



## Stakes Race Analysis by Jeff "Money" Taylor

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### Oaklawn Jockey Club

Friday, May 6

**OAKLAWN - RACE 9 – \$150,000 NATURAL STATE BREEDERS' (4:15 p.m.)** - With several confirmed speedy sprint types stretching out to two turns for this, the recipe for success would appear to be to find someone who can sit and wait early before firing down the lane, even with the short stretch run of the one-mile distance. One need not look further than **The Mary Rose (#1)**. Trained by John Ortiz, who has enjoyed a great deal of success with Arkansas-breds here this season, highlighted by Whelen Springs' open company upset in last Saturday's Bachelor Stakes, the 5-year-old Macho Uno mare successfully stalked and pounced in a couple of high-end optional affairs earlier this meeting. Facing open company herself on December 31, she collared the leaders in the second turn of 1 1/16-miles event before kicking strongly clear to win by nearly eight lengths while overlooked at 18-1 odds. She did the same in a similar route in late February while receiving much more respect as the 2-1 favorite, earning another mid-90 Beyer Speed Figure in the process. She also has a couple of stakes tries this year, picking up minor awards in the G3 Houston Ladies Classic and most recently the \$200,000 Latonia at Turfway when racing without Lasix each time. She will once again receive that medication today and would seem to enjoy a sizable class advantage to go along with her favorable running style.

Although she went wire-to-wire in breaking her maiden the only time she has tried a mile and a sixteenth, **Punchy Girl (#7)** did rally from well off the pace in annexing the six-furlong Rainbow Miss in her last trip postward. With today's distance lying somewhere in between, perhaps she once again can rate off the pace. She will be facing older winning company for the first time but couldn't be coming into the race any better after working the fastest of 28 half-mile moves last Friday. Elvin Gonzalez, aboard for those two recent victories, once again returns to the saddle.

The hard knocking **Connie K (#6)** is slated to make her two-turn debut after winning a couple of state-bred affairs going six furlongs. The daughter of Street Strategy has never been headed when facing fellow Arkies, including a gutty gate to wire victory in the Downthedustyroad two starts back. She reported home second to Southern Grayce most recently when facing opens and that one came right back to win another allowance event last Sunday. She appears to be a major pace player once again as she puts her unbeaten record against Arkansas-breds on the line for trainer Randy Morse. The first one to blink of up front will not likely be her.

**Hot Springs Bling (#8)** has not been the most consistent performer here this season, but she has had her moments, rallying from far back to capture a state-bred optional claimer in mid-March. She benefitted from a :23.20 second opening quarter that afternoon and an equally fast :47.20 half mile to set up her late run. The fractions could be equally as quick today and that should allow her to pick up a goodly amount of the pieces while once again double digits at the windows.

**Wagering Strategy - Solid Win Play: #1, if 9-5 or better**  
**Exactas: 1 over 6, 7, 8; 6, 7, 8 over 1**

**CHURCHILL - RACE 11 – \$1,250,000 G1-KENTUCKY OAKS (4:51 p.m.)** - This edition of the sport's biggest race for 3-year-old fillies is generally being regarded as the deepest in many years. In most seasons, there are one or two that have distinguished themselves as a deserving favorite. This year, however, five or six fillies appear to be truly legitimate. The key then, is not to focus on who actually does go as the favorite, but to pick out a plum one or two in the 6 to 10-1 range that would be a third of that price in a normal year.

Home track prejudice aside, **Secret Oath (#1)** obviously qualifies on the value angle (6-1 morning line). Granted, the post position draw did her no favors by assigning her the rail, nor does her propensity of finding trouble, either at the break or in traffic. The simple truth, however, is that she is talented enough to overcome a lot of adversity. She possesses the rare ability to accelerate at any time which, until this point, has largely served her well. We won't know exactly how good her Arkansas Derby was to Cyberknife and Barber Road until Saturday, but those two colts are getting a lot of attention this

week. Her crushing win in the Honeybee gained additional creditability after distant third place-finisher **Yuugiri (#6)**, came back to capture the Fantasy and earn an Oaks spot of her own. She has continued to train steadily and has the benefit of a win over the Churchill strip. She also should benefit from a pace that looks on the glib side and the addition of the much-in-demand Luis Saez in the saddle. If the racing gods choose to smile on 86-year-young Wayne Lukas, and grant his star pupil any kind of trip, the prize will certainly be within reach.

An even better value lies in the form of **Nostalgic (#2, 15-1)**. The regally-bred daughter of Medaglia d'Oro out of the Tapit mare, Been Here Before, has truly come to hand for Hall of Fame conditioner Bill Mott, winning her two main track efforts this year, including the G3 Gazelle at Saturday's nine-furlong distance. Like the top choice, she does her best running from the second or third flight and would also benefit from a hot pace. With those qualifications, including Jose Ortiz being three-for-four on her, she appears to be a longshot player's dream.

Obviously, the three favorites deserve all the hype they are receiving. **Nest (#4)** looks a lot like last year's Oaks winner and eventual 3-year-old filly champion Malathaat, who also accounted for the G1 Ashland in her previous start. Both are trained by Todd Pletcher. **Nest** drew well for her stalking style although one would not be surprised if she was farther back than usual as she has chased :49-ish half mile splits in her two starts in 2022.

The undefeated **Kathleen O. (#10)** continues to impress for trainer Shug McGaughey. After breaking her maiden at the difficult debut distance of seven furlongs last fall at Aqueduct, she has faced nothing but stakes company since, winning each time while facing progressively stiffer competition. Like **Secret Oath**, the Upstart filly has displayed a mid-race burst that puts her in striking position in the blink of an eye. The 98 Beyer she earned in winning the Gulfstream Oaks last time is second to none in this field.

The fact that the reigning 2-year-old filly champ, who won her first and only start as a sophomore (albeit narrowly) in graded company is the 4-1 third choice in here speaks volumes as to how special this race truly is. No one fully expected **Echo Zulu (#7)** to be 100 percent for the Fair Grounds Oaks in late March with this clearly the goal for last season's Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies winner. She has had six weeks to take her game up a notch and almost certainly will.

**Hidden Connection (#3)** could prove to be a remarkably generous overlay at 20-1. Second by a scant nose when getting to **Echo Zulu** in the waning strides at Fair Grounds last time, she appears to be on the threshold of another move forward in her third start of the year following a solid juvenile campaign for trainer Bret Calhoun.

**Wagering Strategy - Win Play: #1**

**Flyer Win Play: #2**

**Exactas: 1 over 2, 3, 4, 7, 10; 2, 3, 4, 7, 10 over 1**

**Flyer Exacta Box: 1, 2, 3**