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Stakes Race Analysis by Jeff "Money" Taylor

Oaklawn Jockey Club

Saturday, May 7

OAKLAWN - RACE 11 - \$200,000 ARKANSAS BREEDERS' CHAMPIONSHIP (6:17 p.m.): It may not be the 20-horse spectacle that the Kentucky Derby presented about 20 minutes earlier, but this group of 14 Arkansas-breds should provide some interesting racing. Most are familiar names both to local racing fans and to each other as all but three have visited the local winner's circle in 2022.

Mrs. Beans (#13) has made two such trips, the most recent in a state-bred optional claiming affair early last month. The 4-year-old gelded son of Cyber Secret successfully stretched out to two turns following a belated fourth-place effort going six furlongs in the Nodouble Stakes against fellow Arkies the start before. That most recent start produced a career best Beyer Speed Figure of 84 which matches the best last race number of the entire field. He was claimed off that effort by Federico Villafranco for new owner Danny Caldwell for \$20,000. Those connections have teamed up with great success through the claim box through the years. A "bullet" workout of 1:00.20 two weeks ago indicates they have picked up another live one.

Veteran **Bandit Point (#2)** also earned an 84 Beyer in winning his most recent start. Making his first try at Saturday's 1 1/16-miles distance at the current stand after half a dozen sprints tries, he staged a four-wide rally after lagging early to be in time under regular rider Kelsi Harr. That success helped avenge a disqualification he suffered after impeding a rival before crossing the wire first in a lucrative optional spot late last year. The 7-year-old has proven ultra-consistent in the Arkansas-bred ranks through the years and is showing no sign of slowing down as he makes his 33rd Oaklawn start.

Tempt Fate (#10) won this event a year ago but has not crossed the wire first in five starts since. He did have his number put up via the **Bandit Point** DQ in that December contest but most recently finished a disappointing sixth when facing the crack sprinter Gar Hole in the Nodouble Breeders'. That compares sharply with his gate to wire victory in this race a year ago while in the midst of a four-race winning streak. His training pattern since that last start has been largely forgettable although an improving half mile of :50.60 this past Sunday could be a sign that he is coming around. He does not appear to have lost any of his early speed and if left alone up front, it is possible he reverts to his winning ways.

With what could be a busy early pace scenario, players may want to look at the late running **Big Success (#3)**. Although his one career win pales in comparison to the victory totals of his more seasoned rivals, he does seem to be an improving sort for trainer John Prather. He staged a willing rally to finish second in his most recent start as his Beyers continue to trend upward. If jockey David Cohen can work out a trip from near the back of this busy field, he could be in line for at least a share.

Bellamys Roan (#4) also has just a maiden score to his credit, but he too does his best running late. Popular reinsman Calvin Borel picks up the mount and his well-known ability to save ground and navigate traffic might be just the ticket in this large field. At 15-1 in the morning line, this one could also sneak in the bottom of the gimmicks at an attractive price.

Wagering Strategy - Win Play: #13
Exactas: 13 over 2, 3, 4, 10

CHURCHILL - RACE 12 - \$3,000,000 G1-KENTUCKY DERBY (5.57 p.m.): Trying to predict the possible pace scenario in this race has historically been difficult. Comparing internal fractions on 20 horses coming from all the major jurisdictions in this country as well as a couple from overseas creates an almost infinite number of possibilities. One thing that has been far more certain in recent years, however, is those who prefer to run *toward* the front have enjoyed far greater success than those who come from well back. That only stands to as frontrunners simply do not have to deal with the inevitable traffic issues that confront rallying types into and through the stretch. A second factor is that the days of suicidal early pace battles appear to be over. Time was that a sub :23 opening quarter and a sub :46 half mile fraction was a given. Not so much anymore.

With that advantage to forward placement early, **Epicenter (#3)** appears to be the one to beat. The son of the promising young sire Not This Time displayed commendable versatility in winning the Louisiana Derby, electing to rate just off the pace before delivering his customary crushing kick down the lane. The way he finished that 1 3/16-miles event left few wondering if Saturday's 1 1/4-miles would provide any difficulty for the Steve Asmussen trainee. The same distance constraint cannot be said for many of his rivals.

Also a winner at 1 3/16-miles is **Crown Pride (#7)**. Making his first start outside of his home country of Japan in the United Arab Emirates Derby at Meydan Racecourse in late March, he too tracked the early leaders before taking command turning for home, which is usually the portion of the Derby where winning moves are made. This colt also won at first asking going the unusual distance (at least for North American runners) 1 1/8-miles. He then won at that same distance in his second career start as well leaving little doubt surrounding his stamina capabilities. He has made a very favorable impression in Louisville this week according to many knowledgeable sources and with the enormous impact that Japanese representatives have made on the world horseracing stage the last couple of years, leave him out at your own risk.

Charge It (#8) will be making just his fourth career start on Saturday as the "less is more" trend in recent years regarding Derby preparation shows no sign of reversing. He looked the part of an inexperienced colt in the Florida Derby, lugging in twice in the late going costing him valuable real estate to eventual winner **White Abarrio**. He has continued to train well since that effort and also is likely to be lying in wait just off the early leaders. His mid gate post position should also serve him well.

Of those more inclined to do their best running in the latter stages, **Mo Donegal (#1)** could be the one making the biggest impact. Much has been made of his perceived poor post draw along the rail, but he won both the Remsen and recent Wood Memorial from that very same position in the gate. Granted, Saturday's task will be far more difficult with 19 rivals to deal with, but a slow beginning may not be as costly to him as most others since he likely runs the back early anyway. He should get a built-in ground saving journey and there are few better than Irad Ortiz to work out a trip. At 10-1 in price or thereabouts, he appears to be one of the better-value plays in the entire field and may be a rare exception to the "must be in striking position early to be successful" rule.

Morning line favorite **Zandon (#10)** is also likely to be near the back of the back in the early going. The Chad Brown charge rallied strongly through and around traffic to annex the Bluegrass at Keeneland in his final prep but could manage only a non-threatening third to a loose-on-the-lead **Epicenter** in the Risen Star at the Fair Grounds in February. He also finished a nose behind **Mo Donegal** when they met in the Remsen in December. Unlike **Mo Donegal's** potential double-digit price, however, backing him as the favorite given that his chances will hinge on a clean trip will not appeal to most value players.

There always seems to be a real bomber that sneaks the gimmicks in this landmark race so it may be prudent to consider at least a couple. **Tiz the Bomb (#9)** will be every bit of his assigned 30-1 and with good reason. Of his four career wins, all but one came over either the grass or synthetic. Although he did break his maiden over conventional dirt, two other efforts over the surface produced little in the way of results. Still, the modestly bred Hit It a Bomb (stud fee \$5,000) colt brought an eye-opening \$330,000 at auction so he must have been a looker. His recent work pattern over the Churchill main track is solid enough and trainer Kenny McPeck has a history of crashing the party in recent Triple Crown events.

Arkansas Derby runner-up **Barber Road (#14)** has not run as fast as most of his counterparts but he has shown the ability to be involved every time his connections lead him over. These hard-trying types often defy those who put emphasis on speed figures which is why they are always a value on tote. While likely not a serious win candidate, one could do worse than including him on a trifecta or super ticket or two.

Wagering Strategy - **Flyer Win Play: #7**
Exactas: 3 with 1, 7, 8, 9, 14; 1, 7, 8 with 3
Flyer Exacta Box: 1, 7, 8