

Handicapper's Journal – Doug McPherson

Saturday, May 24th 2025

Race 1

#6 Professorridesagain

#1 Elusive Knight

#2 U S Army Corps

#5 Rapture Bay

#6 PROFESSORRIDESAGAIN closed out 2024 with a gate to wire win in a \$5,000 non-two route. He hooks some back classy foes and will have to step up in his first start off of the bench, but he could be the controlling speed. #1 ELUSIVE KNIGHT was entered in a much tougher starter/optional \$15,000 route yesterday but scratched and re-entered into this significantly easier spot. He had a good run in an open \$10,000 at Gulfstream on February 15; this distance should not be a problem for him at this class level. #2 U S ARMY CORPS is winless since late 2022. He did have three very solid efforts against open company for this tag late last season and should be very competitive in this conditioned group. #5 RAPTURE BAY was a non-threatening fourth in a fairly soft \$15,000 non-three on May 4 and now halves in value. He may appreciate the longer sprint distance offered here.

Race 2

#7 Just Jacobo

#2 Bee Me

#4 Bourbon North

#6 Deputy Daddy

#7 JUST JACOBO hooked a very tough group when debuting in August and never factored. He returns as a gelding and with a drop in for \$40,000; we'll see if he turns things around. #2 BEE ME ran some solid races last season. He has tactical speed and a good post here which could give him a very nice pocket trip; the 69 Beyer he posted in his last start looks a bit inflated but otherwise he is tough to knock. #4 BOURBON NORTH added blinkers while dropping in for this tag on May 3, going to the lead and finishing second-best. It's tough to say how the pace will shape up with first time starters present here, but he could take them a long way in his second start off of the bench. #6 DEPUTY DADDY has twice been second against three year olds this season and will now take on older foes for the first time.

Race 3

#6 Miss Maxine

#3 Contrary Mary

#5 Armored Guard

#2 Seeking Magic

#6 MISS MAXINE is by Maxfield, a first crop sire who has had a debut winner in two foals to start. The dam, Grace and Dignity, was a debut winner and Stakes-placed at two, but has not had a debut winner in two foals to start. She worked evenly with a stablemate from the gate on May 4. #3 CONTRARY MARY is by elite sire Uncle Mo, who hits at 14% with debuting two-year-olds, out of a mare who has not had a debut runner hit the board in

seven foals to start but has had a couple of Stakes-placed runners. She had a quick gate work in company with Souper Diva on May 10. #5 ARMORED GUARD is by 8% juvenile debut sire Central Banker, out of a mare whose only foal to start was a distant second on debut. She was slightly outworked by a pair of stablemates from the gate on May 17. #2 SEEKING MAGIC is the only runner in this field with a start under her belt, recovering from a slow break to be forwardly placed early before fading to be a distant fourth. The blinkers are being removed.

Race 4

#4 Sweet Passions

#1 Sinclarity

#2 Prima

#6 Red Samurai

#4 SWEET PASSIONS did not have a great start but rallied well to be third, a length behind runner-up Prima on May 3. With a clean break she could have a very good stalking trip. #1 SINCLARITY forced the pace, edged clear and was able to hold on by a head to win her first start off of the bench on April 26. There could be other speed from Prima or Red Samurai here; we'll see if she can overcome adversity again. #2 PRIMA got loose on the lead but could not hold off Garnet and Gold, who came back to win an N1X/\$32,000, when kicking off her season on May 3. She rarely misses a check and looks like an obvious contender. #6 RED SAMURAI disappointed in an N2L allowance where she was offered for the \$50,000 tag to close out 2024 and drops in for \$40,000 for her return to the races. She was able to win her first start off of the bench last year.

