

Expert Analysis

By Brad Free

BEST BET: *Lady Gregory (9th race)*

First Race

1. Cupid's Crusader

2. Be Punctual

3. Bowtie Boys

First post time Sunday 12 noon for a challenging 11-race card. ~CUPID'S CRUSADER^ drops to the lowest level for SoCal-based winners (\$16k claiming N2) and returns to dirt after facing better on turf. The surface switch should be fine; he won a maiden dirt sprint here last spring and finished second in a two-turn dirt race against winners last summer at Del Mar. A late-runner, 'CRUSADER can wear them down. But he'll have to catch ~BE PUNCTUAL^, who finished second (disqualified, placed third) last out in a similar N2L claiming route. 'PUNCTUAL has a forwardly placed running style that should play well in a race that could unfold at a relatively slow pace. ~BOWTIE BOYS^ ran races last fall that are fast enough for this group, he did not have a fair shot in his recent comeback. He was racing above his eligibility in a N3L claiming race, broke slowly, and was wide throughout. Now he drops to N2L with a prep under his belt. Improvement likely.

Second Race

1. Attracted

2. Rousing Jewel

3. Halfway to Nowhere

~ATTRACTED^ is a tepid choice in this filly-mare allowance/optional claiming sprint for Northern California horses/horsemen. She won her first two starts impressively at Pleasanton, followed by an eventful trip at Santa Anita, runner-up at odds-on. ATTRACTED stumbled at the break and got slammed by a rival, lost position, raced in traffic and missed by a half-length. The bad break gives her an alibi, it seems curious she now shows up eligible to be claimed for \$32k (per the overnight). ATTRACTED is the "best" filly in the field, but a likely underlayer. ~ROUSING JEWEL^ is a five-time winner with speed making her first start in two and a half months. She was listed as a vet scratch Jan. 17, but worked regularly since and runs well fresh. She will be in front of the top choice early. ~HALFWAY TO NOWHERE^ is making her first start since June. The best race of her career was her debut, so she clearly runs well fresh.

Third Race

1. Starts Now

2. Speed Lane

3. Ms Brightside

~STARTS NOW^ must run better than last out in order to win this N3L starter on turf, but her runner-up finish at this level two back gives her the edge stretching from eight to nine furlongs. The "trouble" she had last out was minor; she was flat. She tries a rider switch to Flavien Prat, and is likely to be forwardly placed in a distance race that should unfold at a soft tempo. ~SPEED LANE^ drops from N1X and N2X sprints, into a starter allowance turf route. The races she exits were much tougher than this, the question is distance. 'LANE has never raced beyond a mile and a sixteenth. ~MS BRIGHTSIDE^ will be rolling late; she missed by a neck last out against easier. FREE AND HUMBLE showed surprising speed last out, holding third after setting the pace until late. The inconsistent mare does not always run two alike. If she does, she is another contender in this small field.

Fourth Race

1. Memosis

2. Jolie Candy

3. Little Silver Girl

This Cal-bred maiden-50 is a total raffle. ~MEMOSIS^ showed enough ability in her third-place debut last June to rate the advantage. She rallied to third, worked twice after, and then was sidelined four months. She has not missed a drill since her work pattern began in late November, she returns for a claim tag and probably benefits by the longer distance of this six-furlong sprint. She'll need every bit of it, because so far, she is not particularly quick. ~JOLIE CANDY^ dueled and stopped last month against maiden special-weight Cal-breds, now she drops in for a tag and is likely to improve with a race under her belt. First-time starter ~LITTLE SILVER GIRL^ worked okay from the gate last week; trainer Ryan Hanson won with 7 of his last 21 first-time starters.

Fifth Race

1. Strate Cash

2. Cajun Gold

3. Going Viral

~STRATE CASH^ is bred to win early, his fast works at San Luis Rey Downs suggest he is ready to fire. Debut progeny of Tiz the Law are 9 for 53 (16 percent); 'CASH also is bred to win early on the bottom side. His stakes-winning dam won first out; each of her first three runners hit the board first out including a debut winner. Although maidens trained by Richard Baltas typically race into shape rather than fire first out, fast works and the presence of a top rider suggest 'CASH will come out firing. ~CAJUN GOLD^ is better than his most recent start suggests. He dueled for the lead early, which is against his typical running style. His best race was an off-slow, fast-finish runner-up two back. Expect him to ration his speed more efficiently this time, and put in his typical honest run. Prior to his last-start misfire, he finished second in all three starts. ~GOING VIRAL^ wanted to part of stakes-caliber maidens last out in a dirt mile; he returns to the turf-sprint conditions of his respectable debut in which he did not have a good trip. COULAIR makes his U.S. debut for a stable that already won two maiden races this meet with European shippers.

