



In Focus

Laurel Park stakes

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MARYLAND RACING MEDIA STAKES

THE SCOOP

1. **Pangburn (7-2)** – Multiple graded stakes placed 4-year-old hails from the barn of Tony Dutrow; fourth in Laurel Park debut last outing in the Thirty Eight Go Go Stakes on Dec. 26 travelling one mile, was 3-wide on the turn and offered no rally in the stretch; desperately searching for 2 and 3-year-old form that had connections dreaming of the KY Oaks in 2015.
2. **Gypsy Judy (12-1)** – All three career victories have come on the Laurel Park dirt oval; switch to turf after eighth-place finish in G2 Black-Eyed Susan Stakes did not prove fruitful (6: 1-0-1); return to dirt in \$100 Safely Kept here on Nov. 14 was ugly (9th by 18

lengths) with only 3 works since; adds blinkers.

3. **Mei Ling (4-5)** – Todd Pletcher seeks to become the first trainer to win this event three times. He ships in from New York this KY-bred daughter of *Empire Maker*, after two runner-up finishes in her past two efforts, in the G3 Go for Wand Handicap and most recently in the \$100k Ladies Handicap, both at Aqueduct. One of three mounts on the card for Aqueduct leading rider Jose L. Ortiz.

4. **Lionhearted Lady (10-1)** – Local runner stepped up in class to compete in minor stakes in '15 with success versus state-breds; failed as 4-5 Post Time

favorite in restricted stakes just 14 days ago when in tight at 3/16th pole, then fell after the wire.

5. **Agawa (15-1)** – Ships in from New York for trainer Chris Englehart (23%); on Jan. 3 made first start in 6 months in N2X Optional Claimer at Aqueduct, finishing a distant third while runner-up came back to win \$100k stakes on Super Bowl Sunday; is 0 for 4 on a fast dirt track but part of Exacta in all three starts on an off track; unfortunately the track should be fast on race day.
6. **Medaglia d'Argento (15-1)** – Been sprinting since being claimed

RACE OVERVIEW

Group includes graded-placed runners Pangburn, Mei Ling, and Joint Return (2nd in 2014 G1 Alabama, among other races). Seven of eight enter off a loss.

THE PICKS

1. **#3 – Mei Ling (4-5):** *Pletcher runners usually do not come south from New York unless they plan on picking up a win purse; not to say they always do (9:3-2-0 at meet) but this gal boasts the top Brisnet Prime Power#.*
2. **#1 – Pangburn (7-2):** *A. Dutrow still seeks first win of meet (0 for 25) but has a shot with this filly; has shown some early foot in the past to be a threat early and throughout the contest.*
3. **#7 – Joint Return (8-1):** *Though "outrun" in her most recent race, she earned the 3rd best "last out" speed figure of this bunch; T. McCarthy and J. Servis teamed up for a win earlier in the meet.*
4. **#2 – Gypsy Judy (12-1):** *Adds blinkers in hopes of getting engaged in the race early; both dirt track victories have come at Laurel Park.*

(Thanks to Gary Quill for his handicapping prowess.)

MD. RACING MEDIA FACTS

- ✓ Race 5, 2:43 p.m. EST
- ✓ 1 1/16 miles, \$75,000 purse
- ✓ Just the 3rd running at 1 1/16 miles; first two were in '92 and '93
- ✓ Fillies and mares 4yo and up
- ✓ 25th running, named in honor of the Md. Racing Media Association.

from Linda Rice in July '15 (6 races back) without hitting the board, four of those races have been in minor stakes; switches from George Weaver to Tim Woolley barn, which gets 31% of his first time runners to Winner's Circle.

7. **Joint Return (8-1)** – Has faced the toughest competition among rivals in here, competing in 10 graded stakes during her 20 race career, earning black type in four of them; spent this winter in Florida prepping for her 5-year-old debut, in the \$50k Wayward Lass at Tampa, but was outrun; Laurel leading rider Trevor McCarthy gets the call.
8. **Blisstikus (15-1)** – Exits gate to wire score in N3X Optional Claimer over a good, sealed Laurel surface going one mile; has given a good account of herself when placed in WV-bred stakes races, but ran evenly in first open stakes try; 1 for 1 at today's distance.

