

Expert Analysis

By Brad Free

BEST BET: Mohaven (8th race)

First Race

1. Marjoram

2. Will Happen

3. Mo' Em Down

Santa Anita Derby day, first post 12 noon. The debut victory by ~MARJORAM^ was better than the margin or figure, and gives her a right to win this hillside allowance. MARJORAM broke slowly in the mud, uncorked a middle move into the turn, sustained her rally and won by three-quarters. Impressive win by the Quality Road filly whose dam is a sibling to a G1 turf winner. Turf should be fine, and there is enough pace for her to run at. ~WILL HAPPEN^ broke last in her comeback and basically lost her chance. She reengaged, rallied to the lead in the stretch, then flattened out to third. Good effort under the circumstances. With a clean start, she will be a factor gate to wire. G3-placed ~MO' EM DOWN^ makes her first start since last summer. Based on pedigree, she should relish a turf sprint. Progeny of Caracaro win a high percent of turf sprints; the filly's dam was a multiple turf winner and produced a turf winner. STILL UNWRITTEN dusted Cal-breds last week and would be running back in eight days.

Second Race

1. Crude Velocity

2. March of Time

3. Comedy Town

The only 3yo and least experienced in the field, debut winner ~CRUDE VELOCITY^ moves up to allowance after overcoming an eventful trip to defeat maidens first out. He broke slowly from the rail, steadied into the turn, re-rallied outside and won going away. Impressive win by a colt who might be something special. He is trained by Bob Baffert, who also entered ~MARCH OF TIME^. The latter has not started since January 2025 when he missed by a head in a similar N1X. He earned back-to-back 94 Beyers, which match par for this class level. ~COMEDY TOWN^ is an eight-time winner in peak form, runner-up at this level last month but now stuck on the rail.

Third Race

1. Winston Ave

2. Duke Silver

3. Yautown

~WINSTON AVE^, who chased top 3yos his first three starts, is the choice going route to sprint. He finished second to SA Derby contender Cherokee Nation last out; he finished second to SA Derby contender So Happy in his career debut last fall. These are easier; 'AVE can mow them down late. ~DUKE SILVER^ finished a creditable third in his debut, a race won by race-2 selection Crude Velocity. 'SILVER worked well since including a strong five-furlong work last weekend in which he broke off in front of stablemate So Happy and maintained the advantage throughout the work. The drill signals DUKE SILVER can improve off his debut. First-time starter ~YAUTOWN^, by excellent debut sire Yaupon (19 percent debut wins, all ages), has worked well. CAPTAIN SHREVE misfired last out in the Crude Velocity race. He removes blinkers, switches riders, and fits off runner-up finishes his first two starts.

Fourth Race

1. Thirsty Rebel

2. Sammy Davis

3. Galloping Ghost

~THIRSTY REBEL^ and ~SAMMY DAVIS^ top this sprint stakes for Cal-bred 3yos. The call is 'REBEL in his return to dirt after a decent third on turf. Progeny of Stay Thirsty typically prefer dirt, and the best races by THIRSTY REBEL were on dirt. Although he finished behind SAMMY DAVIS when they met in fall, 'REBEL improved since. SAMMY DAVIS is back doing what he does best, run short on dirt vs. Cal-breds. Runner-up in an open N1X on turf last out, this dirt sprint is his deal. The top pair are evenly matched. Lightly raced ~GALLOPING GHOST^ improved a ton second out, rolling to a two-length win over Matt At Five, program favorite Thursday in race 5. A good effort by Matt At Five would validate the maiden win by GALLOPING GHOST.

Fifth Race

1. Vantastic

2. Ah Jeez

3. Jimmy Blue Jeans

The 10yo veteran ~VANTASTIC^ gets the nod in this \$25k claiming turf mile. He might have won last out, but he ran into severe traffic in the stretch, altered course, and missed by a half-length while starting for the first time in five months. With a clean trip, he can mow them down late. ~AH JEEZ^ is a must-use longshot. He exits the same race as the top choice, and he did not have a good trip. Anchored early, he had to wait for room on the far turn, got bogged in traffic again in the stretch, and never had a chance. He is better than that race suggests, his trainer-jockey combo has been productive all season. AH JEEZ is live at a big price. ~JIMMY BLUE JEANS^ figures as one of the favorites off two wins and a third this meet, but his most recent start was a disappointment, third at odds-on. CATHAL adds blinkers; his close third two starts back puts him in the hunt. Likely pacesetter PIONEER PRINCESS stretches out from a comeback sprint and will lead as far as he can.

