



In Focus

Laurel Park stakes
September 26, 2015

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G3 COMMONWEALTH OAKS

- **RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 10 (5:41 EDT), Grade 3, \$150,000 purse, 3yo fillies, 1 1/8 miles (Turf)
- **STORYLINE:** Formerly the Virginia Oaks run at Colonial Downs from 2004 to 2013, 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."

THE SCOOP

#1 **Catch a Rising Star (20-1)** ran a decent fourth in MTH's Little Silver in her only try on grass but needs further improvement here... #2 **Lola Beaux (12-1)** is a neck and a nose from having a 3-race win streak. Had a game try last out at the Spa, leading late before settling for third at long odds and a repeat puts her in the mix here. One of two to run back has won... #3 **Red Sashay (15-1)**, a Jane Cibelli trainee, owns two stakes wins and ran credibly when fifth in the G3 Boiling Springs. She ran second in lone local try in a good allowance heat vs. elders... #4 **Miss Bullistic (15-1)** looked like she could be any kind when crushing Selima rivals last fall but has made a single 2015 start, finishing 6th in the 6-furlong Jameela. Seemed to be outfooted early in that race, rallied nicely but too late. Distance the question mark here, as she's never been beyond 7 furlongs – but sire Bullsbay was a G1 winner at 9 furlongs on dirt... #5 **Todegica (20-1)** figures to have her hands full after failing twice in N1X company, and rider Trevor McCarthy jumps ship to morning line second choice – though trainer Motion does attract Sheldon Russell here... G3-winning juvenile #6 **Rainha Da Bateria (12-1)** hasn't moved forward in her

COMMONWEALTH OAKS

FACTS and TRENDS

- ✓ 11th running of a race begun at Colonial Downs as the Virginia Oaks.
- ✓ Among the past winners: Dreaming of Anna (2007), Eclipse champ grassy 2yo filly of 2006, and subsequent Grade 1 winner My Typhoon (2005).
- ✓ 11 of 13 turf route winners at LRL this meet have broken from 5-hole or farther in.
- ✓ 3 of 13 winners wired their fields; 5 of 13 were in 5th or worse or at least 5 lengths behind after 4 furlongs.
- ✓ Most runners were on the rail or just off most of the way.
- ✓ In 8 of 13 races, the 4 furlong leader finished in top 3.

NICK'S PICKS

1. 11 - Zvarkhova
2. 8 - Stormy Regatta
3. 2 – Lola Beaux

3 wins at 3 different venues, not enough for talented "Regatta" vs. able foreigner.

sophomore campaign. But let's not hold that messy Riskaverse against her *toooo* much – filly had all sorts of trouble, and rider eased her in late stages after she drifted towards the outside rail... Dirt stakes winner **#7 Gypsy Judy (15-1)** had her best grass result when a loose on the lead third in the Penn Oaks back in May. She defeated one of today's rivals when posting a win over the strip two back but has lost to others... Christophe Clement's an infrequent visitor to Maryland but shows here with top contender **#8 Stormy Regatta (7-2)**, winner of two straight stakes, both by a nose. This runner's won four of five on the lawn, including two stakes, and enters with a bullet work... Shug McGaughey doesn't ship to Laurel without intentions – 10 straight in the money and 11 of 27 winners (74 percent in the money) since 2012, which suggests you ought to consider **#9 Onus (4-1)**, who owns two of those local wins – by a combined 18 ½ lengths. It's hard to know what she's beaten exactly – favored in both, 1-5 in her last, and none of four to run back from the last has won – but she's done it easily, and Shug's not likely here if he doesn't think he can win... Irish import **#10 Ortiga (8-1)** has failed to win a first-level allowance twice for Leah Gyarmati though was recently a good second at Saratoga. She's been a little rank early in both her North American starts, finished the last with “good energy.” Defeated by Zvarkhova two back... French import **#11 Zvarkhova (3-1)** lands in the Chad Brown barn and delivered a good win in a Saratoga allowance to debut stateside, with runner-up winning next out... **#12 Heart of Midway (12-1)** has won two straight for Tom Proctor, and three rivals from last won next out. Notably, jockey Brian Pedroza joins the horse, his only mount of the day at Laurel...



Illustration 1: Gypsy Judy won the Wide Country on the dirt.

BROOKMEADE STAKES

- **RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 4 (2:42 EDT), \$60,000 purse, Fillies and mares 3yo and up, Virginia-bred/Virginia-sired, 1 1/16 miles (Turf)
- **STORYLINE:** For the second straight year, a handful of Virginia-bred/Virginia-sired races make their way to Laurel Park, and while last year's winner won't be in the house, 2013 runner-up Leda's Swan will be, to take on a modest group of older fillies and mares.

