

KEENELAND OPENING DAY PLAYS

Friday, Apr. 7, 2023

Race 1 - \$80,000 Maiden Special Weight for 2-year-olds, going 4 ½ furlongs on the dirt.
Post Time: 1:05 p.m. ET

Wesley Ward 2-year-olds at the Spring meet are kinda like family members on Christmas - you look forward to seeing them, you don't know exactly what time (or in this case, what race) they'll get there, they may not bring you a ton of money, but you know that, ultimately, they're gonna show up and there'll be plenty of them that do.

But for this short of a price, we're gonna try to beat him. I wish I was going with a longer price, but after the **3 - Bledsoe**, I'm looking at **6 - Earl Munny** for a bit of a price as my favorite of three entries for trainer John Hancock, **8 - Nurcan**.

UPDATE: **13 - Alexandra's Song** and **14 - Tranche** drew into the race, so now it's a whole different ball game. I think my new top pick is 14 Tranche. And Bledsoe is no longer quite as heavy a favorite. **Probably using 13 & 14 on top with 3/6/8 underneath.**

Race 2 - \$100,000 Maiden Special Weight for 3-year-old fillies going 7 furlongs on the dirt. Post Time: 1:32 p.m.

You never know what you're going to get with first-time starters, and at least half the field in this one likely will be breaking from the gate for their first time in a real race. But we do know that Todd Pletcher and Irad Ortiz Jr. are a damn good combo at winning races, and that Pletcher is the best among these trainers with first-time starters. Which is why you will see **2 - Contrive** as the heavy favorite here based on those connections alone.

I liked the first race from **8 - Beach Walkn** at Turfway Park, where she was beaten just $\frac{3}{4}$ a length and have to think she'll be ready like a little more track coming off that race. I also have to mention the **9 - Forenoon** for Bill Mott, who I think also should like this distance and ran a respectable third in her debut. Also, **15 - Afternoon Tea** drew in, I like her first and only effort as well and think she'd be live.

Race 3 - \$110,000 Allowance Optional Claiming (N1X) for 3-year-old fillies going 1 1/16 miles on the dirt. Post Time: 2:04 p.m.

The main speed here will be **1 - Hayuevano** coming along the inside. She's been racing in stakes company lately and just hasn't had her way in recent races, but I like the post position and think the race sets up for her to have a chance. And of course, the one to beat will be **3 - Comparative** for Brad Cox, coming off an impressive win by $6 \frac{1}{4}$ lengths at Fair Grounds. I think though if Hayuevano and Comparative go to the front early and are just crawling along, we could see a horse like **2 - Condone** make a late run at it. I really liked the 7 here Closed Caption, who unfortunately was a late scratch.

Race 4 - \$120,000 Allowance for 4-year-olds and up going 1 1/16 miles on the turf. Post Time: 2:36 p.m.

This is one of the toughest races of the day for me. I'm interested to see how the turf plays. **2 - Camp Hope** is a perfect 3-for-3 at Keeneland, and this will be his first start on turf this year, going a distance that he seems to like. Might get a decent price on him. But there are so many good horses in this race. **3 - Kentucky Ghost** is another that seems to run well on this track who's going to be looking to make a late charge. Not much you can say bad about **4 - Duke of Hazzard (FR)**, and Wesley Ward is quite good coming off a long layoff. **7 - Hurricane Dream** ran well in his U.S. debut in the Pegasus World Cup Turf, even though he ran 10th, was only 4 lengths off the winner. **8 - Tiz the Bomb** is another McPeek runner that seems to perform well in Kentucky. And we've got speed coming from the outside with **10 - Hozier**, but I doubt he will be able to wire this field. Just depends on the splits. *If I have to choose three, I'll take Camp Hope, Duke of Hazzard, and Hurricane Dream.*

Race 5 - \$110,000 Allowance Optional Claiming (N1X) for 3-year-old fillies going 6 1/2 furlongs on the dirt. Post Time: 3:08 p.m.

The **3 - Black Forest** won here at Keeneland on Breeders' Cup Friday last year and I like the spot she's in today. **7 - Peacock Alley** is another that could sit just off the pace and make a big run late. **8 - Zierati** is going to want to get to the lead early, but I don't think she's going to get away with going :23 4/5 in the opening quarter, because horses like **5 - Half a Chance** and Black Forest will be faster than that. *I think it sets up well for Black Forest or Peacock Alley and that might be a solid exacta box.*

Race 6 - \$120,000 Allowance (N2X) for Fillies & Mares, 4-years-old and up going 5 1/2 furlongs on the turf. Post Time: 3:40 p.m.

