

Race 1 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

2 KICKIN COWGIRL is one of three that look appealing in this race for non-winners of \$18K lifetime (no allowances). Like Lovely Donna and Smile Sally, she recently won her way out of the NW1 class. It certainly looks like one of these three will win this one and I'm willing to bet that it's Kickin Cowgirl as she hauled down a favourite when she won on 04/19 and last week she was simply too far back in a mile that went a bit faster than Lovely Donna's, etc.

3 LOVELY DONNA wasn't as fast as Kickin Cowgirl on 04/25 but at least she won (at NW1) whereas Kickin Cowgirl didn't even get a cheque. Donna looked good through the lane as she was straight and strong in holding off the pocket-riding Mrs Major Hill. Although not our first choice, she is clearly trifecta material.

8 SMILE SALLY was under some urging in both her qualifier (rare) and when she won by 2-1/2 lengths in the NW1 class on 04/22 so it would appear that she was fully extended. Will she have enough to win first time at this level? I'm leaning to the 'no' side but will use her in the trifecta as well.

1 FAMILY FIRST doesn't show anything in two recent qualifiers to justify a top-three pick but being a Fan Hanover eligible who did win 2 of 5 as a two-year-old, she is definitely one to start tracking.

7 SOUTHWIND RAPUNZEL has not been paid up to any major stakes and yet Waples took her over recent winner Smile Sally. This might have more to do with retaining the drive on stablemate Mohawk Seelster than Southwind Rapunzel's chances in this particular race.

ON THIS DATE...

1497 – John Cabot's expedition departed Bristol, England searching for new lands across the Atlantic

1670 – King Charles II of England signed a charter incorporating the Hudson's Bay Company

Race 2 Selections

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6 OBERTO got a lot more attention than I was expecting when he closed at 7-2 in his 04/22 season opener and while he didn't win, he did finish a solid second to the even-money favourite. That was a pretty good effort for a colt who made breaks in all four of his 2018 qualifiers. It's too early to call that a 'key' race but 5th place finisher Northern Cavalier did come back to win on Monday night so we'll give Oberto a slight edge.

3 ANGRY EYES did pretty much what we were expecting last week when she got off to a slow start but then rallied nicely to finish within a length of a \$3.10 winner. She also made up five lengths in the back half of her 04/18 race with the Magical Journey (see Race 3). Although picked for second, she could beat Oberto fair and square and she's definitely the most likely beneficiary should Oberto get up to any of his old tricks.

1 ROSE RUN UNCLEBUCK isn't the strongest play in here but I do think he's trifecta material based on the fact that he has never made a break and he did manage to hit the board in 4 of 7 last year (5 of 7 before a placing).

5 POWER LOOK might spice up this trifecta with his best effort. He's Goodtimes eligible and coming off a pari-mutuel debut in which he got away nicely but then put in some steps as they raced up the backstretch. Still, that was his first start and Matt Dupuis may have made some adjustments in the meantime.

8 JMR PINARELLO wound up three lengths behind Rose Run Unclebuck in their 04/25 qualifier and now he has been saddled with Post 8 which likely means that he'll be raced from the backfield. At least he demonstrated the ability to pass horses when he was racing at this level pre-layoff.

ONE TO WATCH: 5 POWER LOOK

Race 3 Selections

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3 MAGICAL JOURNEY didn't have much trouble winning the NW1 class on 04/18 – and at a generous price – so we'll stick with him one more time. This first look at NW2 will be tougher but he's not in so deep that a second win is out of the question, especially if he can build on that 1:58.4 mile over a track that was rated "good-1."

1 KNOPFLER has done pretty well for himself in two starts at this level and with a bit of racing luck he might be able to win this sixth start of the year and third start at NW2. There are few in here with the ability of Magical Winner K or even Travel Winner and those are the only two that have bested Knopfler since late March. He could easily be listed on top.

9 GRACEFUL will have to be at her very best to win her 2019 debut from Post 9 but I wouldn't be the least bit surprised if she managed to crack the top three or four. She's a Muscle Hill filly from a Kadabra mare with the great Peaceful Way showing up in her maternal family.

6 ANGIES LUCKEYLADY was well back of Graceful in their 04/25 qualifier so we'll rank her a notch lower now that both show up in this NW2 race where they'll face some colts (geldings) who look to be a bit more advanced right now. However, she's definitely worth tracking as we approach OSS season.