MAJOR CONTENDERS

Favorite **#5 Seeking Her Glory (5-2)** found the water a little too deep at the Spa in August, but there was nothing wrong with her third-place finish against more similar rivals locally prior to that; the two that beat her both are in the Oaks on this card. Daughter of Giant's Causeway was G3-placed as a sophomore... 2014 Rosenberger Memorial winner **#3 Complete St. (3-1)** hasn't quite been able to replicate that form since and is winless in five local tries, which makes expected short odds on this curiously handled runner (ran vs. boys two back, without Lasix last and here) tough to get excited about... 2013 Brookmeade runner-up **#6 Leda's Swan (4-1)** had the worst of the trip that day, missing by a neck. The top two from her last start, at Gulfstream, both returned victorious – but that was back in December, and trainer Reid Nagle has seen just one of his 13 runners returning from similar layoffs in recent years finish in the money... **#10 Why Not Be Queen (5-1)** enters with a two-race win streak and enters the barn of trainer Jamie Ness after being claimed last out for \$20,000. Ness has a positive ROI first off the claim, and this runner figures to control the early pace. The bad news: none of the four to run back from her last has finished better than sixth... **#8 For Finery (20-1)** overcame traffic and closed nicely to break her maiden last out, and show horse Promotional graduated in her next try. It's a big jump, for sure, but the odds should be attractive and she enters off a bullet work... Trainer Susan Cooney won this race a year ago with hard-hitting Embarr, and while her runner this year, **#9 Rapid Rhythm (15-1)**, doesn't have Embarr's glossy credentials, she has the feel of a potential upsetter. Though eighth last out, she was beaten less than six lengths, about 4 1/2 behind the favorite here. She was hung out wide on both turns that day, but here attracts turf ace Forest Boyce, who hits at a 20 percent clip with a positive ROI with Cooney.

BROOKMEADE STAKES FACTS and TRENDS

- ✓ 19th running of a race begun at Colonial Downs.
- ✓ Last year's winner was the solid Embarr,.
- ✓ 2013 runner-up returns here.
- ✓ 11 of 13 turf route winners at LRL this meet have broken from 5-hole or farther in.
- ✓ 3 of 13 winners wired their fields; 5 of 13 were in 5th or worse or at least 5 lengths behind after 4 furlongs.
- ✓ Most runners were on the rail or just off most of the way.
- ✓ In 8 of 13 races, the 4 furlong leader finished in top 3.

NICK'S PICKS

1. 5 – Seeking Her Glory
2. 6 – Leda's Swan
3. 3 – Complete St.

Better chance for "Glory" at Laurel. Nagle's filly 2nd in the '13 Brookmeade at CNL

JAMESTOWN STAKES

- **RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 6 (3:39 EDT), \$60,000 purse, 2yo, Virginia-bred/Virginia-sired, 5 ½ furlongs (Turf)
- **STORYLINE:** Babies square off in a wide open affair featuring 13 runners.

MAJOR CONTENDERS

Favorite **#4 Gem (7-2)** finished fifth in her career debut against maidens at Saratoga, and winner Outsider Art doubled up with a next-out win in allowance company. Gem was done after taking up near the quarter pole but stuck with it well enough in the lane and was beaten less than four. Trainer Eddie Kenneally has sent five horses to Laurel in recent years, and all five finished in the money – but no winners... The most experienced runner in the field, **#1 Holiday Wishes (4-1)**, ran a distant third in the Selima two races back and has a win from two tries on the lawn... **#9 Queen Caroline (6-1)** lost virtually all chance when missing the break in her debut at Saratoga, and it just got worse from there. But note the Spa work tab, including a bullet half-mile, and also her odds in that race: just 3.30-1. Blame filly gets Lasix here, and an improved effort would be no surprise... First time on the lawn for **#7 Cherokee Cousin (10-1)** showed plenty of promise, though just a fourth place finish. Zanjero gelding had to steady in the lane when promising rail route closed up, and then alter out to mid-course. He was beaten just 1 1/2 lengths in a race in which he might have been best, and shows a subsequent half-mile work in 46 1/5 seconds... Trainer Mike Trombetta brings two runners to the party, **#5 Occasionally (10-1)** and **#13 Street Miz (15-1)**. The former showed late interest after a sluggish start in his debut going short, then faded from the scene going long, and gets blinks today. The latter gave an improved effort in his second start last out on the lawn. Notably, jockey Julian Pimentel – Trombetta's go-to rider – jumps off Occasionally to get on Street Miz.

