

Expert Analysis

By Brad Free

BEST BET: *Johannes (7th race)*

First Race

1. Mas Rapido

2. Dancing Rinca

3. Count of Amazonia

Opening day at Santa Anita, first post 11 a.m. ~MAS RAPIDO[^], seventh last out racing one mile, drops in class and returns to a preferred sprint distance in this N1X/optional claiming sprint on the hill. His highly rated main-oval turf sprints at SA in fall (win, second) are fast enough, and though he did not win any of four previous downhill starts, he ran well all four. ~DANCING RINCA[^] is a 1-for-19 tease also shortening to his preferred sprint trip. He ran fast enough both California turf sprints in summer to merit upset consideration at 15-1 program odds. ~COUNT OF AMAZONIA[^] is likely to improve off a creditable third-place comeback. A seven-time winner, his 2023 races make him a contender. NOBLE RELFECTION adds blinkers and is a potential pacesetter dropping from stakes and entered for the optional \$50k claim tag. He could steal it.

Second Race

1. Madaket Road

2. San Saba

3. Father Ted

Bob Baffert trainees ~MADAKET ROAD[^], runner-up in a stakes race in his debut, and ~SAN SABA[^], a fast-working first-time starter, top this 2yo maiden sprint. MADAKET ROAD, G3 runner-up, drops into a maiden race and should improve with a race under his belt. The colt who defeated him (Bullard) will enter winter as one of the top Derby prospects in California. The rail is a potential challenge for ROAD, while his stablemate SAN SABA drew outside. SABA has been working fast for his debut. He is by Justify, whose debut 2yos have won at an above-average 18 percent clip. First-time starter ~FATHER TED[^] looms the upsetter based on an extended pattern of apparently solid workouts. He is trained by Mark Glatt, who also entered bullet-gate-work KOKOSAN.

Third Race

1. Lee's Baby Girl

2. Lila

3. Slick

Still a maiden after eight starts, ~LEE'S BABY GIRL[^] is nonetheless the choice in this turf mile for juvenile fillies. Runner-up in all three maiden turf races, she actually ran okay last out in a G3. She pressed the pace to near midstretch before she faded. Now back with maidens, with an up-front style, facing a cast of firsters and question marks, GIRL can win with a pace-pressing trip. ~LILA[^] ran better than looked in her sixth-place debut last month. Racing a mile on turf, she was rated early, shuffled on the backstretch, caught four-wide on the far turn, and split the field as second choice in the betting. Not bad. LILA adds blinkers and is certain to improve with a race under her belt. She is listed at generous 10-1 odds. ~SLICK[^] was overmatched in a G3 last out. She missed by less than five lengths, and is rounding into form while making the third start of her U.S. campaign. She is trained by Phil D'Amato, who is positioned for a potentially big opening day with contenders in races 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Fourth Race

1. Stop Digging

2. Nene Diamond

3. Barbera

~STOP DIGGING[^] benefits by a cutback to one turn in this Cal-bred allowance dirt sprint. She was unable to close the deal finishing second her last three starts in routes; both career wins (albeit on turf) were sprints. Rider switch to Flavien Prat, speed to establish position from the rail, she can wear them down from slightly off the pace. Lightly raced ~NENE DIAMOND[^] figures as a contender based on her last-out third. She finished only a neck behind next-out eight-time winner Wishtheyallcouldbe. ~BARBERA[^] is all speed. First or second in three SA dirt starts, she will lead as far as she can. Six and one-half furlongs is a long way, however. BERRY VALLEY, a sharp shipper from Northern California, might be ranked too low. She finished one-two all five starts this year. However, her best figures were on synthetic.

Fifth Race

1. Sareeha

2. Real Fire

3. Moment's Pleasure

Also-eligible ~SAREEHA[^] would start from the outside post in this N1X turf mile, but she has natural speed to tuck in for a front-running/pace-pressing trip in a race without much speed. She won this condition last out rallying from behind; she is likely to be forwardly placed this time due to the murky pace. She is entered for the \$40k optional claim tag. ~REAL FIRE[^] has more speed than she showed either recent start. She broke slowly two back, she was purposely rated last out and finished third by a length and a half. All four wins by FIRE were on the SA turf, she can be closer to the front than recently. ~MOMENT'S PLEASURE[^] drops from a sixth-place finish in a G3, she also has enough tactical speed to be forwardly placed in a race likely to unfold at a tepid clip. SHOCKING GREY is the late threat returning to the SA turf on which she finished in the money all six starts including both wins.

Sixth Race

1. Katonah

2. Tarantino

3. Express Train

Late-runner ~KATONAH[^] and front-runner ~TARANTINO[^] top this G2 at a mile and a sixteenth on dirt. KATONAH drops from G1s including a better-than-looked fifth last out in the BC Dirt Mile. The closer steadied near the furlong pole while rallying in traffic, regained stride, and finished well. These rivals are easier, KATONAH can wear them down under jockey Frankie Dettori (rider change from overnight). He will have to catch TARANTINO, who produced three highly rated races (two wins, one second) since claimed by Peter Eurton. His most recent was his best yet, runner-up in a stakes while hounded every step. Now he drew a beneficial post (7 of 8) outside his main pace rival in post 3. TARANTINO also benefits by a cutback in distance from nine furlongs, and is a legit contender with a front-running/pace-pressing trip. Veteran G1 Santa Anita Handicap winner ~EXPRESS TRAIN[^], a 7yo, makes his third start following an extended layoff. Theoretically, it should be his best. J B STRIKES BACK, whose rider is Antonio Fresu, is the aforementioned pace rival for TARANTINO. AMERICAN ADMIRAL is rounding back into form; he won a Northern California stakes last out over LAMMAS.

