

May 4

There was nothing I saw Thursday morning to alter my thoughts in either of the marquee races so without any further ado let's get down to the final thoughts and selections on this years Oaks and Derby.

My Oaks selection is going to be the chalk Paradise Woods. Two months ago after the Las Virgines Stakes at Santa Anita it seemed this race was a near certainty for the freak filly Unique Bella but her troublesome shins resurfaced and the race, for a while, appeared wide open. Then they conducted the Santa Anita Oaks and we witnessed a coming out party for Paradise Woods. I was shocked when she didn't win on debut, but many top horses don't. She then won her second start rather dominantly which led to the SA Oaks. Abel Tasman had inherited top Cal three year old filly status after Unique Bella's defection but got dethroned in a huge way here. This race was over half way around the first turn. This amazon dismantled the field and the videos of her works since then, combined with her gallops since her arrival here make her an obvious choice. Her task may have gotten slightly less daunting when she drew a perfect post and two of her main rivals, the afore mentioned Abel Tasman, and Salty drew the 13 and 14 holes respectively.

For those gamblers looking for value in this race, I recommend Vexatious. She has always hinted at being a developing talent and, if Paradise Woods runs the pace stalkers into submission, could run late to make the trifecta or superfecta pay enough where you won't be ashamed to cash your ticket.

Now, on to the Derby.

1) Lookin at Lee- long legged late running sort comes from downtown so the rail draw shouldn't affect him as much as it would others. He is always making up ground and while a win would be a surprise, I can see him hitting the board with the right pace scenario and trip.

2) Thunder Snow- moves like a grass horse, and though this race got opened up in a huge way with the injury to Mastery, I can't see him having much impact here.

3) Fast and Accurate- it's hot and dirty time for this hard trying dude.

4) Untrapped- massive eye catching colt has galloped fine here after the standard easy half mile final work for Steven A but remains a question on ability and distance as far as this race is concerned.

5) Always Dreaming- had a good workout last Friday while needing restraint to not do too much in the early stages of it. Then things started to get complicated. Saturday morning he returned to the track and was more eager than his world class trainer would've liked. Sunday morning he was a real handful, throwing his head multiple times and being totally uncontrollable. The exercise rider change and the addition of draw reigns commenced Monday and he has been much better for the most part since then. However, he has parts of his gallops even then that cause concern as to how much controllability he will have Derby day when the draw reigns come off.

6) State of Honor- may very well be a pace factor as he also seems to be a higher than average energy sort, but I think him trying a mile and a quarter will be like if I tried running in the Derby 5k run earlier this week.

7) Girvin- has had much publicized feet issues this week and did most of his preparations at Keeneland. His local gallops suggest he's still battling those sore tootsies and I will not be using him Saturday.

8) Hence- flashy chestnut colt has trained forwardly all week. He gets a little warm on his neck, but does not seem nervous at all. Horses are like people. Some sweat more than others. I think he can hit the board but would need a total pace meltdown to win this

in my opinion.

9) Iraq- conventional gamblers will say, "I didn't go to the wedding, I'm not going to the funeral!" on this colt and perhaps justifiably so, but I can't knock the video of his works across town or his local gallops. He is a much more developed colt than I saw train all winter in L.A.

10) Gunnevera- slender chestnut has accomplished a lot and had some minor excuses in the Fla Derby but has danced quite a few dances and may be on the other side of midnight.

11) Battle of Midway- arguably ran the best race in the suspect Santa Anita Derby when inexplicably put on the lead with two others in 46:2³/₄. Still, he was in front with 50 yards to go. The video of his work with Prat up was decent and he'd be my choice of the California brigade.

12) Sonneteer- had a terrific work over a damp Churchill surface for this race to the point that I can see him hitting the board. A win by a maiden in the Derby would stun me and the rest of the racing world. His owner has three in the Derby and that may be enough to get him to show up at The Downs Saturday.

13) J Boys Echo- reportedly not much of a work horse, he proved best in company during his last drill while looking moderate.

14) Classic Empire- wowed me in the championship deciding Breeders Cup last year, then had some bumps in the road before rebounding in the Arkansas Derby. Seeing that was only three weeks ago, it was expected and delivered that his one and only work for this race was a half in 49:2. Another that has had his attitude issues, he doesn't get too exited while galloping. Then again, who am I to question a horse about attitude.

15) McCracken- athletic medium sized colt has done everything right since his so so return in the Blue Grass. He is 3-3 at the Twin Spires and I believe will run his best race Saturday. Whether that will be enough, time will tell.

16) Tapwrit- was on his way to being on everyone's top 3 list after the Tampa Derby then tossed a Hindenburg of enormous proportions in the Blue Grass. Everything he has done since I've laid eyes on him locally suggest he's going to return to his Tampa form. In a race chock full of possible price plays, he may be the livest longshot there is.

17) Irish War Cry- yet another contender that tossed in a clunker on his way down the Derby trail. He rebounded with an authoritative triumph in the Wood over yet another suspect group. His first day on the track Tuesday he was slightly keyed up but has settled in to gallop beautifully since. If his Fountain of Youth flop didn't exist he would be a clear favorite, but it did take place and thus he will be 2nd or 3rd choice Saturday.

18) Gormley- took advantage of a perfect trip to capture the SA Derby. Obviously this years California division lost a lot of luster when Mastery went down but in an open race, it will be interesting to see how they perform.

19) Practical Joke- to look at him one would think he could get the ten furlongs but doubts persist as to whether he can. He looks terrific and Saturday will be his judgment day as far as distance.

20) Patch- seems to have a lot of personality and any horse that makes it to this stage with only one eye deserves much props. He was up against to begin with then drew the far outside post so I won't be wagering on him...but ya can't help but love the big guy.

- 1) Irish War Cry
- 2) Tapwrit
- 3) McCracken

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