4 PETRO HALL was reasonably competitive with OSS Gold fillies last year so she too would be a good one to start tracking. It's worth noting that this is her first start with Lasix.

ON THIS DATE...

1961 – Gregg McNair, born Walkerton, ON

1964 – Northern Dancer and jockey Bill Hartack won the 90th Kentucky Derby in 2:00

Race 4 Selections

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1 MY BABY GIRL is the one we finally decided on after much debate. There are no standouts in this field of 10 so we opted for one who did make an impression as recently as 04/22. In that season-opener she was in tight quarters throughout the third quarter and as they approached three-quarters it appeared that she simply ran up on the horse she was following. It was not charted as an 'ix' but I'm going to treat it as such. She has since re-qualified in 1:56 and turned back a third quarter challenger in the process.

3 CHOCOLATEMILKTOAST showed some promise in her first start of the year but then made a break after a long trip on a wet track one week later. I can forgive her for the break and I was impressed with the solid second place finish to Red River Jane (who has since won again) but I am troubled by the fact that she has not appeared since 03/15. On the other hand, a "stale date" may drive up her price to the point that she's a good value play. It's your call.

5 SOUTHWIND PRIMA might be the sleeper as she did show some promise last year when she won a qualifier in 1:57 with her own last quarter in 27.1. Her lone 2019 qualifier doesn't leap off the page, but the fact that she has been kept eligible to the Fan Hanover says something. She's worth a look!

8 WINDSUN JAGRA has been close in each of four tries this year and she's bound to win her way out of the NW1 class before too long. Just when is anyone's guess.

MIKE'S SPOT PLAY: 1 MY BABY GIRL

ON THIS DATE...

1887 – Hannibal Goodwin was granted a patent for the celluloid photographic film that was later used in Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope

Race 5 Selections

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1 SAUBLE DELIGHTFUL didn't live up to her 4-5 billing when she faced similar on 04/25 so there's a good chance that some bettors will abandon her and that might open a window of opportunity. She may or may not have been at her best that day, but what is clear is that she dug herself a deep hole when she got away 12-1/2 lengths off the leader. Her fate was likely sealed before the half which came up at :59. You know you were in a tough spot when you're a maiden and you pace home in 26.4 but don't get a cheque.

5 JULIASPRECIOUSGIRL has done everything that has been asked of her in two qualifiers and that seems to have impressed driver Sylvain Filion as he passed over the Murray Brethour-trained Sure Fire Katie and Anthony Beaton's recent runner-up Mrs Major Hill in order to retain this drive.

3 SUNSHINEATTHEBEACH remains a maiden after 11 starts over two years so it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that she's snake-bitten. That might be a bit harsh but it's likely that things are going to get tougher as the season progresses – not easier.

7 LANESIDE SPORTSGRL was in the same 04/25 race as Sauble Delightful and she did manage to get a cheque; in fact she got by three in the back half to be a part of the trifecta. She hadn't done as much as Sauble Delightful in some earlier races so and here SD moves in 7 spots while LS moves out 6 spots.

ON THIS DATE...

1885 – "Good Housekeeping" magazine was first published

1903 – Judge Himes and jockey Hal Booker won the 29th Kentucky Derby in 2:09

1904 – Elwood and jockey Shorty Prior won the 30th Kentucky Derby in 2:08.5

1906 – Sir Huron and jockey Roscoe Troxler won the 32nd Kentucky Derby in 2:08.8

1981 – Pleasant Colony and jockey Jorge Velásquez won the 107th Kentucky Derby in 2:02

Race 6 Selections

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5 SCARLETT RAIDER should get some credit for his 04/18 qualifier as he held off the Bob McIntosh-trained Only Take Cash to win in 1:56.4. The McIntosh filly won \$275K last year, largely in the Ohio Sires Stakes, and since that 04/18 qualifier she has won a \$50K race at Miami Valley in 1:54.3. This guy is OSS, Dream Of Glory, Simcoe and Goodtimes eligible so we'll list him on top and hope for the best.

8 CONFESSION SESSION isn't one that I'd recommend for everyone but if you put any faith in the way a horse finished off it's last race and the fact that the driver has turned down others for a second shot then you'll want to at least consider her. She was not well spotted in that 04/22 race and yet she trotted home in 26.4 which was the co-fastest last quarter on the card. And let's not forget that she's a trotter, and a maiden trotter at that! Waples must have been impressed as he took her in this race when he could have driven an attractive candidate in Fitzgibbons or the Luc Blais-trained Hey Jock who was recently 1-9 at Flamboro.

