

Race 1 Selections

The Horseplayer's Journal by Garnet Barnsdale

#7 SOUTHWIND MILK is starting to round into form, and she is one of several in with a chance in a very competitive opening leg of the \$75,000 guaranteed early Pick 5. The Grand Circuit placed sophomore trotting filly was okay in her seasonal debut, closing five lengths in the stretch to get the smallest cheque. She came back with a better performance on May 28th when facing an impressive colt that raced in a Grand Circuit elimination on the weekend that just past. Her 26 3/5 kicker shows that she is ready to fire her best shot. If she can get out in a live advancing flow tonight, she may prove hard to hold off.

#3 ROXIE HART, a fast-improving daughter of local star Musical Rhythm, will rightfully get a lot of attention tonight because of the big effort she produced in an OSS Gold race here on May 26th. After starting seventh, she moved out third-over into the flow, and the filly that she was following didn't advance one step around the final turn. Travis Cullen peeled her out widest when they straightened out for home and she got in high gear in the final eighth, finishing full of trot. She was the only one that closed on the loose leader in the lane. This is a tricky race because she faces some males in a race in between stakes engagements, but if she can replicate that 1:53-flat mile, she should be right there at the wire.

#10 COUSIN HALIFAX had a productive rookie season, taking four wins and two seconds from seven starts, including two Grassroots wins, but he hasn't fared as well facing tougher company so far this year. His most recent start where he was a closing fourth in a Gold race to hot colt P L Spencer is a cause for optimism. He stacks up okay in this field and he has a shot if Billy Davis can get him into the race from post 10, and he is a bomb to consider for the Pick 5.

#8 BRIGHT GREEN had a nice win three starts back then she broke in the SBOA elimination while chasing Monalishi. She threw the trotting hobbles on in the same Gold race that Roxie Hart exits and she raced well and behaved to get third, finishing only a length back of Roxie Hart. She fits okay with these and she can get another share if she gets positioned in the top five or six early.

SPOT PLAY: SOUTHWIND MILK

Race 2 Selections

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#9 READYFORPRIMETIME lived up to his name when he debuted at Pocono Downs in early May when he re-rallied after giving up the lead in the third quarter to win at first asking. Twelve days later he jumped right into the deep end in the SBOA stake trying some colts that went on to race in the North America Cup eliminations on Saturday night. He was doomed at the post position draw when he got the second tier 11-hole, and it went downhill from there. He actually left well from that post, but many outside leavers drove on and dropped in front of him and that left him racing in ninth early. He was sent to the inside in the lane, and he sprinted well to get fifth in a mile that was better than it looks on the program. He then tackled Sterling Choice from the rail post and had no chance of closing into a 26 3/5 final quarter. He fits much better here, and he gets the leading driver. There is plenty that points to him tonight.

#6 WICKED EXPRESS, when he wired a field of maidens here on May 9th in 1:52 2/5, took the fastest mark of any of these and that certainly qualifies him as a contender in this field. The horse that he beat that night, Control Rocks, has since won two in a row, the most recent win coming in a \$90,000 OSS Gold race. This gelding comes in off a good Grassroots effort and he should be a speed threat tonight starting from the best post with regular driver Doug McNair in the bike.

#5 BLAZING CRUISER was good early in his career, winning his third and fourth start then he had some breaking issues and some spring sickness. His qualifier on June 2nd where he rallied from last to fourth while pacing his own back half 54 4/5 is an indicator that all is well. He is capable in this kind of field, and he is worth a price look for the early Pick 5.

#7 CONNOR B was 0 for 10 as a rookie, but he came out firing last week and parlayed an impressive qualifying win into his maiden victory. He got a great drive and a nice trip that night, now he moves up to face a much tougher field. If he leaves for position again, he can sit a trip and take a small share.

Race 3 Selections

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#1 QUEBEC HANOVER broke stride in three straight starts, including one qualifier, before requalifying on May 24th in a good effort behind a Determination trotter that came out of that race and won the first leg of the Graduate Series. This Ben Baillargeon trainee then trotted his own good mile here on June 2nd where he led all the way until deep stretch where he was overtaken by a persistent first-over challenger. He trotted his own final quarter in 27-flat and fended off the pocket sitting 3 to 5 favorite for second. I don't love the rail for him considering his gait issues, but if he stays flat, he should be tough in here.

#3 WILLOWTIME dropped and popped last week, taking his first win of the year and second in the past two seasons. His victory made sense in his fifth start racing out of the Menary barn when you consider that the first four starts were three tries in the Graduate series and a start from the 10-hole. Last week, he started in mid pack then latched onto Truffles Too's cover in the third quarter. He moved to the middle of the track turning for home then methodically wore down the loose leader. He races for a tag tonight and he fits well in this field. He is a threat to double up now that he is at his sharpest.

