



In Focus

Laurel Park stakes
September 19, 2015

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COMMONWEALTH CUP STAKES

- **RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 4 (2:42 EDT), Grade 2, \$250,000 purse, Fillies and mares 3 y.o. & up, 1 1/8 miles (Turf)
- **STORYLINE:** Formerly the Colonial Turf Cup run at Colonial Downs from 2005 to 2013 at a distance of 1 3/16 miles, the Virginia Equine Association (a coalition of flat, harness and jump horsemen and breeders) negotiated its renewal with the Maryland Jockey Club in order to preserve its graded stakes status. "If a stakes race is dormant for two consecutive years, it loses its grade," said Virginia HBPA Executive Director Frank Petramalo, speaking about the Colonial Turf Cup, Virginia Derby and Oaks. "We felt it was imperative that the HBPA fund the purse money for the three races this Fall even though they will be held in neighboring Maryland. When the VEA (Virginia Equine Alliance) brings thoroughbred racing to Leesburg's Morven Park in 2016, we want to open with a splash. Hosting graded stakes will aid in that transition."
- **RACE OVERVIEW:** Just seven are entered but there's a nice mix of early speed, tactical speed and closers. Translated: No one will "steal it" on the front end, nor should there be a pace meltdown. Only four of the runners have competed in a graded stakes, but three of them have tasted victory in such races.

THE SCOOP

- ✓ **THE FAVORITE AND TOP CONTENDERS** -- The morning line favorite **#2 – Mr Speaker (8-5)** made a splash as a 3-year-old winning three graded stakes on the turf, including the G1 Belmont Derby. The Shug McGaughey trainee has yet to duplicate that success at age 4, winning just one (an Optional Claimer) of four starts while being unplaced in the other three. Most recently was 4th as the 8-5 favorite in the 1¼ mile G2 Sky Classic @ Woodbine. Though a clear contender, he's 0 for 4 at 9 furlongs on the grass while... **#5 – Up With the Birds (9-5)** is the only two-time winner at 9 furlongs on the turf, but the 5-year-old son of Stormy Atlantic has lost six straight, all graded stakes. Making his Laurel Park debut, was last seen in Maryland at Pimlico on Preakness Day in the G2 Dixie, finishing 3rd, 4 lengths behind future turf star Ironicus. Trainer Graham Motion will give a leg up to local

COMMONWEALTH CUP

FACTS

- ✓ 10th running of a race begun at Colonial Downs as the Colonial Turf Cup.
- ✓ Originally designed as the prep for the Virginia Derby, it was opened to older horses in 2011.
- ✓ Three winners since the change: Rahystrada, Turbo Compressor, London Lane.
- ✓ Not contested in 2014, a victim of dispute between the track and horsemen.
- ✓ Always contested at 9.5 furlongs prior to this year.

2015 RACE NOTES

- ✓ Two runners – favorite Mr Speaker and second fave Up With the Birds – are Grade 1 winners.
- ✓ Two runners here – Talk Show Man (10-1) and Legendary (7-2) – own a win over the strip. Golden Glint is winless in two tries over the strip.
- ✓ Last weekend's turf routes played to inside speed: two of the three were won by horses wiring the field, and all three started from the one- or two-hole and ran primarily inside.

journeyman Trevor McCarthy for the first time, who will hope for an honest pace to help Birds' late running style... **#7 – Legendary (7-2)** has a win and runner-up effort from two starts at today's distance, the win coming in the G3 Knickerbocker at Belmont last October, which was his last trip to the Winners Circle. Looking to rebound from his worst defeat (12th by 25 lengths), in the G1 Arlington Million, trainer Niall Saville explains, "I should have scratched in the paddock. I didn't realize how bad the ground was. When I watched him go by the first time, I got a bad feeling in my stomach. Put a line through it and go on." Sheldon Russell, who won this race in 2011 at Colonial Downs aboard Rahystrada, will be in the irons.