Sixth Race

1. Meaning

2. French Blue

3. Brooklyn Blonde

The comeback victory by ~MEANING^ was flattered when runner-up Explora subsequently won a stakes race at Oaklawn. MEANING, with a comeback under her belt that was her first start in more than three months, should improve second start back and win the Santa Anita Oaks. MEANING was good enough last year to finish fourth in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies in her second start, she is a better filly at 3. New jockey Juan Hernandez worked her a sharp five furlongs last Saturday; it is logical to expect MEANING can improve in her second start of the season. ~FRENCH BLUE^ looms as an upset candidate. She won her sprint debut, then set the pace before tiring to third in a G3 route that was her first start in two months. She trained well since, and appeared to go easier than workmate FORCED ENTRY on March 26. The work was noteworthy, because FORCED ENTRY defeated FRENCH BLUE by more than three lengths last out. Subsequent drills by FRENCH BLUE suggest she will improve in her second route. FRENCH BLUE might be the one to catch. ~BROOKLYN BLONDE^ stretched out and scored a decisive maiden victory last out. It's a big jump from MSW, but three of the last 12 SA Oaks winners entered off maiden wins (Fashion Plate-2014, Paradise Woods-2017, Soothsay-2021). Rail-drawn FORCED ENTRY might be listed too low. She followed her runaway maiden victory with a sharp win in the G3 Santa Ysabel, defeating runner-up BANK SHOT and third place FRENCH BLUE. The inside post probably dictates a front-running strategy for FORCED ENTRY.

Seventh Race

1. Gaines

2. Eugene Sledge

3. Booked Clubhouse

First-time starter ~GAINES^, trained by Carla Gaines, has worked like he can fire first out in this Cal-bred maiden turf sprint. His March 19 team work on synthetic was impressive. He broke off behind an unraced stablemate and cruised past in the lane, five furlongs in a sharp :58.80. Although maidens trained by Gaines typically race into shape rather than fire first out, this colt looks ready to fire. He is by Mo Forza, whose debut progeny have won just 1 of 25 according to Formulator. Another Mo Forza firster whose works suggest he might be an exception is ~EUGENE SLEDGE^. Produced by multiple stakes winner S Y Sky, 'SLEDGE has trained forwardly for his debut. ~BOOKED CLUBHOUSE^ is a six-start maiden whose four turf sprints produced three runner-up finishes including his last two. He'll be rolling late.

Eighth Race

1. Mohaven

2. Another Zero

3. Too Sassy

Stakes winner ~MOHAVEN^ and last-out maiden winner ~ANOTHER ZERO^ top this sprint stakes for Cal-bred 3yo fillies. MOHAVEN is the most accomplished. She won a Cal-bred stakes last fall; she finished fifth last out in an open stakes for 3yo fillies on the hill. She pressed the pace, and tired the final furlong while making her first start in three months. Solid comeback, class drop to Cal-breds, likely winner with a pressing trip. The maiden win by ANOTHER ZERO was solid. She got an easy lead and dominated in just her second start. This stakes race was won by last-out maiden winners in 2024 and 2025 (Roberta's Love, Om N Joy); ANOTHER ZERO will try to extend the pattern. ~TOO SASSY^ found two turns too far last out and split the field. A stakes winner last summer at DMR, she shortens to a sprint and figures to press the pace. CEE DREW is the late threat, dropping into a stakes for Cal-breds and shortening to one turn after finishing nowhere vs. open company in the Santa Ysabel Stakes.