Seventh Race

1. Johannes

2. Easter

3. Seal Team

~JOHANNES[^] stands out in this nine-furlong turf Grade 2. Runner-up in the Breeders' Cup Mile, JOHANNES trained well since, meets easier, has tactical speed, and a finishing kick. He won his only previous start at this 9f distance, and is six-for-six on SA turf. Low-odds standout. ~EASTER[^] won this race last year and is a better horse than when the top

choice beat him three times early this season. EASTER finished fourth last out in a similar G2, he could have won with a better trip. He steadied slightly into and on the far turn, flew late (final five-sixteenths blazing :28.85) and missed by a length. EASTER is the late threat. ~SEAL TEAM^ ran better than looked last out, fifth in the same G2 EASTER exits. TEAM was too close to the pace, made the lead too soon in the stretch, and got swallowed by late-runners. He missed by only a length. Third start back from a long layoff should be the top effort by TEAM if his new rider Prat can ration his speed. MI HERMANO RAMON might be ranked too low; he won a G2 last out while defeating EASTER, SEAL TEAM and ASTRONOMER. Longshot DICEY MO CHARA may benefit by this shorter distance.

Eighth Race

1. Stronghold	2. Mystik Dan	3. Bentornato
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Santa Anita Derby winner ~STRONGHOLD^ returns from a short layoff as potential upsetter in this G1 sprint for 3yos. His main rivals face hurdles. Ky Derby winner ~MYSTIK DAN^ has not raced in six months; Breeders' Cup Sprint runner-up ~BENTORNATO^ is buried on the rail. The race may unfold perfectly for STRONGHOLD, who skipped the BC Dirt Mile to target this sprint. His works are fast, he has tactical speed for a pressing trip just off the pace. MYSTIK DAN runs for the first time since the Belmont Stakes in June. Arguably the "best horse," MYSTIK DAN ran well at short distances last year, his recent works are sharp, and there is pace to flatter his kick. The last two Ky Derby winners who ran in the Malibu off similar six-month layoffs were 1986 winner Ferdinand and 1997 runner-up Silver Charm BENTORNATO, runner-up against older in the BC Sprint, drew poorly on the rail. He is fast, and is dropping into an age-restricted race after facing older in the BC. Trouble is, he faces fast pace rival PILOT COMMANDER directly to his outside. If those two hook up, the race could fall apart for the top pair. RAGING TORRENT also is speed, drawn wide where he can apply pressure. He is a G2 winner who won his last three starts at seven furlongs before a better-than-looked seventh in the BC Sprint. He did not have a good trip from the rail that race; his chances for a good trip increase from this outside post. WINTERFELL will rally late in a race that could unfold for his closing style.

Ninth Race

1. King of Gosford	2. Stay Hot	3. Atitlan
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Runner-up in the G1 Hollywood Derby, ~KING OF GOSFORD^ should be tough dropping to G2 and shortening to a mile. A two-time turf stakes winner (sprints) at SA, he drew the rail and has tactical speed for a ground-saving trip positioned second behind the pacesetter two stalls to his outside. ~STAY HOT^ finished only a quarter-length behind the top choice last out, and one could argue STAY HOT ran at least as well. HOT ran his final three furlongs in a quick :35.24, and his final furlong in :11.42; both fractions were the fastest by any in the field. HOT fires every start, might prefer this slightly shorter distance, and he will be running late. ~ATITLAN^ was positioned too far off the pace in the same race, and finished seventh. He can be nearer the front; each of his starts was faster than the start before. CURLIN'S KAOS is the aforementioned front-runner expected to set the pace. For what it's worth, favorites are 9-for-18 since this race became a graded stakes in 2006.

Tenth Race

1. One Magic Philly	2. Hope Road	3. Accuracy
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A deep field of 3yo fillies sprint seven furlongs in the G1 La Brea; all 11 entrants have a shot. Graded stakes winner ~ONE MAGIC PHILLY^ is the tepid choice dropping from a creditable sixth in the BC Filly and Mare Sprint. She did not have a great trip, blocked slightly on the turn before finishing okay. She takes a big drop into this age-restricted sprint; there is plenty of pace up front for her to target. ~HOPE ROAD^ is four-for-four this year, shortening to a sprint after winning a pair of G3 routes. Both sprint wins this year were fast, she is drawn near the outside (9 of 11) where she has strategic options. ~ACCURACY^ was dynamite in both recent highly rated route wins, but seven furlongs is a new ballgame and she is buried near the inside (post 2) against multiple pace rivals. KINZA is a fast comebacker, SUGAR FISH goes route to sprint and will rally late in a race that should unfold at a fast pace. TAMARA ran well in her runner-up comeback, finishing a nose behind SANDY BOTTOM. Lightly raced SPLENDORA is very good, but stuck on the rail.

Eleventh Race

1. She Feels Pretty	2. Kathynmarissa	3. Watchtower
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~SHE FEELS PRETTY^ figures to win the G1 American Oaks if she reproduces her recent G1 romp at Keeneland. PRETTY is the class of the field, fastest on numbers, and proven over the SA turf. She ran super here last year finishing third with a wide trip in the BC Juvenile Fillies Turf. A mile and one-quarter should be okay for PRETTY. The distance is perfect for ~KATHYNMARISSA^, impressive last-out stakes winner at a mile and five-sixteenths in Kentucky. MARISSA has been stabled in California nearly a month. ~WATCHTOWER^ has improved each subsequent start including a G3 win last out at a mile. The extra distance and tougher company present challenges, but WATCHTOWER has never been better. SAKURA BLOSSOM should like this distance; her gallop-outs suggest she wants to run this far. Her odds should be high. Bombs away at a giant price? She is listed 30-1, and should be every bit that price.