#6 DEALIN WITH DEWEY has been making frequent border crossings this spring where he has done well racing in the top class at Buffalo Raceway. He has also had some success racing at Flamboro Downs too, and not so much at Mohawk Park so far. He did race well here in several starts in 2024, though, typically thriving in races where he raced close to the front. Tonight, he draws best and I think he will get put into play leaving the gate. That gives him a chance, and he is worth a look for early multi-race tickets.

#2 TRUFFLES TOO raced well first-over when second to Willow Time here because he had to try to chase down a loose leader, which he did before being overtaken late. He has been handy in all of his past three starts landing no worse than third early, and he can get positioned in the top flight again tonight. He is a good one to use in the bottom of the Tri or Super.

Race 4 Selections

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#9 THE GREEK FREAK is a classy veteran making his first start since late February in a spot where he gets to drop in class, and he should be tough to beat in here despite drawing a wide post. His 1:54 1/5 qualifying win on June 2nd where he paced his final quarter in 27 2/5 should have him on his toes. The last time he raced at a class comparable to tonight's he was a front end winner in 1:51 4/5 and he paced his final quarter in 26 3/5 that night. He adds Lasix tonight and if he gets a reasonable trip tonight, he should be tough to overhaul.

#4 ILIKEMEBETTOR A is the logical alternative to the choice for anyone that saw his race here last week. Starting as the 8 to 5 favorite, he left fourth and elected to stay in on the backstretch. He worked his way up the inside and looked ready to explode entering the stretch, and he looked like he had a lane along the pylons. That lane got closed off by the horse that had been leading who then proceeded to fade to eighth. Ilikemebettor A spent the rest of the stretch drive looking for room that never materialized, and he finished behind a wall of horses. He gets a driver change to James Macdonald tonight and he returns on a seven-day cycle after having missed 19 days between starts. He also has post position advantage on The Greek Freak, and he is the only other one that I would consider using on multi-race tickets.

#5 THUNDER COUNTRY is a class dropper who shows a race at this level four starts back that makes him a contender for a share. In that mile, he raced tough first-over to just miss. He battled class dropping favorite Blue Hunt and that one just finished fourth beaten only a length in the Camluck Classic last Friday. This gelding has a good chance of hitting the board in this field.

#1 BET THE BB has been competitive at this level in two straight starts, getting positioned close to the front at the start of both of those races, then riding decent trips to a couple of third-place finishes. Last week, he raced first up and was part of a blanket finish, ahead of the troubled Ilikemebettor A. He can get another good following trip tonight and land in the bottom of the Tri or Super.

Race 5 Selections

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#4 P L RAINBOW DASH hasn't been close enough to win either of his starts since returning, but he powered home with sub-27 second final quarters in both starts, and it should be go time tonight. In his most recent start, he had no early speed starting from the widest post in the eight-horse field, and he dropped back to last leaving the gate. He didn't find his best stride until midway of the final turn then he was sent widest by Bob McClure entering the stretch. He finished with good energy without threatening the top two finishers. The key tonight should be post position improvement. He should get better position leaving the gate and that can be the difference. He gets top billing in this anchor leg of the early Pick 5.

#10 MASSTERCRAFT has been very good in his four starts since exiting the Graduate Series on May 12th, and the driver change has seemed to make a difference as he has been aggressively driven by Trevor Henry in all of those four starts. He came into the May 12th race with only one second-place finish from five starts, but he has recorded two wins and two seconds since to improve his record. He has the requisite gate speed to land in the top four early, and that makes him a threat to triple up despite drawing the worst post tonight.

#9 WHAT ABOUT ELMO is another one whose form improved after exiting a Graduate Series race, and he has been close in three straight races since. Last week, he rallied from third-over on the final turn and cut into Mastercraft's lead in the stretch in a solid effort. His issue tonight is the wide draw because he isn't typically a fast leaver. I see him closing from the back to land on the Tri or Super ticket.

#1 VERACRUZ took a lot of action last week when you consider that in his two previous starts he closed at 53 to 1 and 55 to 1. Sent off as the 5 to 2 third choice by the punters, he rallied late for third behind strong winner P L Robert G. Two starts back he was a good second to a colt that raced in the Grand Circuit on the weekend. He will likely sit an inside following trip in mid pack and look to rally late tonight. He can take another share here.

Race 6 Selections

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#8 PIPEWRENCH CHARLIE closed well last week to finish a close fourth racing one class level higher than this. In that mile, he pulled second-over in the third quarter, but mid way around the final turn, the pocket sitter and horse that was racing third both vacated the pylons, leaving Charlie fourth-over. He was sent widest in the lane, and he closed with good energy. A couple of strides past the wire, he was second. He gets Travis Cullen back in the bike tonight and he will likely be looking to send him right down the road on the class drop. He gets top billing in the opening leg of the late Pick 5.

