

The Empire Report – Monday, July 22, 2024 – Race Analysis

RACE 1 – (3) FORTIFY is feeling pretty good these, an excellent 2nd behind the classy WHATS STANLEY GOT A two back, and then just missing to a currently very sharp HIMSELF A last week – his trip is a little tough to predict but the good draw should put him in good shape to pounce on a potentially vulnerable frontrunner at some point. (1) POUND FOR POUND hasn't been able to just run and hide from fields lately but he could be looking at an easier time on the lead tonight...very real chance he could just take these wire-to-wire. (2) CADILLAC BAYAMA gets some class relief but more importantly, MAY just sit a pocket trip (if #1 scares off any leavers) – becomes a very real threat if that happens. (4) NANDOLO N has to always be considered a possibility but he's generally overbet, usually has to deal with a tough trip and his barn (winning at a 40% clip to start the year) is just 2 for 52 over the last 2 months – better value elsewhere. (5) MELANION N clearly has ability, but the jury is still out as to how much – tough spot tonight, regardless. (6) KINGSVILLE was able to get aggressive off the class drop last week and delivered the victory – will be much tougher to find a good trip from this spot, however. (8) KOMODO BEACH trailed all the way from a similar spot last week, and is looking at the same scenario here. (7) BINGE ON YANKEE lands in a brutal spot off the barn change – keep an eye for next week, when he'll likely be getting some class relief

RACE 2 – (1) OZONE BLUE CHIP has always been a streaky sort and he's certainly in a serious groove right now – he goes for 5 in a row, and he'll be a very tough short-priced favorite to overhaul. (6) BIG DREAM FELLA came up 2nd best to the top choice last week and was re-claimed by a barn that he won three in a row for back in May – remains the main danger, despite the bad draw. (4) WON LAST FEELING has been racing well for some time and any decent trip gives him a solid chance to land somewhere in the exotics (2) NOWHERE CREEK A was incredibly well meant last start and parlayed a perfect pocket trip to victory – he moves up in class here, but an easy trip would still help make him a threat for a good chunk. (5) LOORIM LAKE A can be his own worst enemy at times but he's in a tough spot here, even with smooth sailing. (3) WAR DAN DELIGHT N could probably use some class relief

RACE 3 – (2) PAT STANLEY N is getting the nod here, albeit a tepid one – he was handled VERY cautiously at the start last week (after a miscue the week before) and that resulted in a totally impossible trip – he gets Kakaley back on board tonight and the last two times they paired up, it resulted in a win and close 2nd – IF things go smoothly, he can be tough tonight. (6) TWIG has been pretty good vs. similar in PA recently, and has a good local history – his barn is off to a slow start at Yonkers this year, but a good price makes this guy worth a look. (1) ARTIST BEST is just 1 for 24 this year but he's been 2nd or 3rd a bunch of times, including his last 3 starts – he has to be considered a legitimate threat from this spot. (4) GENIUS MAN doesn't have the most inspiring form lately but he does grab his share of victories every year – possibility in a race with questionable main players. (3) LAZ has disappointed more often than he's delivered this year, but he could be a late threat IF he can find his better form tonight. (5) KOOTEN AY SANTANNA saved ground for an even 4th in his YR return but his best form has come vs. softer lately – maybe if the price is long enough? (7) HEART ON MY SLEEVE is 19-0-03 this year and draws Post 7

RACE 4 – (7) CHIMICHURRI N must have made a pretty good impression on Bartlett as he stopped in last week BETWEEN driving at Pocono (all day) and heading to The Swamp just to drive THIS guy – he won very easily (\$2.10) and should be able to handle these too, despite the draw. (1) CAPTIVATE HANOVER isn't on top of his game but he drops, draws the pole, and still has a solid chance to complete a pretty short exacta. (4) CASINO ACTI ON N is still a little tough to gauge class-wise but he usually finishes pretty well and that could help him grab a share. (5) HUNTING ZONE can be tough to predict from start to start and the double class jump is a concern as well – still, chance to pick up a piece if the “good” version shows up. (6) ALL ALONE hasn't been clicking lately and gets a tough draw for tonight – leaning towards others. (8) KIMBLE A is probably sharper now than he's been at any time since arriving in the U.S. but he draws Post 8 (after 4 straight rails) and that figures to really hurt his chances. (3) PANETTONE HANOVER is a quirky horse prone to clunkers – he's missed a month (re-qualified ok), and we'll stick with more reliable players. (2) LUCKBEWITHALEX looked well short last week returning from a long layoff

