OAK GROVE
RACING • GAMING • HOTEL

The Players' Guide
YOUR COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO TODAY'S RACES

Monday, April 8, 2024 • Race Day 3
Today's selections and commentary by: *Ray Cotolo*

Full-Card Selections

1	4-1-3-5	**6**	6-5-2-4	**11**	7-2-3-4
2	5-2-4-7	**7**	1-2-9-8	**12**	5-7-3-4
3	1-9-2-4	**8**	2-5-6-1	**13**	-
4	7-3-6-4	**9**	1-4-5-2	**14**	-
5	3-5-8-2	**10**	1-9-3-5	**15**	-

Early Pick 5 Ticket
Race 1: 1,4
Race 2: 5
Race 3: 1
Race 4: 3,6,7
Race 5: 3,5
Total Stake: $2.40 for $.20

Late Pick 5 Ticket
Race 6: 6
Race 7: 1,2
Race 8: 1,2,5,6
Race 9: 1
Race 10: 1,3,9
Total Stake: $4.80 for $.20

Race 1

1 Mile/Pace • NW1 EXT PM CD
(4) IT'S A JK is a big, bulky guy who won with relative ease after being off track for over a year. He gets a better draw and should win if he stays in form. (1) LADY'S CHOICE K gets an improved draw to likely let her push to the forward spot she wants. (3) FROZEN SHARK was supposed to win and delivered some in spite of losing. He has the form to perform here but he needs the right trip. (5) CHEYENNE took play on seasonal return and grabbed fourth off a pylon trip. He can build off that effort.

Race 2

1 Mile/Pace • NW$9,000L4 CD
(5) CAPTION THIS went a big mile out of post 8 to lose to a tougher horse in his second start off the bench. As long as he can leave the gate from this optimal spot, he's the one to beat. (2) THIS KIT ROCKS needs to sit closer to the speed. This off the pace stuff ain't necessarily going to cut it. (4) YANKEE B SOMETHING could step forward on the drop in class. She belongs but may need another mile to get real tight. (7) VESPA N beat a weaker bunch with plenty left and should only warrant a look at odds near his morning line.

Race 3

1 Mile/Pace • USHDC NW $3,000L4 Opt. Claim $8,000
(1) TAKEITTOTHEFACE gets a good draw and can work his preferred trip. (9) SOUTHWIND MOLLY can follow the #1's speed to get involved. (2) AYR PIONEER GB got a good trip and worked well to finish third and can improve. (4) DOC'S PAPPARAZZI can grab a share.

Race 4

1 Mile/Pace • Fillies & Mares Open Pace
(7) AINTHESAMEWITHOUTU toyed with this field with a first-over push from last to win under wraps. She towers over this field but will face a tougher, tighter bunch from a tough post. (3) SOUTHWIND BELLA never got a chance to race when boxed in, so this week she should get a shot. (6) MAGGIE RHEE should improve after nearly taking this bunch gate to wire last week. (4) SOFT SPOT makes her second start on Lasix and can hit the ticket.

Race 5

1 Mile/Pace • NW1 EXT PM
(3) WOMEN BE SHOPPIN went a big mile to win on debut and now gets a better draw for her second start. Full steam ahead. (5) DESIGNATED FREAK encountered a tougher rival last out and finished second with an aggressive steer. He should step forward and also has a shot. (8) TELLITLIKESONNY has the speed to do well here but lands a draw that questions how he gets into the race. (2) STANDING LEADER can suck along and get a share.

Race 6

1 Mile/Pace • Open
(6) HE'ZZZ A WISE SKY is the one to beat until proven otherwise. (5) LOW RIDER went a big mile to deliver last week and appears capable of stepping up to this level. (2) NO LOU ZING should get involved now that he has a tightener and a better draw. (4) ROCKS SHINING STAR had plenty to offer last week, but could encounter a tough trip this week. His ability should land him in the mix though.

Race 7

1 Mile/Pace • NW$6,500L4 CD
(1) SPEAKING VOLUMES managed to sit close to the speed in his most recent and that new dimension could make him a fierce foe. (2) WESTERN ERA fits this class and won fairly easily last out. (9) SURE THING CAPTAIN should be able to get into the race from the second tier and has the speed to contend. (8) CAVIART CAMDEN could pop on the class drop and should have a bit more late speed with a start over the track.