Kicking off the late pick five with a turf sprint for older ladies, where **8 - Kaufymaker** makes her return to the track after taking an allowance turf spring here at Keeneland in the fall. I'm trying to make a case for some of the other runners in here, but it's hard to see anyone stacking up to her speed. The only one I can really see challenging her is the other Wesley Ward entry in **6 - Her World (IRE)**. These two seem far and away the class of this race. **2 - Frozen Solid** maybe could hit the board, which doesn't bode well to start the pick 5.

Race 7 - \$400,000 Lafayette Stakes (G3) for 3-year-olds going 7 furlongs on the dirt. Post Time: 4:12 p.m.

The pressure is on **3 - Hejazi** to get to the lead early and run away with it. The Bob Baffert-trainee commanded a whopping \$3.55 million last May but so far, has been disappointing when attempting two-turn races for a chance to get on the Derby trail. So he will try the sprint distance of 7 furlongs for the first time, with the lone win of his career coming at 6 1/2 furlongs in January at Santa Anita. If he doesn't win this race, it will be another blow to his owners at Zedan Racing Stables.

Who is best poised to knock him off? I'd have to go with **5 - Corona Bolt** for Brad Cox, who I think has a legit shot. I'd be pretty damn surprised if these two don't run 1-2. Third place may be a battle between **1 - Gulfport** and **2 - Lughan Knight**.

Race 8 - \$400,000 Transylvania Stakes (G3) for 3-year-olds going 1 1/16 miles on the turf. Post Time: 4:44 p.m.

This is where we try and cash in. **4 - Wonderful Justice (GB)** should have a unique opportunity here as a speed horse on the inside. **12 - Dude N Colorado** is going to want to get a jump toward the early lead, **8 - Candidate** is another that's going to be sent early, along with **7 - Mo Stash**. So you're going to have a good amount of speed trying to get up front from the outside and we could see some bumping going on early.

I think if a horse like Wonderful Justice or **9 - Nagirroc** can sit just a little off that pace but stay close, we could see the pace collapse and one of these two or even **2 - Webslinger** be there at the end. I think the pace may be a little too hot for Dude N Colorado to go the distance, so **my top choice is going to be Wonderful Justice followed by Nagirroc.**

Race 9 - \$600,000 Ashland Stakes (G1) for 3-year-old Fillies going 1 1/16 miles on the dirt. Post Time: 5:16 p.m.

5 - Punch Bowl has posted the fastest beyer figures of anyone else in this race and only looks to improve after an impressive showing at Oaklawn for trainer Brad Cox. She's out to prove herself among stakes company for the first time, and I think she's the real deal. Last year's Eclipse Award and Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies-winner **2 - Wonder Wheel** also will improve on her second start of her 3-year-old campaign, but did show she was beatable in her last start, the Suncoast at Tampa Bay Downs, where she was denied after a stretch duel. **4 - Julia Shining** and **3 - Guns n' Graces** both seem like logical choices to hit the board, but if I'm looking for a price to come in, I'm going with **7 - Effortlesslyelegant** for trainer Norm Casse to show up late.

Race 10 - \$100,000 Maiden Special Weight for 3-year-old fillies going 1 1/8 miles on the turf.
Post Time: 5:48 p.m. ET

We're looking for a price on **3 - Idle Chatter** who ran a solid 2nd in her debut at Gulfstream. Looks like she wants more ground and she will get it here, hoping she can improve in her turf debut. **10 - Doral** would probably be my first choice, she's found a way to be right there running a close second in two seemingly tough races down at Gulfstream. Don't love her breaking from the 10 post, but it's a long race & she should have plenty of opportunity to get there late.

Can't leave out a Chad Brown/Tyler Gaffilione filly who has run in the money in each of her last two starts at Gulfstream in **7 - Haystack**. But her workouts haven't been anything special and I don't think she's a 9-5 favorite by any means, but I'd use her. I'm also a little interested in the **8 - Lil Miss Moonlight** for Tim Hamm and Irad Ortiz Jr. She's put up some solid beyer figures and you have to think she's gonna be better under Irad than any rider she's had thus far.