

OAK TREE AT SANTA ANITA ANALYSIS
By BRAD FREE



BEST BET: Tamar (7th race)

First Race: 1. Scottish Diamond 2. Craig's Storm 3. Saxophone

It is unusual for a sharp claimer such as SCOTTISH DIAMOND to drop two levels off a big win. SCOTTISH DIAMOND rolled to a sharp front-running win for a \$25k claim tag at Del Mar, yet drops off the win to \$16k claiming. Not exactly a signal of optimism. On the other hand, his connections are almost "out" on the gelding just two starts after being claimed, and his spot in a \$25k claiming race on Thursday is taken by a stablemate (Jeff Mullins-trained Six Pack Abs runs in race 2). It is tough to be enthused about a low-odds dropper, but if the real SCOTTISH DIAMOND shows up, he can win the first race of the 2009 fall Oak Tree meet. Meanwhile, improving CRAIG'S STORM and SAXOPHONE are moving back up the ladder off deep-closing wins, and both offer greater wagering value. CRAIG'S STORM has held his form all season, he ran well on this surface in spring, and won back-to-back at Del Mar. Seven furlongs is a good trip for the closing sprinter. SAXOPHONE won for \$10k at Del Mar, and moves up two levels to \$16k. He continues to work well, and he will finish.

Second Race: 1. Headache 2. Sassou 3. Smooth and Savvy

HEADACHE trounced this class level (\$40k claiming) last month on the main track at Del Mar, and is likely to maintain his form on a downhill turf course he loves. Last winter, he won for \$40k and finished second in a N2X on the hill. He is sharp, consistent, fast, and can move them down late. However, front-runner SASSOU looms an interesting pace play in a race without serious speed. SASSOU drops from N2X, switches to front-end rider Tyler Baze, and if the strategy is to let him rip early he could be gone. SASSOU is 2-for-2 on the Santa Anita turf. The knock is his most recent start was abysmal. If he is tailing off, the drop might wake him up. SMOOTH AND SAVVY has run races that put him in the hunt. He also likes the hill. AL FAROUK looms the upset special first start in the U.S. for Melody Conlon. He won 7 of 35 in New Zealand, and has a steady work pattern for his first local out.

Third Race: 1. Cabo Chico 2. Breakmark 3. Killer Bear

This maiden sprint for California-bred 2-year-olds is the most perplexing race on the card. Although first-time starter CABO CHICO debuts for an outfit that does not pop often with firsters, he might be the exception. The son of good debut sire Salt Lake (16 percent first-start winners) was working fast at Del Mar, and then was briefly sidelined with a minor setback (no works from Aug. 12 to Sept. 7). But he has a solid work pattern since including three works at Santa Anita, and off a six-furlong work just five days ago he should be fit. The past five years in Southern California, trainer Jerry Hollendorfer is 0-for-15 with 2-year-old firsters, and 1-for-23 with firsters of all ages. BREAKMARK is a rookie by Benchmark (12 percent debut winners). He was training well this summer at Del Mar, and has two good six-furlong works at Hollywood Park. KILLER BEAR has something the top pair lack. That is, racing experience. A respectable fourth in a \$100k Calbred stake last time, he returns to the maiden ranks and will be finishing.

Fourth Race: 1. Dynamic Range 2. Icemancmeth 3. Lockford

DYNAMIC RANGE has improved in each subsequent start of his comeback; the improvement coincides with being gelded prior to his June 20 return. Last out, RANGE finished third in a highly rated allowance from which winner Massone returned to finish third in the Super Derby and runner-up Pleasure to Ride returned to win an allowance. Bred top and bottom for a mile and a quarter, DYNAMIC RANGE should wear down the lone speed. That is front-runner ICEMANCMETH, who wired \$32k restricted claimers last time. While his ability to stay a mile and quarter is suspect, ICEMAN should be loose on the lead. If he walks early he get brave. LOCKFORD drops from N2X to N1X/\$40k claimer while returning to grass. PALLADIAN GENERAL is eligible to improve second start back from a long layoff, although he might prefer a shorter distance.