- ✓ **LIVE AT A PRICE - #4 – Cut to Order (10-1)** claimed for \$12,500 from a N2L just five months ago, has reeled off five consecutive (turf) wins since for the Jamie Ness barn. Though grandsire *More Than Ready* offspring rarely are successful beyond 8½ furlongs, having 1993 Kentucky Derby winner *Sea Hero* as his damsire explains his recent win at 9 furlongs on the Monmouth Park lawn. Ambitiously placed here, but if he gets away with slow early fractions, a gate-to-wire upset isn't as far-fetched as one might think.
- ✓ **THE REST OF THE GANG -- #1 – El Jefe Grande (20-1)** ships in from Belmont as trainer Abigail Adsit's only entry on the Laurel Park 10-race card. Came up a neck short at Saratoga when 26-1 in an Optional Claimer in most recent effort. Not having the cleanest of trips in his last two, this closer should relish going 1/16th mile longer than ever before... **#3 – Golden Glint (20-1)** now in the barn of

Mary Eppler via \$40,000 claiming tag last outing when he trailed throughout on the dirt at Parx. Yikes! The good news is he's back on turf where he won in near gate-to-wire fashion this spring at Pimlico... **#6 – Talk Show Man (10-1)** has been off-the-board in two starts going 9 furlongs but owns a win in 4 starts on this turf course. Faced *Up With the Birds* in the G2 Dixie, was uncharacteristically racing near the lead and faltered late at long odds (21-1). This will be his 3rd start off layoff and was beaten favorite in last, two angles that most handicappers will take notice of when the price is right.

GQ SAYS...

1. **#1 – El Jefe Grande (20-1):** NY shipper, only entry for trainer Abigail Adsit, should get the 9 furlongs and with a clean trip could light up the toteboard in graded stakes debut with returning star Mike Luzzi in the irons.
2. **#5 – Up With the Birds (9-5):** Winless last six since July '14; 9 furlongs is his best distance (4:2-1-0); this will be 10th straight graded stakes which makes him by far the class of the field.
3. **#2 – Mr Speaker (8-5):** Seems to prefer a turf course with some "give" in it (good or soft); lack of recent rain indicates the turf will be firm. Shug's been in-the-money (4:2-0-2) with all of his shippers to Laurel this meet, and this one should make it five.

Analysis and selections by Gary Quill.

COMMONWEALTH DERBY

- **RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 9 (5:11 EDT), Grade 2, \$400,000 purse, 3yo, 1 1/8 miles (Turf)
- **STORYLINE:** Another one of the graded stakes from Colonial Downs, formerly the Virginia Derby, being presented by VEA (Virginia Equine Alliance) to preserve its graded stakes status. Prohibitive Morning Line favorite (6-5) Force the Pass looks to make amends for his loss in the G1 Secretariat at Arlington Park last month.
- **RACE OVERVIEW:** A field of eight entered and not one is local (i.e. based in Maryland). Half of this field last raced at Saratoga. There are five who have run in a graded stakes, four have hit the board while just one has been victorious.

THE SCOOP

- ✓ **THE FAVORITE AND TOP CONTENDERS** --Morning Line favorite **#5 – Force the Pass (6-5)** broke in air and raced 5-wide in the G1 Secretariat as the 3-2 favorite in most recent effort. Easy to excuse that 3rd place finish, the worst of his seven-race career. He catches a rather weak field here as far as graded stakes are concerned. There's enough early speed in here not to worry whether he'll have any problems running down the early pacesetters in deep stretch... **#1 – Go Around (5-2)**, owned by three-time Va. Derby winner Peter Vegso, has never been off-the-board in five career starts, all on the grass. Trainer Bill Mott ships in this son of *Medaglia d'Oro* from NY who has improved on his Brisnet speed figure with each outing. Interesting that Jose Lezcano, aboard for the last four efforts, elected to ride in NY (4 non-stakes races) instead of a \$400k stakes. Local jock Julian Pimentel picks up the mount... while Jose Ortiz takes over for his brother (Irak) on **#8 – Fundamental (6-1)**, another NY shipper who is a perfect 2 for 2 going today's 9-furlong distance. Chad Brown, who has quickly become the newest "King of the Turf" conditioners (27%), equipped this gray colt with blinkers in his latest test, which netted a 2-length victory in a N1X at Saratoga off a 3 month layoff.
- ✓ **LIVE AT A PRICE** -- The Irish bred **#3 – Great Dancer (8-1)** raced at age 2 in his homeland, taking four attempts to break his maiden. Relocated to the Mid-Atlantic (Fair Hill Training Center) in preparation

