

Expert Analysis

By Brad Free

BEST BET: Coach Cronin (5th race)

First Race

1. Debby's Gal

2. Eighties Music

3. McSniper

~DEBBY'S GAL^ adds Lasix for her comeback after finishing a creditable third all three starts last year as a 2yo. Her main rivals are first-time starters from stables that typically race maidens into shape rather than fire first out. DEBBY'S GAL has an experience edge, and likely has improved in the three months since raced. She is trained by Richard Baltas, who also entered first-time starter ~EIGHTIES MUSIC^. Although the trainer's firsters typically need a race before showing their best, this field is light and MUSIC appears to have trained well at San Luis Rey Downs. ~MCSNIPER^ also makes her debut with snappy works at SLR. It's been a while since trainer Peter Miller won with a firster, but that :47.40 gate work last week at SLR suggests this gray filly could come out firing despite the rail draw. Only five entered this restricted maiden sprint.

Second Race

1. Ballyhooligan

2. Mici's Express

3. Handsome Ticket

Up a notch to N3L claiming after winning a N2L claiming sprint, ~BALLYHOOLIGAN^ gets the call over comebacker ~MICI'S EXPRESS^. The win by BALLYHOOLIGAN was his second from his last three starts, he has speed to be positioned second behind the likely pacesetter drawn to his inside. When/if that rival falters, BALLYHOOLIGAN can get first run. He will have to hold off the rally of late-running comebacker MICI'S EXPRESS, who is faster based on speed figures. However, EXPRESS has been a distance horse most of his career. This is his first start since May. On the other hand, it is an optimistic signal he returns in a claiming race while employing the "no-claim waiver." MICI'S EXPRESS will rally late for the productive combo of Doug O'Neill and Emisael Jaramillo. They entered the week as meet-leading trainer-jockey combo with 10 wins from 36 starters. ~HANDSOME TICKET^ is the aforementioned pacesetter, up in class to \$25k claiming N3L after wiring a \$10k claiming N2L sprint. He adds blinkers, worked a fast half-mile last weekend (bullet:46.60), and will take the field as far as he can.

Third Race

1. Blacksmith

2. Sharons Beach

3. Authentic Patriot

G2-placed ~BLACKSMITH^ and highly rated maiden sprint runner-up ~SHARONS BEACH^ top this maiden dirt mile. The call is BLACKSMITH, runner-up in the Los Alamitos Futurity two back, and a closing third last out in a MSW route won by the slow-pace front-runner. BLACKSMITH worked well since raced including a Feb. 7 team drill with two-for-two stakes winner Boyd. All systems go. But he will have to catch potential pacesetter SHARONS BEACH, who stretches out for the first time following a fast runner-up finish at six and one-half furlongs. He finished a neck behind Liam Smith, who returned to win a starter allowance by a double-digit margin with a 90 Beyer. BEACH was entered in the \$500k Sunland Derby on Sunday at Sunland Park, but reportedly will stay home and try to wire this maiden dirt mile. ~AUTHENTIC PATRIOT^ stretches to a route for his second start, while adding Lasix. He set the pace and tired to sixth in his sprint debut. He is quick enough to keep SHARONS BEACH honest on the front end, and set it up for his stablemate BLACKSMITH.

Fourth Race

1. Starry Night

2. Miss Meagher

3. Miyako

~STARRY NIGHT^ enters this N3L starter turf mile as the class of the field, having missed by a nose in a G3 last out. The challenge here is distance; all three recent starts by NIGHT (two wins, stakes runner-up) were a mile and one-eighth. It is a different ballgame racing one mile chasing a quicker pace. NIGHT is not as quick as others in this field, and must try to win from off the pace. She probably is good enough to do just that, but she is no slam dunk. ~MISS MEAGHER^ finished in the money three of her last four at this class level and distance. The pace-pressing mare ran her final quarter-mile in just a shade over 24 seconds her last two starts on the Santa Anita turf. That is a decent come-home time. She will be finishing. ~MIYAKO^ is expected to set the pace. She wired a N2L starter two races back, but went too fast on the front end last time and faltered to fourth. If she slows down just a little, she could be long gone. Last-out runner-up O K ROSE will rally from the back of the field.