2 FITZGIBBONS looks better than Confession Session at first glance as he recently won a qualifier in which he was challenged at the half. The catch is that Waples said "thanks but no-thanks," and opted for Confession Session instead. Is that out of loyalty to Bax? Has he come to the conclusion that Fitzgibbons might be just a very nice Grassroots colt whereas Confession Session, the filly, has potential to win big bucks in races like the Casual Breeze and Elegantimage? Your guess is as good as mine.

6 ACE BI is worth a look as he has been winter trained in Florida and was a 1:57.3 winner over a track that was listed as sloppy-2 before shipping north. While a Donato Hanover colt from an unraced Pine Chip dam has loads of potential, he has not been heavily staked and his Pompano qualifier was back on 03/26.

7 ARAZI might fly under the radar as he has been close but unable to win since January when he beat lesser at London. The reason for our interest tonight is the fact that he was claimed from the most recent race and will now race out of the Moreau camp. This shouldn't be construed as a slight on the former trainer but simply an acknowledgement that Moreau had the horse for four starts back in 2017 when he paced miles in 1:51.3, 1:51.3 and 1:51.4 here at Mohawk and 1:56 at Georgian. He didn't make a big impact on 20K claimers but at least he faced 20K claimers. This time around he's facing 8s and there isn't a standout in the field.

6 CASIMIR OVERDRIVE should get the bulk of the support based on his 13-6-3-2 record and the fact that he's starting from an ideal post position. Last time out he got away at the back and simply had too far to come in the race that Cams Tux controlled from the outset.

5 CAMS TUX was undeniably effective last time out, however, he has never been the most consistent and he has not won back-to-back since 2013. If he does happen to win this one we'll acknowledge that he has turned things around. Until then, top three is the best we can do and even that's a leap of faith.

MIKE'S SPOT PLAY: 7 ARAZI

ON THIS DATE...

1967 – The Toronto Maple Leafs beat the Montreal Canadiens, 3-1 in Game 6 to win the Stanley Cup. The game winning goal was scored by Jim Pappin who would later own Standardbreds with Rheel Bourgeois and others and whose father had horses with Keith Waples. The final face-off of the game featured 41-year old Allan Stanley, 37-year old Tim Horton, 39-year old Red Kelly, Bob Pulford, George Armstrong, and 42-year old goalie Johnny Bower. It was the Leaf's last Stanley Cup victory.

Race 8 Selections

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3 SUNNY DEE is the obvious choice as she rang up four straight wins (five if you count a qualifier) before she was given some time off in February. The holiday was well deserved and an easy management decision as she would likely have peaked before the big money stakes rolled around had she kept racing. And if not for broken equipment in her 04/18 qualifier she would likely still be undefeated lifetime in races and qualifiers. Of course that's not all that surprising when you know the family which includes her siblings L A Delight (\$1.7 million) and Somewhere In L A (\$1.7 million) and her mom's brother, the North America Cup and Breeders Crown winner Thinking Out Loud (\$1.9 million).

4 BE BEST has changed hands since last year when she was a 1:54 winner and stakes placed for trainer Rick Zeron. This looks like an excellent acquisition, especially after that 1:52.4 qualifier, but if she couldn't take down Sunny Dee in the qualifier I do question whether she'll be able to do it with some money on the line. There's no shame in being listed a notch below Sunny Dee.

6 WESTBEACH has done pretty well for herself in six starts but here she climbs from NW1 to NW2 for her first start of the year and she's reunited with Sunny Dee who was clearly the best in their recent quality.

7 RED RIVER JANE was under some urging to hold off Goodnight Irene on 04/18 but at least she did get the job done. I'd consider her if she was in your 'average' edition of the NW2 class but with stakes-eligible fillies coming out of the woodwork things are only going to get tougher.

ON THIS DATE...

1908 – "Take Me Out To The Ball Game" was registered for copyright

1918 – General Motors acquired the Chevrolet Motor Company of Delaware

1933 – In Germany, Adolf Hitler banned trade unions

Race 9 Selections

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5 JOHN MAC is one that we backed last week when we noted that he was both the only winner in and the only North America Cup eligible colt in the field. Not much has changed in that regard as he's still facing maiden and here there's only one other with A-list stakes engagements. In the 04/25 season opener he made a bobble after the start and was parked past the first pole before clearing and yet he was back out on the last turn for a second move that fizzled. I can see him building on that race and perhaps winning with a more forgiving trip. It means less each time he starts but we'll still add that he has two older brothers who have won over a combined 81 races: Dapper Dude (\$1.3 million) and Dress The Part (\$410K).