Fifth Race: 1. Charlie and Chris 2. Clue Me In 3. Dixie Passion

CHARLIE AND CHRIS faced better at Del Mar where he was unplaced in successive maiden-40 starters. He drops to a restricted (non-winners of two) \$25k claimer, shortens in distance, and will be forwardly placed in a sprint with little true speed. CLUE ME IN has been working bullets for his first start in nearly a year. Scratched from a similar spot Sept. 3 at Del Mar, he has four big works since. The speed figures he earned as a 2-year-old were modest. It is likely he will return as an improved horse at age 3. DIXIE PASSION returns to a sprint, while dropping from 3-year-old \$50k claiming to restricted claiming against older. DEPUTY FLYER dips into the first claiming race of his career. These restricted claiming races do not have much quality.

Sixth Race: 1. Recap 2. Erbeia 3. Take a Hard Look

A first-time starter sired by Storm Cat, 2-year-old RECAP is bred to be something special, and has been training likewise. A full brother to G1 winner After Market and G2 winner Courageous Cat, RECAP debuts at a mile on turf for trainer John Shirreffs and jockey Garrett Gomez; his workouts at Hollywood are strong. His full brother After Market won first out in a turf route. All systems go. ERBEIA has an experience edge over the top choice and showed much improvement second time out when stretched to two turns. ERBEIA rallied from last and ate up ground late to finish third by three lengths. The winner of that race (Pulsion) is scheduled to start Sunday in the Grade 1 Norfolk. TAKE A HARD LOOK was well-bet in his debut, got rank chasing a hot pace, and weakened. He is certain to improve. RAPID HEAT is a California-bred facing open company, but he ran well finishing third in his sprint debut and is bred to run long. He is a full brother to California Cup Classic winner Mr. Chairman. GUILTY ASSOCIATION showed brief speed in his debut and also can move forward at a price.

Seventh Race: 1. Tamar 2. Emmy Darling 3. North Rodeo

The margin of victory by Del Mar maiden winner TAMAR does not begin to tell how well she ran. Hooked into an insane 22.03-second first quarter, she shrugged off her pace foe after a blistering half-mile in 45.11 seconds, opened up, died home and held. It was a super win by a fast filly with a huge pace advantage in this seven-furlong race. There is absolutely zero speed signed up other than TAMAR, who figures to fall into the lead, lope along unchallenged, and race gate to wire as the most probable winner on the opening day card. It is either brave or naïve to back a synthetic-surface runner on the first day of any California race meet. Because no one knows for certain how Pro-Ride will play, EMMY DARLING goes route to sprint off a good third. If the top choice does not stay, anything goes rallying from off the pace. This is the third start on the comeback trail for EMMY DARLING, who will be rolling late. NORTH RODEO and DISH THE DIRT are usually there or thereabouts and they also will clunk along late.

Eighth Race: 1. Desert Code 2. California Flag 3. Cherokee Heaven

DESERT CODE has not raced in five months, and this is merely a prep race for the Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint. It is not a must-win situation for DESERT CODE, who tailed off in spring and subsequently was given a freshening. His recent works have been sharp, he loves the downhill (5-for-8), and is the best horse in the field (2009 BC Turf Sprint winner; his multiple stakes wins include four on the hill). DESERT CODE figures for a good trip behind pacesetter CALIFORNIA FLAG, and can wear down the front-runner late. However, CALIFORNIA FLAG returned from a long layoff with a huge front-end victory at Del Mar going five furlongs, he won this race last year, and he will be loose out front. They have to catch him to beat him. CHEROKEE HEAVEN is the knockout, first start since May. His only turf sprint was the best race of his career, although it was a mere N2X allowance. HEAVEN is ambitiously placed for his comeback, but he packs an explosive kick and if the pacesetters melt he could be along in time. He appears to be training well for his comeback.

Ninth Race: 1. Good Newsmen 2. Boo Too 3. De Brief Me

GOOD NEWSMAN might be a bust, but he deserves one final chance. He had a nightmare trip in his Aug. 12 comeback, then finished fourth in what initially seemed a disappointing race. However, it turned out to be a fast race subsequently validated by the next-out wins of third place Hotie and ninth place Clearly Quiet. Seven furlongs should be just right for the closing style of NEWSMAN. Last shot. BOO TOO has improved each subsequent start, and enters off a solid runner-up finish at Fairplex. DE BRIEF ME will be clunking along late. RED DOOR DRIVE has been away a long time (one year). And he has never raced this low (maiden-25).