Race 8

1 Mile/Pace • NW$2,500L4 CD
(2) JIM STRIKESITRICH may seem farfetched here, but he showed some life as the speed collapsed and got a tiny piece from post 8 off two-month's rest. He's capable of better and could be live with the improved post. (5) DOWAHS BOY typically would go on speed missions when he hit this level, but tough to tell if he still has those miles in him. (6) MEL'S VICKI LOU drops in class and could have more for the stretch drive in her second start from a layoff. (1) WOLFTRAX has gone big miles in the past, but as he's dropped on the class ladder his ability has become tough to read. This is a spot where he is supposed to be competitive.

Race 9

1 Mile/Pace • Fillies & Mares NW 1 EXT PM LT
(1) SPARKLING DIVA lost last out because she had to navigate the second tier. Now she doesn't. (4) ASHLEE'S LIL ANGEL went a ground-saving trip to grab fourth in her most recent and that could be enough to get a size-able piece in this bunch. (5) TAMEUDOWN endured tons of pressure on her seasonal return and with a smoother trip she can be more involved. (2) U-C-DEE-U-C-ANNIE comes from a barn that has thrown some large-price surprises off even form. Maybe she hits the super?

Race 10

1 Mile/Trot • Maiden/NW1 EXT PM LT
(1) MISS KENTUCKY showed miles at 2 against tougher that would win her this race. Question is if she's ready to pop at first asking. (9) ESCAPER likely follows inside speed and can suck along for a good share. (3) HAUTEUR levelled off as the pressure mounted in the last quarter. She showed plenty of fight though off the bench and should be a factor. (5) AUTUMN WINDS made a big improvement between her 3- and 4-year-old years despite grabbing third in a race that fell apart. She can finish a mile in a race where others struggle.

Race 11

1 Mile/Pace • NW 1 EXT PM CD
(7) GIRL GIGGLES can show speed and, despite frequently folding on the lead, could have enough to last against a group like this. (3) LUCKY PETE made a sharp appearance scoring down last week and matched it with a third-place finish at 26-1. He should improve. (2) DUALLY TRUCK finished fairly evenly once pulling, but now makes his second start off the bench and meets a weak field. (4) CRUNCH THE NUMBERS has the speed in theory to win, but will be such a short price that taking him seems tough.

Race 12

1 Mile/Pace • USHDC NW$4,200L4 Opt. Claim $12,000
(5) PALOMAR persevered through a tough trip to grab second and likely will not have as uphill a climb this time. (7) SCHWARTZ BROS PAT drops in class and went a sneaky good mile last out. (3) LANESIDE LOGIC GB will take play for fast times but he's a little finicky. Play with caution. (4) BUSINESS CHECK went a huge mile last week, so we'll see how he follows that kind of effort that could win him this race at a much shorter price.

SHEET STATS

STATS (2 Days)	WINS	TOP PICK	2ND PICK	3RD PICK	4TH PICK	ALL PICKS
# OF RACES	24	7	9	3	3	22
WIN %		29.17%	37.50%	12.50%	12.50%	91.67%
RETURN	($48)	$39.82	$101.90	$107.48	$18.20	$267.40
ROI %		-17.04%	112.29%	123.92%	-62.08%	39.27%
AVG RETURN		$5.69	$11.32	$35.83	$6.07	$14.73
MEDIAN RETURN		$5.06	$6.76	$29.36	$5.34	$6.47
AVG ODDS		5.15	6.76	9.13	13.07	8.53
MEDIAN ODDS		2.83	2.96	6.25	9.06	5.20
CORRECT PLACINGS	*RACES*	*1ST*	*2ND*	*3RD*	*4TH*	*ALL*
RACES	24	7	5	7	3	21
RATE		29.17%	20.83%	25.00%	12.50%	21.88%

Welcome back to Oak Grove for our second week of racing this year. The first week was a fascinating mixture of longshots, closers, slow second-quarters, blazing third-quarter sprintaways, with even some lightning and a tornado warning thrown in for good measure. Our opening day was a big success from the perspective of total betting, and a great opportunity for big payoffs. The twelve-race card featured winners paying $29, $54, $31, $27, $15, and $23, for two-dollar bets. I doubt any other track in the country -- thoroughbred or harness -- produced more winning longshots that day.

