

4 REMEMBERING SHORTY is one that we have picked to win each of his two starts to date and so far he has been mildly disappointing, finishing second and fourth. Perhaps we should say “mildly disappointing to us and those who made him the favourite” as his connections are probably rightfully pleased that he has got by eight horses in his debut and then forced the pace in a 1:53.4 the second time out. I can see him building on that and getting his first stakes victory.

1 USURPER has yet to win a Grassroots race but with a very close third on 07.05 and a very respectable second on 07/16 he has come closer than any of these so it's not too hard to imagine him winning this one too. His 08/06 win was encouraging even if it was more than a second slower than the time he turned in when held to fourth on 07/26.

5 PLAY THE PONIES deserves a closer look now that he has hit the board for the first time in four starts. He made two distinct moves in that 08/05 race and wound up third behind a 1-5 shot in Mayhem Hanover and longshot Aces Rock.

7 ACES ROCK caught our eye when he used he blasted out of the nine hole in his latest. It isn't readily apparent by reading the chart line as he was back to third by the time they hit the quarter, but he was on top at the sixteenth and in front by about three at the eighth and that was from the far outside post.

ON THIS DATE...

1057 – Macbeth, the King of Scotland, was killed by the son of King Duncan.

1848 – The dental chair was patented by Waldo Hanchett

1877 – Thomas Edison wrote to the president of the Telegraph Company in Pittsburgh, suggesting that the word, "hello" would be a more appropriate greeting than "ahoy" when answering the telephone

Race 2 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

3 WHOSE BLUES has a pretty good shot to sweep the Pure Ivory Series now that she has won the opening leg and will face just eight in this second leg, minus the two who got closest to her last time. However, she did drift out towards the end of that 08/01 race and that's something the other drivers will be aware of as they look to get the best trips for their fillies. In closing we'll add that trainer Luc Blais swept the Pure Ivory in 2016 with \$240K yearling purchase Dream Together who is now sitting on earnings of \$779K. A similar career path might be in store for this \$300K yearling purchase.

7 ALYVIA DEO is one that did most of the work but didn't get a cent for her efforts on 08/01. According to Trakus, she went 42' further than the winner with that first-over move that saw her go from sixth to second in the third quarter. She could be a real threat with the right trip.

9 PANEM is the new kid in town, having skipped the first leg of the Pure Ivory in favour of the Jim Doherty Memorial at The Meadowlands. She didn't get a cheque after making a break near the start of that \$310,700 race but it was definitely worth a shot as she did finish a lapped-on second in the elim.

5 SPIRIT OF DEO latched onto a second-over tow in the first leg of the Pure Ivory and the best she could do with it was a fourth place finish, some 6-1/4 lengths behind Whose Blues. I don't see her winning this one but with Intense Justice and Highland Foxytrottr out of the way she *might* improve on that fourth place finish.

ON THIS DATE...

1907 – First program of harness racing at Toronto's Dufferin Park

1918 – Diplomatic ties between the U.S. and Russia were severed

1925 – Oscar Peterson, jazz pianist, composer, bandleader, born in Montreal, Quebec

1939 – Dr. Pete Johnston, owner, trainer, veterinarian, born at Peterborough, Ontario

Race 3 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

2 DELIGHTFUL TERROR looks like the one to beat in this second Grassroots division for the two-year-old pacing colts. On 07/29 he was a wide open winner over Remembering Shorty (our top pick in Race 1) and last time out he increased that win margin and dropped his record to 1:53 with a another off-the-pace score. A winner's circle appearance would probably cap a pretty good birthday for owner Doug Millard. All the best, Doug!

7 DONTBLVMEJUSTWATCH hasn't raced in a month so it's tough to say if he'll be at his absolute best – and that will likely be required if he's to deny Delightful Terror a third straight win. These two have never met but they did both race on 07/16 when Dontblvmejustwatch took a 1:53.1 record as the odds-on favourite and Delightful Terror acted up at 56-1 in a separate division.

6 TWIN B WATCH ME couldn't get by Usurper when they battled it out on 08/06 but at least he kept that chalky winner honest. I could see him playing a similar role in this race where he's a contender but not considered the one to beat.

