

Expert Analysis

By Brad Free

BEST BET: Mega Moon (9th race)

First Race

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| 1. Glamora | 2. Nafisa | 3. Defiance |
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Rain is forecast; this filly-mare maiden race is scheduled for six and one-half furlongs on the main turf oval. Changes are possible. If the race stays on turf, ~GLAMORA^ can wear them down. She ran well on wet turf in Europe; her U.S. debut at Santa Anita last May was a third-place finish, beaten only a length. Though she misfired with a wide trip in her November comeback going five furlongs at Del Mar, she has trained well recently and can win if she reproduces her previous SA start. ~NAFISA^ merits top billing if the race moves to dirt. In the money three of four on the main track, NAFISA has chased good company and ran okay finishing third her only previous sprint. Six and a half might be shorter than preferred, but she is in form. ~DEFIANCE^ has worked fast (on synthetic) for her debut. Sired by Curlin, produced by a G1-winning mare, the question is footing and distance. She is bred for longer, and uncertain on dirt.

Second Race

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| 1. Chips | 2. Skylight Ride | 3. Busy Making Munny |
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Second-time starter ~CHIPS^ disappointed as the favorite her only start, but she did show speed before she faded. She returns from a four-month layoff, adds Lasix, and meets an apparently soft field of maiden-32 fillies. Tab for an improved effort second out. ~SKYLIGHT RIDE^ ran well her only start at SA in October, finishing fourth after being shuffled back on the turn and briefly blocked into the lane. It was a good effort, beaten only three lengths. If her DMR races before and after are discounted, she figures as a contender rallying from off the pace. ~BUSY MAKING MUNNY^ finished a distant second as the odds-on favorite last month against similar, but that was her first try at SA and first in two months. She can improve second start back, adding Lasix.

Third Race

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| 1. Upstart Yankee | 2. Rich Gold | 3. Happy Does |
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~UPSTART YANKEE^, based most of his career in Northern California, merits top billing in this starter allowance/optional \$10k claiming dirt mile. He won last summer at DMR, so he does fit on this circuit. Furthermore, he has been stabled at SA since December, and worked three times over the track. His recent races are solid, his speed figures rank among the highest in the field. For what it's worth: 'YANKEE was listed as a vet scratch Jan. 3. ~RICH GOLD^ was compromised by a wide trip last time vs. slightly better. He lost ground virtually the entire race, and split the field. Under the circumstances, his fourth-place finish was not that bad. With a more economical trip, and with the benefit of a race over the track, 'GOLD is likely to improve. His autumn races at Pleasanton put him in the hunt. ~HAPPY DOES^ exits the same race. Rank and steadied early, he chased the pace, was under a drive on the far turn, and held third. That was his first start at SA, the seven-time winner probably can improve.

Fourth Race

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| 1. Factory Drive | 2. Toppers Wager | 3. American Renegade |
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A soft field entered this maiden-20 dirt route, which is a good spot for stretch-out ~FACTORY DRIVE^. His sprint debut on this track last spring was promising; his recent third-place sprint comeback was not bad. He was not quick enough to keep up with the sprint pace, but he did pass rivals to finish a distant third in a strung-out field. It was an okay comeback, nothing more. He figures to be forwardly placed in this slower-tempo route, and the Utah-bred gelding just might spring a minor upset. His main rival is 18-start maiden ~TOPPERS WAGER^, who drops from Cal-bred MSWs/maiden-50s to run for the low tag. Tough to like a career maiden with this many starts, but his figures rank among the highest in the field. ~AMERICAN RENEGADE^ stretches out and drops in class off an okay fifth-place sprint comeback. MISCHIEF MOMENTS also fits off his runner-up finish two starts back at Los Alamitos.

Fifth Race

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| 1. Shanghai Mist | 2. Super Ellie | 3. Proof of Jazz |
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This starter allowance/optional \$10k claiming dirt mile is the filly-mare version of race 3. Northern California-based ~SHANGHAI MIST^, runner-up last out at PLN, gets the call off two good recent races at PLN including a runner-up finish last out in a \$16k claiming race won by the class-drop favorite. 'MIST meets easier, she is a nine-time winner, with 11 seconds. The challenge is this is her first start at SA; all 44 previous starts were in the North. Top choice anyway, from slightly off the pace. ~SUPER ELLIE^ completely misfired her last two starts against tougher than these, but her autumn form in the North would be good enough. She is taking a substantial drop from open \$16k claiming to starter/\$10k claiming, and likely to improve second start over the SA track. ~PROOF OF JAZZ^ is speed, a veteran mare who has tailed off recently. But she is a nine-time winner who has not raced this low since 2022, and she is quick enough to make the lead. The class-drop speedster merits wire-to-wire consideration.

