~YELLOW CARD^ drops into a restricted stakes on the main turf oval after an uneasy trip finishing sixth in a Grade 2 on the hill. 'CARD was shuffled back, raced inside and behind runners in an uncomfortable spot, and went evenly late. Not a good trip. He trained well since, and only needs clear sailing under new rider Emisael Jaramillo to score as "best bet" on the card. ~SUMTER^ finished in front of the top choice last out, runner-up to Gas Me Up, a contender in the G3 Thunder Road on Saturday. SUMTER posted

three bullet drills since raced, and will be rolling from behind. ~FLYOVER^ benefits by a softer pace scenario than the suicidal splits he chased last time before fading. He also benefits by the shorter distance of this six-furlong turf stakes. The challenge facing FLYOVER is the closers-friendly course profile. With the rails at this 20-foot setting, 11 of 12 turf sprints this meet at six furlongs were won from the middle or back of the field. Only one gate-to-wire winner. Nonetheless, FLYOVER commands attention in a race likely to unfold at a slower tempo. Gate to wire at a price?

Eighth Race

1. Super Corredora

2. Explora

3. Meaning

A trio of top-class 3yo fillies entered this four-runner nongraded stakes, they finished 1-2-4 last fall in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies. They are BC winner ~SUPER CORREDORA^, runner-up ~EXPLORA^, and fourth place ~MEANING^. It's a close call between the three, but SUPER CORREDORA has been working super for her first start in three months. She is drawn outside where she has the option of setting or pressing the pace; her works suggest she will fire first start back. EXPLORA has something the top choice lacks. That is, a recent start. She crushed the seven-furlong Santa Ynez last out, and stretches back to two turns. She could be more forwardly placed than she was in the BC, when SUPER CORREDORA got the jump and wired the field. EXPLORA is not likely to concede the lead so easily this time. The upset candidate is MEANING, whose BC fourth was outstanding considering it was just the second start of her career and her first route. The two-start filly has worked well for her return, Flavien Prat is in to ride, MEANING could tuck into a cozy trip right behind the speed. Wagering value in a four-runner field is elusive, but MEANING is worth backing at 3-1 or higher. She is ready to fire.

Ninth Race

1. Genius Jimmy

2. Balladeer

3. Uncle Happy

Based on his tough-trip fourth in a similar N2X/optional claiming turf mile, ~GENIUS JIMMY^ is the choice. He had no shot last out as the favorite. He was rated midfield, inched closer on the far turn, but blocked in traffic through most of stretch. He returns at the same level, and only needs clear sailing. ~BALLADEER^ exits the same race; his runner-up finish was super. He set the fastest turf-mile fractions of the meet (:45.18 and 1:08.55) and only got worn down late. Excellent try by the front-runner, who could wire the field. In what looks like a two-horse race, third preference ~UNCLE HAPPY^ is an upset candidate from slightly off the pace. Post time for this race is about a half-hour before 3:30 p.m. kickoff for the Super Bowl. Prediction: Seattle Seahawks 31, New England Patriots 17. Suggested wager: over 45.5 points.