1 NIGHT WATCHMAN might be able to improve on his recent fourth place finish now that he starts from Post 1 and is likely to find a less complicated trip. He was parked past the half in his latest and then in tight quarters for a portion of the third quarter before brushing home in 27.3 to finish just 2-1/4 lengths off a 1-5 winner.

ON THIS DATE...

1945 – VJ Day was proclaimed by the Allies, a day after Japan agreed to surrender unconditionally, marking the end of the Second World War; over one million Canadians fought in the conflict and 42,000 were killed

1945 – The Count B won the second of his four Canadian Pacing Derbies with a 2:08 1/4 mile over Fountain Park in New Hamburg, Ontario

Race 4 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

6 DAY DELIGHT should find present company a little more to his liking now that he has made two appearances in the Dream Maker Series and one start with Gold company since last appearing in a Grassroots race back on 07/05. He didn't make much of an impact with the 1:51 types that he faced in the Dream Maker but when he last faced overnight horses on 07/23 he absolutely romped in 1:53.3. We're hoping that he can build on that now that he has drawn an ideal post.

2 POSEIDON SEELSTER is one of two Grassroots winners in this field and his win was almost 2 seconds faster than that of Sirjamesthegreat so we'll give him the edge as far as these two are concerned. That first date with OSS colts was on 07/16 and he has since been race-timed in 1:53.3 on two occasions despite overland trips each time.

8 MENLO PARK got paid for his second place finish on 08/06 but those who wagered on him got their money back after the judges determined that he had a broken Buxton (breastcollar) before the start. And while he was no match for Lous Delight in the stretch drive of that race, who knows what he would have done without the wardrobe malfunction?

3 SIRJAMESTHEGREAT was able to win a Grassroots race back on 07/05 when a 1:56 mile held up. Those days are now long gone. This race is likely to go closer to 1:52 than to 1:56 and there's little to suggest that he's ready to win in 1:52 and change. Just cracking the top-three would be a good goal.

ON THIS DATE...

1946 – Harrington Raceway in Delaware opened in Harrington, Delaware

1948 – CBS-TV inaugurated the first nightly news broadcast with anchorman Douglas Edwards

1951 – Malcolm Hanover (Wm. Simmons) won the \$4,000 Canadian Pacing Derby at Fountain Park in New Hamburg

Race 5 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

3 CAPTIVATE HANOVER looks as good as any in this third Grassroots division. Although he missed a cheque altogether in his latest, it wasn't a bad effort when you consider that he suffered a bit of a shuffle in the third quarter and then actually gained some ground in an all-out sprint through the final quarter. He only passed one horse despite pacing home in 26.3. I like the way his times have been coming down – with the exception of last time when he had a legitimate excuse.

6 BEE TWO BEE is probably ready for his Mohawk unveiling after winning three of four at the Bs. The latest was a 1:56.4 romp around Grand River. It's conceivable that he could have gone a second or more faster had he been pressed and when you factor in another 2 second allowance for the half-mile track, it's not too hard to imagine him going the kind of speed that will make him competitive in this race.

1 MY LAND has been race-timed in 1:53 and a winner in 1:54.2 so we'll include him in this top-three and even concede that a win is possible given the right trip. He took the overland approach when third behind Examiner Hanover and Captivate Hanover on 07/26 and still finished up in 1:53. I'm prepared to overlook the 08/08 race at Rideau as there may have been more to it than is readily apparent from reading a chart line.

4 WILSONS VINNER had some issues in his latest (poor start, extra wide in the stretch) but just two back he made two moves and finished second in a local overnight. He's a work in progress so even a top-four rating might be giving him too much credit. Time will tell.

ON THIS DATE...

1956 – Lyle MacArthur, trainer-driver, born

1959 – Selka Song (Harold McKinley) own the \$6150 Maple Leaf Trot at Woodbine (later Greenwood) in 2:04.1

Race 6 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

8 NYLANDER didn't live up to his 1-2 status when he finished second in the opening round of the Define The World Series on 08/01 and that was after no less than four of the other eight made breaks! That doesn't sound particularly encouraging but at least here he dodges the only one that did beat him in that first leg. It's not hard to imagine him bouncing back and winning this second leg as he is a Muscle Hill colt from Superstar Hanover 2, 1:56.1f, 3, 1:53.2f (\$517,490), which explains why he brought \$105,000 at Lexington.