Sixth Race

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| 1. Whatmakessammyrun | 2. Terry's Boy | 3. Devil Be Me |
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Rain is forecast, this \$32k claiming sprint is scheduled for six and one-half furlongs on the main turf oval. If it stays on grass, late-runner ~WHATMAKESSAMMYRUN^ is the choice to wear them down. He won going away last time at six furlongs, this slightly longer distance benefits his style. A seven-time winner including three SA stakes (two on the hill, one on the flat), the 7yo gelding can wear them down again. ~TERRY'S BOY^ ran the fastest race of his career his only start at SA two back. He crushed in a blazing 1:07.74. He subsequently met his match vs. N1X/optional \$40k rivals at DMR, but is now back on a course where he dominated similar. The difference is course condition. If it rains, the turf will be slower than it was when he ran his fast race in autumn. ~DEVIL BE ME^ would be tough if this race moves to dirt. He is 5-for-11 on the main track, and won his last four SA dirt starts including a career-best effort three back. If the race moves to dirt, DEVIL BE ME is the one to beat.

Seventh Race

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| 1. Cotton Rosser | 2. Trotsky | 3. Last Call Paul |
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Second-time starter ~COTTON ROSSER^ looks like the speed of the field based on the fractions she pressed in her debut last month (:21.74 and :44.42). That race was a Cal-bred MSW, the gelding drops to Cal-bred maiden-50 for her second start and gets the call to wire the field. ~TROTSKY^ is a 10-start maiden who will be rolling from behind. He placed both starts at this class level over this track last spring, and actually ran okay finishing fifth last out while making his first start in three months. With minor improvement second start back, he could wear down the speed. ~LAST CALL PAUL^ is an 18-start maiden with 11 in-the-money finishes. Beaten favorite six times, he will get there one of these days.

Eighth Race

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| 1. Air Force Red | 2. Vlahos | 3. Turn On The Jets |
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Rain is forecast, this \$100k stakes is scheduled for six furlongs on the main turf oval. ~AIR FORCE RED^ fits the conditions (non-winners of graded stakes 2024-25). He won a G2 in 2022, he placed in two graded stakes last year. 'RED had a nightmare trip last out in a G2 on the hill. He was blocked inside after crossing the dirt, stayed blocked with nowhere to go, and lost all chance. The race was a toss. He drops in class, and only needs a clear trip and the race to stay on grass. If it moves to dirt, ~VLAHOS^ could be tough. He is fast, and looked super working 1:01 in his final workout on Jan. 19. He looked like he was going slow, but his workout time ranked 12th of 78 works at the distance. VLAHOS is expected to start if the race stays on turf, which would create uncertainty. He has never raced on turf, and he would be up against a fast filly two stalls to his outside. If those two duel, it could set the race up for ~TURN ON THE JETS^, an off-pace runner seeking his first win since summer 2023. 'JETS will rally late. HAMWOOD FLIER is the aforementioned pace rival for VLAHOS. 'FLIER set the pace and finished fifth in this race one year ago. That was her most recent start. She will keep the pace honest.

Ninth Race

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| 1. Mega Moon | 2. Rogue Son | 3. Teddy's Triumph |
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Runner-up at this level last out, ~MEGA MOON^ finished almost two lengths clear of third, he earned a respectable speed figure, and was claimed by Goerge Papaprodromou. The past five years, Papaprodromou is 14-for-24 (58 percent) with first-off-the-claim favorites. MEGA MOON should win if he runs as well as he ran a month ago. ~ROGUE SON^ was disqualified from a last-to-first victory at this level last out at LRC. The DQ was for alleged interference. 'SON will be rolling from behind. ~TEDDY'S TRIUMPH^ moves up a notch from a game N2L claiming win here three weeks ago. It was a solid race by the top pair; the runner-up finished five+ lengths clear of third. 'TRIUMPH is 2-for-2 on SA dirt, and will be forwardly placed.

Tenth Race

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| 1. Muscled | 2. Legitimate | 3. Stargell |
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Rain is forecast; this mile race for maiden 3yos is scheduled for turf. Back-to-back runner-up finishes by ~MUSCLED^ stamps him the logical choice if the race stays on turf. ~LEGITIMATE^ has improved each subsequent turf start; his third-place finish last out was his best race yet. Off nearly two months, working well, Lasix on, first-time Flavien Prat. Obvious contender on grass. ~STARGELL^ improved in his second start, a closing fifth in the same race the top choice exits. CATCH THE BREEZE finished only a length and a half behind the top choice while making a forward move off his sprint debut.