JAMESTOWN STAKES FACTS and TRENDS

- ✓ 9th running of a race begun at Colonial Downs.
- ✓ Speedy Hooligan, for trainer Wesley Ward took this race last year and is in a later race on the card.
- ✓ Of 9 turf sprints contested so far at the Laurel meet, five winners led at every call.
- ✓ On the other hand, three of nine winners were 7th or worse early on.
- ✓ In eight of nine races, the horse on the lead at the first call finished in the money.
- ✓ Eight of nine winners were in the five-hole or farther outside.
- ✓ But most winners found an inside-type trip, using (generally) their speed to attain good position.

NICK'S PICKS

1. 5 – Occasionally
2. 9 – Queen Caroline
3. 6 – Free Union

Experience, even when not the best, can still be valuable for 2-year old fillies.

BERT ALLEN STAKES

- **RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 7 (4:10 EDT), \$60,000 purse, 3yo and up, Virginia-bred/Virginia-sired, 1 1/16 miles (Turf)
- **STORYLINE:** Defending champ Rose Brier and G3-placed Special Envoy square off in an interesting renewal of the Bert Allen.

MAJOR CONTENDERS

Six-year-old **#2 Rose Brier (1-1)** was a dominant winner of this race a year ago for trainer Jane Cibelli, and nothing the Mizzen Mast gelding has done since calls his form into question. He's won one of seven this year and was beaten two lengths or less in a pair of Grade 3 events. Most recently he was second a length in a MNR stake, and one of the runners from there won a minor stake next out. His last race was August 1, and he's fired fresh before; entering this one with a steady work tab, there's plenty of reason to think he runs big here... The improving **#3 Special Envoy (7-5)** just missed last out, running second a neck in the G3 Cliffhanger at Monmouth Park. That was a game effort against tough company at 14-1 odds – he led in the lane before favored Middleburg came and got him – and a repeat puts him right there in this event. Interestingly, the Arnaud Delacour trainee is showing three recorded breezes since that August 23 test... Likable veteran **#8 Dannhauser (10-1)** won this event in 2013, its last running at Colonial Downs, and was third here a year ago. But he's made just two starts this year for trainer Kathleen O'Connell, and neither was much to write home about. He enters off a bullet work, and backers will have to hope his third off a layoff is a major step forward... It's something of a shot in the dark, but if King Leatherbury thinks **#5 Congrats to Ken (30-1)** is worth a shot in here, maybe he's worth a look. A \$25,000 claim in July, this runner gets blinkers on and, in his second off the layoff, also has Lasix for just the second time. He'll need to take a major step forward, but if he did, he'd blow up the tote board... Charles Town-based Jeff Runco doesn't train a lot of grass horses, but **#7 Titan Alexander (10-1)** is a handy sort who can do turf and dirt. Prior to his last, his two best Beyers came in turf starts, of which he's made only three. Runco's tried two times recently to get him back on the lawn, but those races came off. He enters on a two-race win streak...

BERT ALLEN STAKES FACTS and TRENDS

- ✓ 17th running of a race begun at Colonial Downs.
- ✓ Defending champion Rose Brier returns to try to double up.
- ✓ 11 of 13 turf route winners at LRL this meet have broken from 5-hole or farther in.
- ✓ 3 of 13 winners wired their fields; 5 of 13 were in 5th or worse or at least 5 lengths behind after 4 furlongs.
- ✓ Most runners were on the rail or just off most of the way.
- ✓ In 8 of 13 races, the 4 furlong leader finished in top 3.

NICK'S PICKS

1. 3 – Special Envoy
2. 6 – Curve of Stones
3. 2 – Rose Brier

Last year's Allen winner returns ready for Delacour duel. Longshot splits.

OAKLEY STAKES

- **RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 8 (4:41 EDT), \$60,000 purse, Fillies and mares 3yo and up, Virginia-bred/Virginia-sired, 5 ½ furlongs (Turf)
- **STORYLINE:** Flashy first out winner Exaggerated and 2014 Jamestown winner Hooligan face off in a turf spring.

