

Early thoughts on the Blackeyed Susan

Army Wife breaks from the one-hole, has some early speed, is third off a layoff, and picks up Rosario for Maker – a powerful combination. She is two for four on dirt, had some trouble in her last, a G3 at Aqueduct, but still ran very well, particularly considering the slow (:50, 1:15) pace in that 1 1/8 mile race. With a little better luck her figures would be closer to the top. She's 8-1 in the morning line. A 2.8% closer with with three good works since her last. I don't like betting closers on the rail because, as the saying goes, they're likely to end up in jail. But it's at least conceivable in a race this long with a masterful jockey like Joel, so...

Willful Woman has won two of her seven races. Curiously enough, both wins came on off tracks. Pray for rain? They were also both routes, and she won both prettily handily. Asked about her dismal showing in the Honeybee, her owner said she was looking at something in the infield when they popped the gate, and got flustered. First time I've heard that word used to describe a horse's feelings. She's 12-1 on the line. To dismiss her, you have to also dismiss Nyquist, Uncle Mo, Ricardo Santana, and Steve Asmussen, who is still looking for his first BES training win. She has one slow work and one bullet since her last. A 1.26% closer, she is usually close to the lead but usually can't finish the deal. I won't be using her, but I can't argue with anyone who chooses her for her name, because I have several of her namesake in my family.

Spritz is zero for two on dirt, and one for four on synthetic. Hardly the proper credentials, it would seem. However, she showed good early speed on the all-weather at Turfway, but there's no indication how that speed will translate to dirt. Her trainer, Bissett, however, remarked that "she's tactical out of the gate," and thinks that's a pretty good weapon. So there may be some hidden speed there. If she does manage to get the lead, will she have the strength to stay against this tougher group – on dirt? The morning line guy doesn't think so; he makes her 20-1. She does get Flavien Pratt, however, and that's a pretty big plus. From a numbers, form, trainer, works, and about any other viewpoint she's a toss-out. However, she's one of the few with a bit of early speed, and Pimlico is historically an early speed track, so... With Pratt up I figure her to have an effect on the race, but not win or place. Any finish beneath that is a decent possibility.

Forever Boss has won two races, one on the turf, in which she was placed first through a disqualification, and the other at 1 1/8th mile at Keenland in a race that had been taken off the turf, in which she basically wired the field at a moderate pace. So no dry dirt races for her, either. She gets Jose Ortiz, who knows how to ride, for McPeck, who won this thing last year with Swiss Skydiver, so I guess he knows how to train, too. She's 15-1 on the line. I'd like to throw her out like yesterday's newspaper, but without any dry track reference, and since the apparently off dirt track was her best race, and Jose gets up... Nah. I may suffer for it, but I'm tossing her. She's a 1.3% closer.

Lady Traveler has won one of her seven races, that one, of course, being her maiden race six back. The interesting thing is she wired that race, and though it was only six furlongs, and she has failed pretty miserably in two of her three routes, Castellano gets up, a switch from Corey, and he is a very heady rider. Dale Romans has won this race twice recently. Food for thought. Can this horse

somehow get the lead in the BES? According to Tom Bellhouse, "she's like the darling of the workout report guys. She works out great, everybody's in love with her, she looks beautiful." A 1.6% closer with one good work and one bullet since her last, breaking from the five-hole at 15-1 ML odds, she just looks overmatched to me.

Iced Latte has run three races, two on dry dirt and one in the slop, and won one, pressing, at Gulfstream. She gets Saez back, under whom she broke her maiden, for Todd Pletcher, pressing, with a 90 speed figure. Saez is a very aggressive rider; I believe he believes the best way to win this will be on the front end, and he has an excellent chance of getting there. She's 8-1 on the line. A 1.0% closer, which is probably a good profile for this race and track, she's an obvious throwout on class, with only one mediocre work since, but it's hard to argue with her last two speed figures. She may be on the lead or pressing, but I'm giving her a decent shot to be in the trifecta.

Miss Leslie, another closer, has won four of her seven races, two of them routes, both 8.5f, the last here at Pimlico after being steadied at the 7/8th pole. She steps up in class, as most of these do, (with Beautiful Gift the only exception, coming from a G2 at Santa Anita.) So... a deep closer, stepping up in class, having won both routes on dirt, one of them here, with hot connections. A 2.72% closer with a morning line of 15-1. I don't feel her.

The Grass Is Blue has won three of her seven races, one at this very distance three back at Aqueduct. She yanks off the blinkers for the BES, a tactic with which her trainer, Chad Brown, has been very successful (40% win rate). She weakened in her only start at this distance, the Gazelle, a G3 run at Aqueduct about 6 weeks ago, which was won by her stablemate Search Results. Chad Brown puts Irad Ortiz up, displacing Franco. A 1.6% closer with okay works since, she is 6-1 on the line. BTW, in all four of her races without blinkers she was pretty desperately far behind at the halfway mark, not exactly the profile you're looking for in this type of race, and at Pimlico. I can't ignore her, but probably won't use her for the win slot.

Adventuring, second choice on the morning line at 4-1, breaking from post 9, broke her maiden in a race taken off the turf, then won her next race at Turfway on the all-weather surface. Hmm. She won those two races by closing; when she tried to win on the lead in her second maiden try, she missed. She has never run on dry dirt, has never run this far. Of course she has Geroux and Cox running her, and Pioneer of the Nile behind her, so.... A 2.7% closer, she has been close to the pace in two of her races, one of which she won, but it's hard to get a reading since she is evidently running on dry dirt for the first time, and adding distance. However, her speed figure put her close to the top. A puzzlement with great connections. I'll wait till post time to make a final decision.

The previously mentioned Beautiful Gift has won two of her four starts, all on dirt, one a G3 at Santa Anita, and just missed in her last, a G2, also at SA. She's third off, and a presser, which may suit this distance and track. Her numbers are the best in the field, she's had excellent recent works, and she keeps Johnny V for Baffert. She's 9-5 on the line and the program favorite. She passed on the Kentucky Oaks to run here in the BES because Baffert thought the race turned up too tough. Pretty important factoid, I'm thinking. A 1.5% closer with the top overall pace figures, she's proven at this level and shouldn't have a problem with the extra half furlong. The outside post could be a

bit of a problem, but at least she'll be able to see what everyone else is doing, and Johnny V is a superb decision maker. My pick, even if she is the chalk. But who will come in with her?

In all, as I said, a very puzzling race. I'll give Army Wife, Iced Latte, and The Grass is Blue the best chance to fill the place spot, and maybe Adventuring and Willful Woman for third and/or fourth.

This is all very early, so don't take it as gospel. We'll reanalyze as the race gets closer.

The Fat Cowboy