Fifth Race

1. Coach Cronin

2. One Smokin Dude

3. Special Club

Cal-bred allowance sprinters race six furlongs. ~COACH CRONIN^ can make amends for his fourth last out as the even-money favorite at this level. He never had a chance. He was trapped inside and behind runners while farther off the pace than normal, and only went evenly late. His claiming wins two and four starts back were highly rated, and though he is potentially compromised by the inside post, he actually might tuck into a cozy trip because his rivals in posts 2-3 are quicker. If they clear, CRONIN could find himself positioned third behind the speed. That is how he scored his two recent wins. ~ONE SMOKIN DUDE^ won this condition two back, then misfired in a turf mile. He is back sprinting on dirt, entered for the optional \$20k claim tag, and likely press the pace. ~SPECIAL CLUB^ upset Cal-bred sprinters on turf last out, he also runs well on dirt. Look for him late. MR. MACHUPICCU is speed, and probably the one to catch. He has one win from 24 starts, with six seconds and six thirds.

Sixth Race

1. Third Beer

2. Ventry Strand

3. Can't Help Myself

~THIRD BEER^ gets class relief in this Cal-bred allowance turf mile, after facing open stakes company his last three starts including a runner-up finish in a G3 turf mile over the SA turf last fall. He adds Lasix after finishing fifth in a listed stakes, and is reunited with jockey Antonio Fresu, who rode him to victory in his debut and runner-up G3. The bottom line: BEER is the class of the field. ~VENTRY STRAND^ stretches to a mile after winning a Cal-bred allowance turf sprint. His deep-closing style around one turn suggests he might be best as a late-running sprinter, though the jury is out. His pedigree is fine for a mile, sired by Bolt d'Oro and sibling to a three-time route winner. STRAND is trained by trained by John Sadler, who also entered first-time turf ~CAN'T HELP MYSELF^. The latter finished third in a pair of Cal-bred stakes last fall; no reason he won't handle turf. Lightly raced CRUISE HOME had a wide trip finishing fourth in the Cal Cup Derby on dirt; he will be rolling late. DARK OMEN is speed, stretching out from a fast-pace debut sprint win. He is the one to catch.

Seventh Race

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1. Broadway Unions

2. Austonian

3. Tougherthantherest

Wheeled back eight days after winning a \$10k claiming N3L dirt mile, ~BROADWAY UNIONS^ can fire again in this open \$8k claiming dirt mile. His win was perhaps better than it looks on paper; he was wide throughout. He has enough tactical speed to race within striking range of the speed, which has been the winning profile this winter at a mile on dirt. This is his third start in 17 days; strike while the iron is hot. ~AUSTONIAN^ was only prepping last out when he finished next-to-last in a Cal-bred allowance. In the money both previous starts in low claiming routes, he returns to his proper level. Look for him late. ~TOUGHERTHANTHEREST^ is a stretch-out class dropper likely to set the pace. The expected pacesetter will take the field as far as he can.

Eighth Race

1. Doncic

2. Harcyn

3. Tigerhon

A competitive claiming turf sprint ends the four-day racing week, and late-runner ~DONCIC^ gets the call dropping from \$50k claiming to \$32k. His runner-up finish last out was fast; this field has enough pace to flatter his closing kick. ~HARCYN^ moves up a notch off a runner-up finish for \$25k, a six-furlong race won by the pacesetter/favorite. He benefits by the extra half-furlong of this turf sprint. ~TIGERHON^ finished third in the same race the top choice exits, while MUCHO DEL ORO is a "back class" G3 winner with speed. This is the lowest level at which he has raced. An 8yo veteran with 10 wins from 27 starts, he will lead the field as far as he can. Gate to wire at a price?