MAJOR CONTENDERS

#4 Exaggerated (5-2) impressed in her debut last month, turning in a professional effort to win by a couple against local maidens as the favorite, and a repeat by the Arnaud Delacour trainee might be enough to get the money here. Blame filly is cross-entered but looks likely to face the starter here, and gets Daniel Centeno in the irons; Centeno and Delacour have ridiculously good stats together, including a \$2 ROI of almost \$3... Wesley Ward runners are typically speedy and precocious, and **#11 Hooligan (2-1)**, the morning line favorite, was no exception. She won the juvenile Jamestown last year in her second career start and followed that up with an allowance win at Pimlico – but she hasn't visited the winner's circle in three tries since. Most recently she ran fifth in a Saratoga allowance after steadying out of contention on the turn. An improved effort here would be no surprise... The only other runner in single digits is **#5 Gratzie (8-1)**, who's working on a 15-month losing streak. The Two Punch filly's never been on the lawn, and her breeding is inconclusive about the green stuff... **#3 Found (12-1)** has made only a single, not very promising start on the grass. But her dirt form is solid, with three wins and six other in-the-money finishes, and two back she crushed a CT allowance field by 10 while recording a Beyer of 82. She was sixth in her last, in the \$150,000 Sugar Maple against a pretty rough crowd but has been away since April 18. Trainer Carla Morgan does fairly well bringing horses back off long layoffs, and this one's breeding – dam Hilarity, by Kingmambo, did all of her running on the turf – suggests the surface switch could work... Whatever's gone wrong with **#1 Trish's Wish (10-1)** in her last few has gone pretty spectacularly wrong: she's been sixth or worse three straight. But the Henry Carroll trainee's previous efforts, including a June win against MTH allowance foes, are in range of this group...

OAKLEY STAKES FACTS and TRENDS

- ✓ 17th running of a race begun at Colonial Downs.
- ✓ Runners include Hooligan, who won last year's Jamestown.
- ✓ Of 9 turf sprints contested so far at the Laurel meet, five winners led at every call.
- ✓ On the other hand, three of nine winners were 7th or worse early on.
- ✓ In eight of nine races, the horse on the lead at the first call finished in the money.
- ✓ Eight of nine winners were in the five-hole or farther outside.
- ✓ But most winners found an inside-type trip, using (generally) their speed to attain good position.

NICK'S PICKS

1. 4 – Exaggerated
2. 2 – Nancy's Gone Wild
3. 11 – Hooligan

Last year's Jamestown winner comes finds tough foes upon returning to MD.

PUNCH LINE STAKES

- **RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 9 (5:11 EDT), \$60,000 purse, 3yo and up, Virginia-bred/Virginia-sired, 5 ½ furlongs (Turf)
- **STORYLINE:** Defending champ Two Notch Road will be a solid favorite, but other contenders might have a say in the outcome.

MAJOR CONTENDERS

#9 Two Notch Road (1-1) won this race impressively a year ago, and while he hasn't quite returned to those heights – in part, perhaps, because of some awfully tough spots, including last year's G1 Shadwell Turf Mile, where he ran eighth behind Wise Dan – he's continued to run pretty solid races. His two sprint tries on firm turf this season – third in the McSorley, third in allowance company – have been good enough to get him the nod as fave here... **#4 Simmstown (9-2)** is officially winless in six tries on the turf, but there's a caveat: all came early in his career (none since '13), and in one of those, the 2010 Jamestown, he crossed the line first but was DQed. Trainer Mark Salvaggio claimed him from Jeff Runco in his last, an easy win at CT, and gelded him. Jockey Andrew Wolfsont comes down from PEN for the ride, and that jockey-trainer combo hits at a 20 percent strike rate... **#3 Anybodyreallyknow (6-1)** began his career on turf, making four straight starts on the green – but hasn't been back on it in 16 tries. He had a win and a third from those four tries, so his grass aptitude is good enough. He has the look of a horse worth about \$15,000 or so, which might be good enough to get a piece here but probably won't get the big check. He ran third against starter allowance foes last out, just 13 days ago... **#6 Service for Ten (8-1)** has made a single try on grass, running a non-descript fourth in a five-horse allowance where grass star Ben's Cat ran second. This guy owns a huge class edge on this group – but it's all on dirt... Three other runners who tried this event last year are back: **#1 Pride of the Fleet (30-1)** ran eighth a year ago and most recently, in May, was eighth going 1 1/4 miles at Great Meadow; **#5 Cap'n Raymond (10-1)** was 10th last year but has run some OK races this year, finishing in the money in three of five starts; and **#10 Jake Rattle N Roll (30-1)**, who was ninth a year ago, looks to be nearing the end of his career at age 10 and with no wins since 2013.

PUNCH LINE STAKES FACTS and TRENDS

- ✓ 16th running of a race begun at Colonial Downs.
- ✓ Defending champ Two Notch Road looks to repeat.
- ✓ Of 9 turf sprints contested so far at the Laurel meet, five winners led at every call.
- ✓ On the other hand, three of nine winners were 7th or worse early on.
- ✓ In eight of nine races, the horse on the lead at the first call finished in the money.
- ✓ Eight of nine winners were in the five-hole or farther outside.
- ✓ But most winners found an inside-type trip, using (generally) their speed to attain good position.

NICK'S PICKS

1. 5 – Cap'n Raymond
2. 9 – Two Notch Road
3. 3 – Anybodyreallyknow

Veteran Two Notch back to defend his Punch Line versus several veterans.