As I'm going to do regularly, I'm going to focus on one particular race, race 8 on Monday's program. This race is a very interesting collection of horses coming from many different racetracks, many different classes of race, and their own performances tell some fascinating stories. As the centerpiece of the Pick-5 (races 6,7,8,9,10), this race falls at that part of the card that can turn a winning day into a losing one, and a losing one into a winning one. Let's go horse by horse, and then try to figure out how the race might go, then turn our opinions into winning bets. I'm going to give out the way I would bet the race myself, but the idea is to get you to think about it yourself and figure out the best bets that make sense to you. Plus -- you'll have the chance to look at the actual odds for the race, whereas this column has to be written long before the fans will bet against each other, setting the odds.

RACE 8

1 WOLFTRAX was scratched last week, but this wasn't anything about the horse- Both driver Tony Hall and trainer Annette Lorentzon weren't able to make it that day and all of their horses were scratched. The biggest question about this horse is- is he ready? He was off from mid-November to mid-March and he has has just one qualifier as he prepares for his 2024 debut. He probably trained in-between, and that qualifier wasn't bad at all- he was stuck in the back of a qualifying race that crawled the first half and sprinted the second half. You can't really blame him for not winning- it's impressive that he even gained ground in that fast half.

2 JIM STRIKESITRICH was surprisingly good on opening day. Finishing well, was't far off of pulling off a major upset at 44-1. He also paced his mile faster than any race's he been in in his ten starts. It was a big performance, and now that he moves in from post 8 to post 2, he has to be taken seriously.

3 CAMWOOD would really be a shock if he won this race. He hasn't raced since February 11, and after being scratched twice, he came back to qualify at Hoosier Park with a very poor effort, coming a final quarter in :36.4. When he's at his best, he has good early speed, but for now he doesn't look like he's ready to win this.

4 DAKOTA JACK is a tough old horse who at 11 years old is still racing well. He's earned nearly $400,000 in 225 races lifetime. He had a streak of really bad races last fall and mediocre races last winter- but he seems to be in the process of turning things around a bit. After taking some time off, he qualified well at Oak Grove and finished a promising fourth. Definitely deserves some respect for that race.

5 DOWAHS BOY also raced on opening day in a higher class (non-winners of $4000), but was well-beaten. He's down in class today, but that higher class race actually went a full second slower than the lower class race last week, which leaves some questions. He had great early speed and raced really well at Vernon Downs last year, but I'd wait to see some of those old signs of life before betting him.

6 MEL'S VICKY LOU was really used hard early on to get the lead (the two circles after his "1" for his quarter position means that he was three-wide around the first turn, a tiring thing to do. He really didn't get tired until pretty late, and his early speed might be put to greater advantage today.

7 SNEAK ON BYE was claimed last week for $8,000 and now tries his hand at this conditioned race. His race last week wasn't that great, so he'll have to improve for his new connections to win this. His races at The Meadowlands were pretty good, so improvement is definitely possible- a question mark today.

8 MAJOR LEAGUER is pretty sharp but the outside post won't help. Jimmy Whittemore is a good driver and I expect him to leave pretty hard from the outside to get a seat. If he succeeds in getting a good trip, the Major Leaguer is a major player today.

9 MY HOUSE starts from post nine in the second tier behind the leader. This isn't a bad place to start for most horses, but it might not be great for him because he loves to fire off the gate and obviously you can't do that when there's a horse in front of you. Also it's his first race in more than five months, and he's no longer with the nation's winningest stable, the Burke Stable. He also makes breaks sometimes which adds to his negatives. BUT he did dominate his qualifying race and threw in some big efforts last year. Another question mark!

In sum, this is a race where you can make a case for almost anyone, depending on which way you're sizing it up. It would be very hard to try to create a scenario of exactly how the horses will line up early- another reason this is such a difficult race. There's not much certainty- which sets things up perfectly for a value bet on who is getting overlooked in the betting. This is a race to be watching the odds. I don't know if any horse here is worth less than 2-1, so I wouldn't bet anything getting too much money. In general I like 1 (WOLFTRAX) with 2, 4, 8, and 9. Here's my bet, but to get your best value, wait, watch the odds, combine them with Ray's analysis and you might come away with a big payoff.

My bet: $2 exactas 1/2489 (One with the two, four, eight and nine) and $1 exactas 2489/1 in case he finishes second. Total bet $12.

Good luck! And please, if you have any feedback or requests, please email me at kleinhorse@gmail.com and I'll do my best in next Monday's analysis!