4 SILAS SEELSTER has not been paid up to North America Cup, although he is still eligible to the Somebeachsomewhere which goes a week before the Cup elims and is generally raced in three or four divisions. At this point he looks like he might be a better three-year-old than he was two-year-old so we'll consider him right off the bat. His connections obvious had high hopes at one point as he was a \$150K yearling.

2 GAMBLINGTERROR isn't one that we can back with confidence now that he's 0-for-14 over two seasons and starting to face some stakes-eligibles. On the other hand, he does look like the type that could tag along for a good share if his last race is any indication. He gained a position at each call, fired home in 26.4, and paced in 1:55 behind Balder Son and Joe McDude, only one of which is in this race (and stuck in Post 10).

10 JOE MCDUDE did some of the work in the 04/25 race that Balder Son ended up winning in a romp. I'd be all over Joe if he was facing "overnight" horses and leaving from inside or mid-gate but winning from Post 10 in the company of John Mac might be too much to ask.

5 B STONEY caught our eye when he closed from 16 back at the half to finish within two of the Bob McIntosh-trained Do Ya Think in his 04/25 season opener so we'll gladly give him top billing in this encore. We had him pegged as a 'One To Watch' in that race even though we listed him a notch below Do Ya Think and Size Me Up. The fact that he was widest and apparently liveliest of all when home in 26.2 was encouraging even if it was tailwind assisted.

2 BETTER MOONON OVER has had an extra week to recover after finishing fifth and just two lengths off the lead in his 04/18 season opener. I like the fact that he his time are coming down by the week and also that Christoforou is on board as he knows the colt well from earlier qualifiers and drives last year. This might be an angle to watch now that many horses are getting new drivers with guys like Trevor Henry, Bob McClure, Roger Mayotte, Anthony MacDonald and Phil Hudon are on the DL.

9 CENTURY FURY was no match for the undefeated and North American Cup eligible Mohawk Seelster or even the solid runner-up Silver Beast when he raced here on 04/25, but just finishing within five of those two was encouraging.

3 MAINTENANCE MAN hasn't done anything in particular to secure this top-four rating but there's always a chance that he'll go forward now that he has joined the Auciello barn and is paired with Drury.

MIKE'S SPOT PLAY: 5 B STONEY

ON THIS DATE...

1988 – Kingwood Tog, Jack Des Rivieres, and HF Elaine finished in a triple dead-heat to win at Hippodrome Trois Rivieres

6 BATTLE STRONG looks like the type that might be able to win his first start at three. At least that's the opinion we formed when he finished a lapped-on second to the Bob McIntosh pupil Do Ya Think in the 04/18 qualifier and it was further strengthened on 04/25 when Do Ya Think dropped 4 seconds to win the NW2 class in his first pari-mutuel start of the season. Battle Strong has had an extra week of fine-tuning and now faces a decent but still beatable bunch.

9 BALDER SON hinted that a win might be in the cards when he made a great recovery from an early interference break on 04/18 and that win came just a week later when he proved much the best in the NW1 class. It might be too much to ask for back-to-back wins now that he has climbed to NW2 and Post 9.

2 CARSONS SHADOW is another option as he's 2-for-2 this year and coming off a win at this same level. I like the fact that he turned back Big Rocky and then held off McPat but will note that this is likely a deeper field.

10 SIZE ME UP turned a few heads when he went toe to toe with a pair of North American Cup eligible colts in the closing strides of his 04/18 race. He didn't win, mind you, but then few were expecting that of a 42-1 shot. Last week he was again "right there" with a colt that clearly has some potential.

ON THIS DATE...

1992 – Lil E Tee and jockey Pat day won the 118th Kentucky Derby in 2:03

1997 – The Daily Racing Program, a past performance program produced by Sports Eye and Equibase Company, which was designed specifically for the Nevada market, was launched in 39 racebooks.

2000 – Bill Clinton announced that accurate GPS access would no longer be restricted to the US military

2003 – The late Guy Larush was inducted into the Kingston Sports Hall of Fame