Sixth Race

1. Supa Speed

2. Maysam

3. Cipriani

Stakes-placed turf filly ~SUPA SPEED^ switches to dirt in this G3 route; her main-track works suggest the surface switch is fine. The main question is how she will react to kickback; she is likely to be positioned in the rear flight. 'SPEED is by multi-surface stallion Justify, though her dam raced exclusively on grass. Based on her turf races against good company and her dirt works, the most accomplished filly in the field gets the call to rally for the win. ~MAYSAM^ wheels back two weeks after misfiring in a \$250k stakes at Sunland Park. She acted up in the gate, broke poorly, and sputtered to finish sixth at 1-to-10. But her debut win on SA dirt two back was a six-length romp. She worked an easy three-eighths here Wednesday; her trainer's starters typically do well running back on short notice. Since summer 2021, Bob Baffert is 8 for 20 wheeling back in 14 to 16 days. MAYSAM has more speed than she showed last out. ~CIPRIANI^ finished a respectable second (three-horse field) last out in a race won by division leader Tenma, who is expected to return April 5 in the Grade 2 Santa Anita Oaks.

Seventh Race

1. Silver N Black

2. Mr Fabricator

3. Mongolian Champ

The 15-start maiden ~SILVER N BLACK^ is the tepid choice in this weak maiden-20 dirt mile. His best races have been long on dirt; he stretches out from an okay fourth-place sprint. ~MR FABRICATOR^ drops from maiden-50 and returns to dirt for his second start following a layoff of more than nine months. The only time he ran long on dirt was last winter when he finished fourth and earned a figure that exceeds the 67 Beyer par for this level. Furthermore, FABRICATOR has more early speed than the top choice. ~MONGOLIAN CHAMP^ looms a potential upsetter, first start in four months and first time at the bottom level for locally based maidens. FACTORY DRIVE finished third all three tries at this level. Weak race, actually.

Eighth Race

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| 1. Abadon | 2. Right Hand Ryder | 3. Contrary Chieftain |
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Also-eligible ~ABADON^ would start from the far outside in this \$5k claiming mile, but the post is not insurmountable. He overcame a tough post (9 of 9) last out winning a similar race. This field is restricted to Northern California-based horses and horsemen; if ABADON reproduces his last-out win over the SA track, he can make it two straight despite the draw. Otherwise, ~RIGHT HAND RYDER^ has a shot to steal it while stretching out from a series of sprints. He is quick enough to make the lead, and could get brave dropping in class. ~CONTRARY CHIEFTAIN^ is likely to vie for favoritism again. He rallied to second last out vs. similar, and was the only late-runner in that race to make up any ground.

Ninth Race

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| 1. Lady Gregory | 2. Nanci Griffith | 3. Long Mayshe Reign |
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~LADY GREGORY^ can make amends in this Cal-bred allowance turf sprint after finishing fourth at even-money. She never had a chance. A nine-time winner, she was blocked from the quarter pole to deep stretch. It was a toss race. Her runner-up finish two back would be fast enough, she only needs a clean trip to deliver as most probable winner on a difficult card. ~NANCI GRIFFITH^ merits upset consideration while shortening from a route to a sprint and switching riders. She has been losing her punch late in short races, which suggests the cutback in distance will be to her benefit. Steve Miyadi and Prat are a quietly productive trainer-jockey combo: 10-for-25 the past four years. ~LONG MAYSHE REIGN^ wired easier two weeks ago, but she faces more speed this time including FIVE O COCKTAIL.

Tenth Race

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| 1. Billy Joe Shaver | 2. Cody Boy | 3. Blazing Peme |
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This \$16k claiming NL is the sprint version of race 1. It is the lowest class level for local runners. ~BILLY JOE SHAVER^ wheels back in a week after a sharp runner-up finish on turf. He can run on the main track; he won a maiden-20 dirt race here two starts ago. ~CODY BOY^ also ran well last out, runner-up on dirt behind an odds-on winner. BOY has had more time between starts (five weeks) than the top choice. Seems like a two-horse race, at least on paper. ~BLAZING PEME^ makes his first start in nearly six months, while exiting MSW and allowance races in Northern California. He worked fast at PLN, and should fire his best shot first start back.

Eleventh Race

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| 1. Eye On Ry | 2. Maniatic | 3. Grand Aspen |
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~EYE ON RY^ has improved since relocating from the Midwest. His runner-up finish last out at this N2X class level was flattered when winner El Potente wheeled back to win a G3 next out and was entered as one of the favorites in a G1 on Saturday. EYE ON RY meets easier; he is versatile enough to make the lead or rally from behind. European import ~MANIATIC^ makes his U.S. debut as the class of the field. He placed in multiple Group races in France, and though he is a four-time winner, he remains eligible to N2X because in two of his wins he earned less than the \$21k eligibility cutoff. ~GRAND ASPEN^ stretches back out following a creditable fourth-place comeback in a hillside turf sprint.