Race 5

#5 Fighting the Wars - Best Bet

#4 Garden of War

#2 Little Thonio

#3 Naughty Frosty

#5 FIGHTING THE WARS was flat and not persevered with in the stretch when racing on the Gulfstream turf in December. He was reported as a gelding in January and has been working like a rocket; potential to turn things around in his Tapeta debut. #4 GARDEN OF WAR pressed his pacesetting stablemate but was outkicked in the stretch when finishing third as the heavy favourite on May 3. He showed strong late run in his debut in the Royal Palm Juvenile at Gulfstream last year and may be better coming from a little further off of the lead. #2 LITTLE THONIO was second-best behind Regal Guest when debuting at the OS/\$40,000 level last year before finishing second in a route at this level; tough to knock him two starts into his career. #3 NAUGHTY FROSTY raced wide and finished a non-threatening fifth in the same race that Garden of War exits; could improve with a better trip.

Race 6

#4 Hymn to Her

#3 Dolce Fortuna

#6 Speedy Freeze

#7 Regal Moment

#4 HYMN TO HER had a very wide trip over an inside favouring track on May 11 in an effort that was better than it looks on paper. She could make a significant improvement with a more favourable trip. #3 DOLCE FORTUNA sat midpack and raced very gamely to break her maiden on debut on December 14, earning a solid speed figure in the process. She looks live in her return to the races. #6 SPEEDY FREEZE raced very well in two starts for these connections including a third against non-threes. She has the advantage of being a four-year-old against primarily three-year-olds; blinkers are being added. #7 REGAL MOMENT was a credible sixth in the Princess Elizabeth to close out her juvenile season. She won on debut showing that she can fire fresh.

Race 7

#4 Our Lady

#10 Logistics

#2 Lunch With Bernie

#1 Good as Gone

#4 OUR LADY was an extremely impressive, drawing away winner of her debut on May 4. She showed nice early speed and looks like she will be tough to catch again. #10 LOGISTICS gets back to her preferred surface after failing to handle the Oaklawn dirt in two attempts. Her only bad Tapeta start came in a Stakes race at Turfway; she has been quite solid at Woodbine but will have to overcome a tough post. #2 LUNCH WITH BERNIE set the pace and was outkicked when dead-heating for third in an N1X/\$32,000 won by the super consistent My Sunny Valentine to close out 2024. She should appreciate the move back to N2L company. #1 GOOD AS GONE was winless last year but had a solid campaign primarily in route races. Her maiden win came in a sprint in California and she may be happy with the turnback.

Race 8

#6 Never Silent

#2 I'm Into Mischief

#5 Talk to Ya Later

#3 Determined First

#6 NEVER SILENT won back-to-back conditioned races before weakening in deep stretch when trying a route in the Ashbridges Bay, then coming up empty at this level on December 7. She is clearly better than that final run of the season; we'll see if she can fire off of the layoff. #2 I'M INTO MISCHIEF could not find suitable races at Gulfstream this winter but got back to form when racing here three weeks ago, setting the pace and being caught late at this level. If she can get loose from the inside she could hold them off this time. #5 TALK TO YA LATER has more than enough talent to win this race but often finds ways to lose races she looks poised to win. Multiple Stakes-placed filly has some of the best speed figures in this field. #3 DETERMINED FIRST was a distant second behind the monstrous Earhart when last competing on December 7 and has been prepping consistently at Fair Hill coming into her return.

Race 9

#10 Firecracker Fiona

#9 Bright Sunshine

#2 Magical Trick

#11 Pretty Good Joke

#3 Shameless Affair

#10 FIRECRACKER FIONA stalked the pace and pounced to a good-looking maiden score on November 2, then pressed the pace and gave way to be fourth in her first try against winners 22 days later. If she can work out the good stalking trip from this post she could be live in her first start off of the bench. #9 BRIGHT SUNSHINE set the pace and held on to break her maiden against OS/\$40,000 three-year-olds on May 10. She takes a drop for her first try against winners. #2 MAGICAL TRICK had to angle wide to rally and was outkicked by a ground-saving foe on May 3. She should have a hotter pace to run at this time. #11 PRETTY GOOD JOKE repelled a bid late on the turn to earn a gate-to-wire score on December 12. She will have to use a lot of her speed to get clear from the 11 hole. #3 SHAMELESS AFFAIR dueled on the lead before fading to third in the same race that Magical Trick exits. She should not be on the lead with the speed in this group and is probably happier having a target to run at.