#4 NIGHTIME DANCER gives off mixed signals here because he exits a tough Pop Up series that produced several fast miles, but he also comes off a sick scratch and he has missed more than three weeks of action. He has a good record in 2024-25, taking nine wins from 59 starts, and his best race puts him right there with these, but the time missed to sickness is concerning. He gets the leading driver tonight, and that teamster drove him to his last win on April 21st. He should contend if fit enough, but I wouldn't take a short price here.

#6 BEACHIN LINDY can be a bit of a tease at times, because he often comes with an eye-catching rush late in the mile like he did two starts back when he powered home in 25 3/5. But many of these closing efforts come when the race has already been decided and he has done no work to that point of the mile. He draws best and gets a driver change tonight with Macdonald opting off him to take the drive on Nightime Dancer. He will likely be rallying too late from the back again and land in the bottom of the Tri or Super.

#5 R J RINGO hasn't done much of note recently, having taken only one cheque in his past six starts, but the drop in class and driver switch to Jody Jamieson could perk him up enough to improve to the point where he takes a share. He is worth using on the bottom of the Tri and Super at a price tonight.

Race 7 Selections

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#7 FLIRTY DANCER took some sneaky action at the windows last week in her second start at this level considering she was leaving from post 10 and was coming off a break in stride in his previous start. The money was proven correct though as she converted for the 6 to 1 score. It was an impressive effort when you consider that she pulled first-over before the half, battled the leader for the entire back half, opened up a lead then held on. She returns at the same class level and gets a better post to work from tonight and she should be the one to beat as she seeks a repeat score.

#1 DAHLQUIST HANOVER is interesting here because he beat a better field than this four starts back before jumping up to face a steady diet of tougher company in three straight starts. The leading driver sticks with him coming off a poor effort where he had no visible excuse. Also concerning is the time missed between starts, but if the class drop perks him up, he should be right there tonight. I wouldn't take a short price here, but I would consider using him on late multi-race tickets.

#4 CRYSTAL BALLER drops off a decent effort where he rallied widest and finished with good energy to get the smallest cheque. He gets a good post to work from tonight, and he gets Trevor Henry in the bike. That teamster drove him to a couple of wins in late 2024. I think he will look to get the Baller positioned closer to the front leaving the gate tonight, and that makes him a threat to at least land in the Tri.

#8 SOUTHWIND DOMINO is another that can improve on the class drop tonight after taking shares in two of three starts racing one class higher. In his last start, he was pointed to the front and it appeared as he was being asked to rebuff a backstretch assault on his lead when he made a rare break. He can contend if he stays trotting tonight, and he is another one to consider for usage on the bottom of exotic wagers.

Race 8 Selections

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#3 STORMALONG is one of two horses in this race that is dropping more than one class level, and he is the one that I like better from that duo. He has been racing okay in some tougher company recently, and I like that he was sent right to the front from post eight last time, even though the end result didn't work out. Last time this Gregg McNair pupil raced this low, he was a front end winner by two and a half lengths. He then stepped up in class and took a repeat win. He tends to do his best work with Doug McNair at the controls, and that pilot returns to the bike tonight. He is the clear top pick to kick off the late Pick 4 that starts here.

#7 ELLIOT MOOSE is the other dropper that should be better tonight. Seven starts back he beat a Pop Up series field that probably wasn't as good as this one, but he raced over his head since then. In his most recent start racing one level higher, he was sent wide turning for home and he closed some ground, but he wasn't urged late when it was obvious that he wasn't going to get a cheque. Travis Cullen drives for the second consecutive start and I could see him completing the Exacta.

#5 BETTOR OF THE WEST has a past performance line from last week that will get some bettors to climb aboard as it looks juicy with him closing for second and pacing a 26 4/5 kicker. The replay tells a different story, however, as everything panned out his way to get a perfect trip and save all the ground and he still couldn't get past the leader. The question in my mind is: if he couldn't convert off that trip, what kind of trip would it take to get him across the line first? He has taken nine slices and only one win in 31 starts in 2024-25, and another share is likely his ceiling tonight facing the class droppers.

#4 FOREFATHER is another that has yet to win this year that sometimes gets bet when he shouldn't because he sometimes produces nice rallies to take a share. He has closed well in his past three starts, and he will likely be coming late again to finish on the edges. He is one that I will use underneath only until he shows me he can find the wire first once.