COMMONWEALTH DERBY

FACTS

- ✓ 17th running of a race begun at Colonial Downs as the Virginia Derby.
- ✓ Not contested in 2014, a victim of dispute between the track and horsemen.
- ✓ Every prior running was at 1 ¼ miles. Fastest running: 2007, Red Giant, 1:59.62.
- ✓ Once one of the most important sophomore grass races in the nation, winners include Paddy O'Prado, Gio Ponti, English Channel, and Kitten's Joy, among others.

2015 RACE NOTES

- ✓ Favorite Force the Pass owns a big class edge here as the only runner to have won a graded event. He's won two, the G1 Belmont Derby and G3 Penn Mile.
- ✓ Delaware-based Majestic Pride (30-1) is the only horse with a race over the surface; he came in 2nd that day.
- ✓ Last weekend's turf routes played to inside speed: two of the three were won by horses wiring the field, and all three started from the one- or two-hole and ran primarily inside.

for his sophomore campaign, he has improved with every race which coincidentally have also gotten longer (1 mile, 1 1/16, 1 1/8). He most recently scored versus N1X at Saratoga where he earned his personal best Brisnet#, which also happens to be the best in this field. There should be enough early pace in here to support his late running style.

✓ **THE REST OF THE GANG -- #2 – Vision Perfect (20-1)** finished 7th, 6 lengths behind *Go Around* (3rd) in the G3 Saranac @ Saratoga in his most recent race, running to his 29-1 odds. It was his first try tackling 9 furlongs, and he came up empty in the stretch. The pedigree suggests this distance might be a stretch, but Forest Boyce is at her best when riding on the turf. This will be 3rd start after layoff as VP tries to regain the 2-year-old form that saw him win 2 of first 4 races while earning black type with a runner-up finish in the G3 Pilgrim... whereas **#4 – Gallery (12-1)** makes just his second graded stakes appearance in his fourteenth career outing, was game in the G3 Penn Mile weakening late to finish just 2 length behind the winner, today's M/L favorite *Force the Pass*. Trying

9 furlongs for the first time is the biggest question mark, as he's gotten leg weary going 8½ failing to hold off rivals in the final furlong and will have to contend with... **#6 – One Go All Go (8-1)** and **#7 – Majestic Pride (30-1)**, both of whom will likely vie for the lead in the early stages of the race. The latter has never raced beyond 7½ furlongs on the grass and makes his graded stakes debut after a 3rd place effort sprinting in a N2X at Penn National. He's the only one in here with a race over the Laurel Park turf course, a runner-up effort in a 5½ furlong Optional Claimer for N1X. *One Go All Go* made his turf and 3-year-old debut a winning at Indiana Grand in gate-to-wire fashion, but was placed second via DQ. If the Laurel Park turf course, which will be firm, is kind to front runners, then this VA-bred has an outside chance to score the upset.

GQ SAYS...

1. **#5 – Force the Pass (6-5):** *Simply the class of the field; had a legitimate excuse (broke in air; 5-wide) when failing as the 3-2 favorite in the G1 Secretariat; gets perfect stalking trip and pounces on early leaders in mid-stretch to win in a hand ride; run don't walk to the betting windows if you can get 1-2 or better*
2. **#3 – Great Dancer (8-1):** *Hasn't reached his full potential ; though taking a big step up from N1X win, the distance fits him perfectly and gets a favorable pace setup to come flying in the final furlong*
3. **#1 – Go Around (5-2):** *Seeking improvement off that graded stakes debut when 3rd as the 2-1 second choice; needs to get a smart ride from Pimentel as this Mott runner is a tad better than the Chad Brown entry (#8 – Fundamental)*