Ninth Race

1. Prince Dolce

2. Call Me Sir

3. Warm Sun and Brew

A deep field of Cal-bred allowance horses race a mile on turf; late-runner ~PRINCE DOLCE^ is the choice off a troubled runner-up finish in a similar race. Blocked through the far turn, blocked again in deep stretch, he flew late to miss by a neck. With clear sailing, he can mow them down. ~CALL ME SIR^ is compromised by post (12 of 12), but otherwise fits off his runner-up finish last out in a starter allowance. ~WARM SUN AND BREW^, in the money all three starts at this level, finished a half-length behind top choice PRINCE DOLCE last out. PLEASE FOCUS and ZAGREUS are the main speeds.

Tenth Race

1. Robusta

2. Potente

3. Cherokee Nation

~ROBUSTA^ and ~POTENTE^ are tough to separate in the Santa Anita Derby, they ran two-one last out in a G2. ROBUSTA added blinkers, raced wide throughout, yet missed by only a head. He ran as well as the winner. However, POTENTE was making only his second start, he was game in victory, and galloped out super. It's a virtual coin flip between two talented colts likely to be the two favorites. ROBUSTA was always well-regarded, though his first three starts were modest. He added blinkers last out and delivered the best race of his career. Wide while forwardly placed, he led into the lane and finished more than two lengths clear of third while on his wrong lead to the wire. ROBUSTA worked well since, figures to relish the mile and one-eighth, and probably will be in front of his main rival turning for home. If he switches leads, he can turn the tables on likely favorite POTENTE, whose San Felipe victory was super. Stretching out from a debut sprint win, he rated comfortably behind the speed, waited, swung outside, wore down ROBUSTA and galloped out far in front. The lightly raced POTENTE is making just his third start; he has unlimited upside. Last-out maiden winner ~CHEROKEE NATION^ finally broke well in his sixth start, and crushed with a 100 Beyer. From the inside post, he'll have to gun to the lead. If he establishes an early advantage, and gets comfortable, he could wire the field. SO HAPPY finished a respectable third in the San Felipe. Although two turns is still uncertain for the Runhappy colt, he has a right to improve in his second route. INTREPIDO, G1 winner last year, finished a respectable second in his comeback in February. It is uncertain if he has improved since his 2yo campaign, but he drew well for his stalking style. He dueled early in his comeback; he is more effective from off the pace. That is his likely trip this time, from post 7 of 7.

Eleventh Race

1. Queen Maxima

2. Love Appeals

3. Princesa Moche

~QUEEN MAXIMA^ won this G3 hillside stakes last year by more than four lengths; she is a better mare this season. Her last-out victory in a similar hillside G3 was the highest rated of her career and her eighth victory (five stakes) from 13 starts. A hillside specialist (3 wins, 1 second on the hill), 'MAXIMA enters as the fastest on figures and the class of the field. Her last-out victory was flattered when the runner-up returned to win a stakes her next start. Multiple stakes winner ~LOVE APPEALS^ is a consistent East Coast-based mare whose last four starts produced one stakes win, and three stakes in-the-money finishes. TIRUPATI has not raced since last April, and is using this sprint to prep for a mile stakes later this month. But she is a G3 winner who should be running late. ~PRINCESA MOCHE^, runner-up behind QUEEN MAXIMA three starts back before winning a G3 mile, cuts back to a sprint and drops from a G2. 'MOCHE ran well both starts on the hill.

Twelfth Race

1. High Society U

2. Whatastarr

3. Silkie Sevei

A promising third-place debut by ~HIGH SOCIETY U^ makes him the choice in this maiden turf sprint. He pressed the pace, rallied to the lead in the stretch, then got swallowed. Good debut, and Jonathan Thomas-trained maidens typically improve with racing. His second-start maidens won 26 percent (23 for 89) the past five years; his most recent six second-start maidens produced three wins, three seconds. ~WHATASTARR^ trained well into his U.S. debut, got bet to 5.80-1, but raced wide and backed up. He worked fast since, retains jockey Mike Smith, and is likely to improve second start back. ~SILKIE SEVEI^ finished an okay fourth as the favorite in her U.S. debut, a race that already produced at least three next-out winners. Same as the top pair, SILKIE SEVIE also is likely to improve second start back.