RACE 5 – (1) BOILING OAR was banging heads in the Open every week with ENERGETIC HANOVER not long ago so this is obviously a MUCH easier spot that he's returning to – his form has probably slipped at least a bit, but he just missed to a pair of sharp horses in his last 2 starts at PcD, and has to be seen as the clear favorite to score in his local return. (4) SAMHARA N is probably sharper than he looks on paper and often finishes full of pace – maybe he can add some value to the exotics? (2) THE LONGEST YARD was able to hold 2nd behind CHIMICHUR

RI N last week despite racing for a new barn, off a bad date – an easy trip gives him a chance to grab another good slice tonight. (5) THUNDER HUNTER JOE was good here in his 3YO starts but is just 8-0-1-1 locally in 2024 – he’s capable of better, but will need Stratton to get him in play if he hopes to make any noise here. (6) MIKITEEN is 6-1-2-2 since the barn change including a close 3rd last week – he’s another that will need a quick start if he hopes to be in the hunt. (3) NAUTICAL HANOVER draws well but faces an uncertain trip from this spot – chance for a piece if things go his way. (7) FULTON finally picked up his first win as a 4YO last week (from Post 8) but he was definitely a bit opportunistic – he’ll likely need to be even sharper to be a serious player from this much tougher spot (8) GINGRAS BEACH is the outsider, both literally and figuratively.

RACE 6 – (1) OPTICAL ILLUSION N sat pocketed to REAL WILLEY last week but found room too late to be a more serious late threat – we’ll give him a shot to reverse that decision this week. (3) REAL WILLEY needed a very vigorous stretch drive to prevail last time but was able to extend his winning streak to 2, picking up his 5th victory in 13 starts this year – would certainly be no surprise to see him take another. (5) MAXIMUS RED A took a conservative approach last week and may have had more pace in the lane than he was able to show – he’s a strong 20-5-5-5 this year, and could pull off an upset if things get a little testy up front. (6) THRASHER is also having a strong year (22-6-4-4) and is another that could be a late threat if the front end weakens – has to be worth at least a look at that 20-1 ML price. (2) PURPLE POET had a very nice trip last week but found only even pace in the lane – needs to be a bit sharper to be more of a late threat. (7) SHINE A LIGHT hits board almost every start but has only 2 wins this year and starts tonight from Post 7, for a new barn – leaning more towards others. (4) THE REGULATOR has missed 3 weeks after a sick scratch, and that’s the main reason he’s being listed at the bottom

RACE 7 – (3) DUNKIN led the nation in wins last year (with 21) and already has 8 victories this year, despite facing much tougher competition - he’s shown that he’s VERY tough to beat when he avoids the occasional trouble behind the gate, and remains the one to knock off tonight. (2) HAZEVILLE picked up a win on 6/10 and it seemed to help turn his season around, leading to a string of sharp efforts ever since – maybe he can add some value to the exotics with a good trip? (1) ADAM TWELVE took a couple of months off after showing some hints of wear and tear after a long series of big efforts – he qualified back nicely (behind classy barnmate COACHES CORNER) and it’s hard to say if he’ll be 100% for his first start back. (5) AMMO shipped in sharp from Maryland and made his YR debut a winning one, helped a bit by a tough trip for his main rival – he’ll likely have leavers to his inside tonight, and we’ll see if that hurts his chances. (4) ITS A ME MARIO’s losing streak began after a win on 5/13...coinciding with the cold spell his entire barn has endured – others in here just seem more attractive at the moment

RACE 8 – (4) HEMSWORTH N saw his modest 2 race winning streak ended last week but he was still insanely sharp, pacing a final half in :53.2 to be a close 3rd from an impossible spot – just may be sharp enough to overcome even a bad trip to take this. (6) ENERGETIC HANOVER could use some better friends at the race office – he was assigned Post 8 last week despite missing a month due to sickness and after trailing all the way, was still assigned the outside post once more – look for a much better effort tonight...maybe even a winning one. (3) WHATS STANLEY GOT A held 2nd last week but was no threat to COVERED BRIDGE – he’s sharp enough to beat a few of these, but may be a notch below the top pair. (5) TYPHOON BANNER N has really upped his game lately and made his YR return a winning one last week – he faces tougher now, and faces an uncertain trip with the draw – playable in exotics, if the price is decent. (2) FUNATTHEBEACH N has missed a month and faces a few sharp ones – guessing he’ll be handled conservatively tonight, especially with a win coming off the bottom of his card. (1) MAN DONTFORGET ME is a mare taking on boys, in a bit of a head scratcher