7 THREEFIFTYTWO was sent off as the 3-2 second favourite when he took on Gold colts on 08/08 but unfortunately he was off-stride before the start. We will give him credit for mounting a credible challenge in the third quarter where he closed 13 lengths before finally raising the white flag. This colt was developed by Massachusetts-based trainer George Ducharme and sold to Determination (Stable) on 07/10 so this will be just his third start under the Luc Blais banner.

2 CROSSFIT MOUSE is coming out of the same OSS Gold race as Threefiftytwo only he had already dropped from second to fifth before he made the break that sealed his fate. He has one other thing in common with our top two pick in that they are both members of the powerful Luc Blais barn. It may not mean anything but Crossfit Mouse is eligible to the Wellwood whereas Threefiftytwo – who until recently was US-owned – is not.

6 RUN LIKE HILL didn't get much attention in his 08/06 race and he was off-stride shortly after the quarter so I see no reason to list him higher than fourth. On a more positive note, he was a \$90K Lexington yearling and he's the second foal of Smarty Pans 2, 2:00.2s, 3, 1:54.4s, 1:54.2s -'14 (\$476,301). His one and only sibling Smart As Hill 2, 1:53.4f-'18 (\$145,650) finished second in last year's Wellwood for these same connections.

Race 7 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

3 ROCKIN THE ACES is the one to beat now that he has returned from some New Jersey stakes obligations and will take on mostly maidens in this race where the only condition is that they must be two-year-old pacers. He is by far the most successful with a record of 3-2-1-0 and \$75,000 in earnings and he would have been another \$50K richer had his nose been a bit longer on 07/12. And therein lies the only negative that we can see. It's not that he lost a photo but that he last raced more than a month ago. We're going to treat that as "noise" and just focus on the fact that he was extremely good at the Big M and he has all the markings of an A-lister as he's out of the \$744K winner Mattaroni who won her first eight races, including the \$517K Sweetheart.

6 FORCE N FURY is one off two in this race who have done their time in the Dream Maker where they were up against colts willing and able to go miles in 1:51 and change. He managed to get a cheque in the second round of the Dream Maker despite being parked every step.

7 ESAI HANOVER is the stablemate of Force N Fury and he too was in very deep in recent races with Tall Dark Stranger, Captain Midnight, Captain Kirk, etc. If he manages to win this one, some bettors will say "I told you so" as he is the younger brother of Brad Grant's 38-time winner Easy Lover Hanover.

ON THIS DATE...

1960 – Chicago Bears beat NY Giants 16-7 in a game played at Exhibition Stadium in Toronto, Ontario

1960 – Calgary Stampeders moved into McMahon Stadium which had been built in only 103 days

1962 – Lynden Chief (Almer Holmes) won the \$2626 Champlain Stakes (2yo Colt Pace) in 2:09

1969 – Opening day of the Woodstock Music and Art Fair; the three-day concert featured 24 bands and drew over 400,000 people to Max Yasgur's dairy farm in Bethel, New York

1970 – Ken Middleton Jr., born

Race 8 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

2 MARTINIQUE BEACH isn't the only one who qualified for the final of the Whenuwishuponastar but then opted not to race in the \$50K event on Monday night. Just seven were entered for that race after the Tony Alagna-trained Reflect With Me and the David Menary-trained Somebeachsometime showed that they are more than capable of going miles in 1:52. Here Martinique Beach will face a group that is a lot more comfortable in the 1:54-1:55 range which should make things considerably easier for her. She's not a shoe-in but I do think she's the one to beat.

6 HIT BY A BUS will argue with the assessment of Martinique Beach being the "one to beat" since she has actually won a race and showed the way for a good portion of her most recent. It's the fact that she blew a two length lead in that 08/06 race that concerns us. It's not a deal breaker but it does raise questions.

4 WATCH MY SPEED has shown enough in two starts that we'll gladly list her top-three and even concede that a win is possible if she continues on the path that has seen her go from 2:00.1 to 1:54.4 in quick order. She got by five in the last quarter of her most recent and lost only to the Nancy Johansson-trained winner who was a \$100K yearling.