BEST BET: STORMALONG

Race 9 Selections

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#1 GHOSTLY CASPER moved first up on 1 to 9 Gaines Hanover last week because...somebody had to do it. That move was mission impossible, and he understandably faded late. Two starts back, he raced tough on the lead at this Preferred 2 level, only to get nosed out by a tripped out Nasey right on the line despite pacing a 27 2/5 kicker. I think the short field helps him here because he will likely lead or sit in the pocket through a moderate early pace. He has a good shot tonight and he may even get sent postward as an overlay.

#4 NASEY was on a good roll until he faced mighty Gaines Hanover last week. He could only chase that rival home in an exercise in futility as that one trotted a 27-flat kicker. The dynamics of this Preferred 2 race should play out more to his favor, and I expect him to race close to the front as he did two starts back when he edged the top pick in this race. He figures to be a big threat tonight.

#6 PEMBERTON is one that I tabbed on my mental watch list last week because he looked so good at the end of his mile which also happened to be his 2025 debut. In the closing strides of that race, seemingly closing with a gear that the others didn't have. My issue tonight is he draws widest in a six-horse field, and he could end up sitting last where he could be a victim of trip and pace. On the other hand, he shows a race at this level from March 2024 where he was in the exact same scenario, and he was sent right down the road from post six by tonight's driver Bert Renaud. Perhaps the board will tell the tale as he went off as the 8 to 5 favorite that night he won in March of 2024.

#2 SID THE KID has been right around the money all year, taking one win and nine other slices from 14 starts while earning close to \$80,000. He sat an inside trip and landed in third behind Gaines Hanover last week, and he should once again get a good following trip and get a slice in this spot.

Race 10 Selections

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#6 KYLES ART just wins recently, finding a way to work out the winning trip three times in a row. It could be argued that all the racing luck went his way in his two wins on May 12th and May 19th. Even in his last start, he got a bit of a break when the pocket sitter broke before the half. He easily converted off that pocket trip though, and he finally gets away from inside posts tonight. I think he will blast off the gate and race in the pocket of the likely favorite that leaves from post seven. I'll give him the nod to take his fourth straight win in this spot.

#7 STASH IT AWAY was favored by the public and some handicappers alike last week exiting some tough Pop Up races and dropping into a claimer. He had a claim in on him and he was predictably sent to the front. Once he hit the half in 56 2/5, he was never getting caught. He took a new lifetime mark, now he goes for the Barrington barn off the claim with regular stable driver Trevor Henry in the bike. There is little doubt that he is heading to the front, and he will be the one to catch and beat.

#2 ON TIME DELIVERY was a game winner racing in the slop two starts back, then he stepped up from a conditioned claimer to a much tougher claiming handicap facing Stash It Away. He also drew an outside post and he dropped back early the closed for the fifth-place cheque. Drawing inside tonight, I think he can get a better start, and that gives him a chance to land in the Tri this time.

#4 LETS GET ROCKED jumped it off racing in the pocket two starts back which was a big help to Kyles Art who then converted off a golden trip. Last week, he drew a wide post, got around the track and stayed flat, and closed mildly at the back of the pack. He is capable of better, and he is another one that I think will get better position leaving the gate tonight. He merits a look for the bottom of Tri and Super bets.

Race 11 Selections

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#9 MISTER MAGIC was a strong winner here at this level two starts back when he sat the pocket early, popped it around the last turn then drove away from the field. There is a clear delineation in his past performances that shows that he fits best at this level, and he drops off a decent effort where he finished third racing one level higher against the top pick in race seven tonight. I'm certain that he won't go off favored in this race and that makes me like him even more. He gets top billing in the anchor leg of the late Pick 4.

#1 HEAD OF THE CLASS produced some big speed in his May 16th qualifier, and he has raced twice since, his most recent start better than the one before. He sat the pocket last week then got room to follow the 4 to 5 favorite coming around the last turn. He couldn't get to that claimed rival, but he closed gamely for second. He gets the leading driver back in the bike tonight, and he will likely get pounded at the windows. I see this race coming down to him and Mister Magic.

#6 BUCK DANCER, stablemate to the choice, is always around the money it seems. He has finished in the top three in 12 of his 18 starts this year. He comes off a solid front end effort where he was only three quarters of a length behind Head Of The Class at the wire. He should get another trip racing on or near the lead starting from the best post tonight and hit the board once again.

#8 LIKE CHAOS drops and his owner/trainer handles the lines tonight. His strategy will likely be to head to the front and try to lead all the way. I think he gets middle moved on and shuffled but sticks around for a share.

#7 ZIP ME UP is a consistent sort that rarely finishes lower than fourth. He exits the same race as Head Of The Class and Buck Dancer, and he sat fourth the whole way and that was where he finished. A small slice seems to be his ceiling, but he could be a good one to use on the bottom in this spot.