RACE 9 – (1) HIMSELF N took a while to find his best U.S. form but he picked up his first stateside victory on 6/6 and has raced well ever since, even as he’s climbed the class ladder – his win 2 back was very impressive, and he held his own vs. tougher last week – gets the narrow nod from the pole. (4) BIG GULP has overcome bad dates in the past but just wasn’t at his sharpest last start, after missing 3 weeks – drops right back in the box, gets some class relief, and may be ready for a much better effort. (5) CENTURY HEINEKEN rallied past a couple of sharp ones to win 3 back, then was in tough spots the last 2 weeks – at least a chance for an upset tonight for a sharp barn. (7) PAT MCGARRY A arrives sharp from Pocono, with wins in 3 of his last 5 starts – he should be able to deal with the class jump, but the poor draw is definitely a concern. (8) GUNG HO was away from December until May, then finished in 2nd in his first start back (at The Meadows) – he rattled off 4 in a row since then and while he clearly ships in razor sharp, it’s hard to say if he’s handy enough to work out a manageable trip from out here. (3) GREG THE LEG is still a hard-hitter but probably needs to be in just a bit easier to strut his best stuff. (6) MY ULTIMATE

BYRON A shows 4 straight sharp miles but he had the rail in all of them – the move outside could hurt considerably. (2) POINTOMYGRANSON was scary sharp for a while but does seem to have gone the other way recently

RACE 10 – (2) JUST ENUFF STUFF threw a surprisingly disappointing effort two back but he rebounded (off the claim) last week, rallying to be a solid 2nd behind heavily favored VERDUN – we’ll see if he can turn the tables on that rival tonight with the post advantage. (6) VERDUN arrived from Delaware riding a 2 race winning streak and has extended that streak to 4, picking up a pair of short priced victories after joining our (new) leading barn – he still deserves plenty of respect, but may be in for a tougher trip tonight...don’t fall in love if he ends up way overbet. (1) TACK ROOM CHATTER has been racing well out of town but hasn’t won in some time – he was 6-3-3-0 here last year and joins a top barn, but he also exits a barn that has been clicking at 30% this year– mixed feelings, but clearly he’d be no surprise from this spot. (7) SHAKESPEARE was hammered at the windows 2 back and just missed to #6 – he was off to a surprisingly fast start last week, but then ended up squandering the two hole trip he earned – this inconsistency has plagued him all year, but he’s still a reasonable stab if looking for a bomb (5) SURFSIDE BEACH has been turning in good miles all year, always has a good move in him but does seem a bit more dangerous at the \$30K level than he does for the \$50K tag. (4) JIMMY CONNOR B is another of the “in-and-outers” in here – he’s capable on his best effort, but others just feel more reliable. (3) TRAIN STATION has missed 4 weeks after a pair of duds – more importantly, Bartlett opts off to handle #2.

RACE 11 – (4) TWO FACED was already sharp when claimed for \$30K three starts back – he rallied crisply for 3rd against the 50s in his next, then paced home evenly in a hot 1:51.4 mile last week – he drops back down tonight to the level of the claim, and that stamps him as the one to beat. (1) LYONS PRIDE can be a pretty lazy horse at times so look for Bongiorno to be all over him at the start looking for a good getaway – can be part of the equation if he works out a good trip. (3) TAKE A CLOSER LOOK can be forgiven for getting collared late by a 30-1 shot last week but he just didn’t LOOK good at the end of the mile...after taking a somewhat suspicious drop below the level of the recent claim – feels vulnerable, at a relatively short price. (7) HES SPECIAL may have trouble getting in play from out here but he did win twice at this level in June, and isn’t a bad choice if looking for a possible late night bomb. (2) VICTOR CRUISE was no factor upon arrival from PA but had Post 8 that night – we’ll see if the move inside can help him content for a share. (5) DE LA HOYA HANOVER’s two wins this year have come vs. cheaper and he was no factor in his lone local try – leaning elsewhere. (6) ROSE RUN X CON caught ‘em off guard when a big price 3rd 4 back but he’s done little since, and is now 18-0-0-4 on the year. (8) CLEVELAND B MIKI doesn’t figure to be close enough to the action to have any impact tonight.