ON THIS DATE...

1971 – U.S. President Nixon announced a 90-day freeze on wages, rents and prices

1972 – Harold Ballard, President of Maple Leaf Gardens and owner of the Toronto Maple Leafs, was convicted of 47 charges of fraud, tax evasion and theft of \$205,000 from the Gardens to pay for personal expenses; he was sentenced to three years in Kingston Penitentiary and had to reimburse the business

1972 – Benjamin Géza Affleck-Boldt (AKA Ben Affleck), actor, born in Berkeley, California

1974 – Official opening of the Metro Toronto Zoo

1987 – Follow My Star (Bruce Nickells) won the \$115,500 Roses Are Red at Greenwood in 1:57.1

Race 9 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

5 BETTER B SWIFT has been to Grand River for the elimination and final of the Battle of Waterloo since we last saw him win an overnight race in 1:53.4. We're not too concerned that he didn't hit the ticket in the Battle as he was pretty good in his elimination and then severely roughed up after a Post 7 start in the final.

4 QUICK TOUR didn't contest the Battle of Waterloo but that's because he was not paid up to the race. He would likely have been a factor had he been eligible as he did beat Grassroots colts out of the 10 hole as recently as 07/16. He didn't fare as well in his latest but we'll chalk that up to a Post 7 start and no meaningful flow in a race that National Sport won from the pocket.

3 MY BETTORS DEL is reunited with Bob McClure after a pair of handy wins in Quebec. He was so much the best in his latest that he was still able to deliver on the 1-9 promise despite making a break before the quarter. When we last saw him on 07/16 he came off cover to finish a lapped-on second to Quick Tour.

8 LOUS DELIGHT drew off on overnight colts in his latest and the result was a maiden-breaking win in 1:54. He may not have been so lucky had runner-up Menlo Park not suffered some broken equipment.

ON THIS DATE...

1988 – Vicki Keith became the first person to swim across Lake Superior

1992 – Artsplace (John Campbell / Robert McIntosh) set a new all age track record at Yonkers when he won the U.S. Pacing Championship in 1:52.1

1992 – No Sex Please (Ron Waples / Ron Waples Jr.) won the \$100,000 Maple Leaf Trot for the third time in the last four years with a 1:57 mile at Greenwood

1997 – Fools Goal made a break and finished 8th by 30 in his pari-mutuel debut at Ocean Downs in Maryland. He went on to win over \$3 million lifetime.

6 VELOCITY POPROCKS didn't have a very good introduction to Mohawk on 07/23 but since then he has done nothing but win so we'll treat him as the one to beat since he's still racing at NW2. He pulled off a 15-1 upset on 08/01 when Ken Middleton described him as being "18 wide" at the top of the stretch." Ken was exaggerating, of course, but it did make a point. Last week the four-year-old gelding took matters into his own hands with a second quarter move to the top and he never looked back in 1:52.2.

2 CORTEZ THE KILLER is one that we added to the Watch List on 08/01 when he made good late gains and fell a half length shy of Velocity Poprocks. He might have won that one had he not been shuffled to sixth in the third quarter as he did look "game" at the end.

3 CAPTAIN NASH has already won at this NW2 level so he's probably worth a closer look as well. He has been held to just one top-three finish since that win, mind you he has been stuck in some challenging post positions. Will the move to Post 3 be enough to take down Velocity Poprocks? I'm skeptical but will concede that it is possible.

9 WHAT UP MO has previously won a pair of races at this level so with a bit of racing luck he could win another or at least be part of a trifecta. The one knock is that he has Post 9 and is coming off a race in which Post 10 seemed to be his downfall.

ON THIS DATE...

2005 – Style (Tony Kerwood / John Kopas) won the lone division of the Robert Stewart Stakes for two-year-old pacing fillies. It was the fourth consecutive win for daughter of Rustler Hanover.

2009 – Hyperion Hanover (Rick Zeron / Robert Fellows) swept the field to win Mohawk's Preferred Pace, paying \$104.20 to win

2011 – Google announced that it would acquire Motorola Mobility for \$12.5 billion.