



Oaklawn Stakes Race Analysis

Saturday, March 16, 2024

By Jeff "Money" Taylor

RACE 7 - \$200,000 PURPLE MARTIN (3:10 p.m.): Sprinting is the name of the game today with an intriguing pair of six-furlong dashes. Despite the short fields in both, they are surprisingly bettable.

Xtreme Smoke Show (#1, 5-1 morning line) had a difficult trip in the Dixie Belle last time, to say the least. She was racing with the first flight inside when forced to steady along the rail entering the turn then appeared to be mounting a bid in midstretch only to be bothered again. Perhaps more importantly, she also was doing some of the heavy lifting in forcing an honest early pace for her shorter priced and later running stablemate **Xtreme Diva (#6, 2-1)** that afternoon. With a confirmed pair of early burners present today, the early fractions should take care of themselves, freeing up **Xtreme Smoke Show** to settle into her own stalk-and-pounce mode which has produced prior dividends.

Minnesota-bred **Xtreme Diva** has looked professional in each of her two wins here this meeting and should continue the trend of decreasing prices and go favored here, although perhaps not by much. This is a saltier group than she disposed of in the Dixie Belle, but not significantly so, and she has an extra week between starts this time around. A solid half-mile maintenance work since that last win should have kept her on edge and she obviously has developed a fondness for the local racing surface. An all Mac Robertson-trained exacta looks very possible.

Tx Women for Arts (#4, 8-1) is a stakes winner sprinting, but her speed figs are decidedly a level below others in here. That is likely the primary reason she is such a generous price in the morning line but is hard to ignore her ultra consistent record of half a dozen trifecta finishes in just eight career starts. Remarkably, this will be her eighth difference track during that span, so she always seems to show up, regardless of venue. Roberto Santana returns to the saddle today and the last time these two got together, they took down top honors in the Prairie Gold Lassie last summer.

Fair Grounds maiden winner **Brooklyn Drew (#3, 6-1)** seemed to have woken up with the move to dirt last time but one might be skeptical of the quality of competition in a race that was originally scheduled for the turf. Neither the second- nor third-place finisher that day have come back to earn a diploma, which is a true warning sign. New Orleans form has generally translated favorably in the stakes ranks this year and those willing to take a chance of that trend continuing will be rewarded with a square price.

Wagering Strategy - **Win: #1 (If close to the 5-1 morning line price)**
Exacta Key Box: 1 w/ 3, 4, 6

RACE 9 - \$250,000 G3-WHITMORE (4:23 p.m.): This race has historically drawn considerable interest, but the presence of the reigning champ **Tejano Twist (#2, 9-5)** probably discouraged some locals from participating. One can hardly blame them as the 5-year-old's form looks every bit as good as it was coming into last year's edition, if not better. After accounting for the Bet on Sunshine at Churchill in early November, the Chris Hartman trainee crushed seven rivals here in the Ring the Bell five weeks later, once again roaring from the back of the field with his patented late run. It took the world class sprinter Skelly to end that streak in the King Cotton last month but while this race is competitive, there are none of those kind present. He looks to be a very deserving favorite.

Another Fair Grounds invader could be poised to make an impact in the form of **Surveillance (#4, 6-1)**. First and second in a pair of open optional affairs this winter, he looks ready for a return to stakes company. Not as deep a closer as the favorite, he finds himself in the second flight early and if the pace is moderate, may enjoy a tactical advantage over that same foe. James Graham, aboard for the upset by fellow Fair Grounds import Tiny Temper (\$25.60) in last week's Azeri, once again makes the journey north to ride for trainer Keith Desormeaux who has a long Oaklawn history of surprises.

Stakes veteran **Cowan (#7, 10-1)** changed hands via a high dollar clam last time in a near miss and now makes the long journey in from New York sporting respected new connections. The barn switch has the potential to wake up a sleeping giant from a back class standpoint as the 6-year-old Kantharos gelding has run up close to a million dollars in earnings, not an easy task when racing exclusively around one turn. Seemingly at his best over wet footing, a lingering wet forecast into the weekend may be to his liking.

Local stakes winner **Ryvit (#3, 2-1)** largely fell off form in the second half of 2023 but looked like his old self in winning in allowance company in his return three weeks ago. That last Beyer Speed Figure of 99 he earned was a career best and that is saying something since he was a six-time winner as a sophomore, including the Bachelor Stakes on this surface. He seems to have made that crucial step forward into his 4-year-old year and might be ready for another successful campaign.

Wagering Strategy - Win: #4
Trifectas: 2, 4 w/ 2, 3, 4, 7 w/ 2, 3, 4, 7