JOHN B. CAMPBELL HANDICAP

THE SCOOP

1. **Act of Madness (20-1)** – Fresh off Mary Eppler claim out of a \$32k N2X Optional Claimer, one has to wonder if this 38-race veteran was entered as an insurance policy (aka rabbit) for Eppler's other runner and Morning Line favorite #2 – Page McKenney, just in case the field shaped up with a potential lone speed runner... which it didn't; if he runs, his only stakes-level appearances have come in the 9 furlong Tampa Turf Classic (Apr. '15; 5th when 17-1) and in the 2013 G3 Ohio Derby (moved up from 5th to 4th via DQ when 6-1).

JOHN B. CAMPBELL FACTS

- ✓ Race 6, 3:13 p.m. EST
- ✓ 1 1/8 miles, \$75,000 purse
- ✓ 4yo and up
- ✓ 62nd running, named for handicapper/racing secretary John B. Campbell, who held those positions at Bowie for two years but was best known for weighting the triple dead heat in the 1944 Carter.
- ✓ Race began at Bowie in 1954, moved to Pimlico in 1985 and Laurel in 2001.
- ✓ Stakes record at 1 1/8 miles: Redding Colliery (2010), 1:47 1/5

2. **Page McKenney (7-5)** – Defending champion from the aforementioned Mary Eppler barn; claimed for \$16k 2½ years ago has become a \$1 million earner via multiple graded stakes placings; has a current streak of 22 consecutive finishes in-the-money, 19 of them being part of the Exacta; this will be his 18th straight appearance in a stakes race; should get a perfect stalking trip as there is plenty of early speed to chase down in the final furlongs.

3. **Kobel (15-1)** – This PA-bred has seen a few of these in here before (4th to *Page McKenney* and *Kid Cruz* two races back), typically setting the pace in hopes of stealing it, but that's unlikely with the group entered; his distance comfort zone is 8-8½ furlongs as his only nine-furlongs race came the 2014 Private Terms Stakes where he finished dead last when 114-1.

4. **Warrioroftheroses (15-1)** – There's only one way this 7-year-old gelded son of A.P. Warrior runs... that's on the front; in every race he gets the first call but has never made every pole a winning one in five career efforts travelling today's distance; gave a top effort in last outing, third race after a layoff, by salvaging SHOW purse money behind *Page McKenney* and *Golden Glint* in \$75k Native Dancer here.

5. **Pappa Portmore (30-1)** – Lightly raced (11:5-0-2) 6-year-old was away from the track for nearly two years, when he returned 2 months ago; has been protected in three optional claimers sprinting; appears to be slowly regaining old form that saw him win 5 of his first 7 career starts; late runner is a live longshot as he'll relish more distance, but this is his first going nine-furlongs.
6. **Golden Glint (6-1)** – Makes third start for Laurel Park leading conditioner Kieron Magee after claim for \$32k; earned second triple-digit Brisnet# (100) of his career when runner-up to *Page McKenney* in most recent effort; loves the local oval as he's never been off the board (10:4-5-1).
7. **Souper Lucky (8-1)** – Returns to give this event another shot after sixth-place finish in 2015 when sent off as the 9-2 third betting choice; been away since mid-September after failing as 4-5 favorite (5th by 10 after being steadied in tight quarters on final turn) in the \$75k Sensitive Prince; tough spot for a return but has won and been runner-up in only other "1st race after layoff" outings.
8. **Classic Giacnroll (15-1)** – Early in his career he showed promise and was briefly on the KY Derby Trail but appeared to just spin his wheels at that level; this 5-year-old gelded son of Giacomo is bred to get nine-furlongs, but has yet to hit the board in three starts, albeit two in G2 events, at this distance; runner-up in most recent race behind *Any Court Inastorm* who was previously third in Jennings Handicap.
9. **Sheikinator (20-1)** – This 5-year-old son of Curlin should have no problem stretching out to 1 1/8 miles for the first time after an easy win at Penn National versus N1X; always well-backed but will be a value play here as he takes his first crack at a stakes races; Toledo/Brooks combo has been lethal (30%) at the current meet.
10. **Lucky Lotto (12-1)** – NY shipper for trainer Edward Barker who won with first Laurel Park starter of the meet last weekend; untested at nine-furlongs but has the plodding running style that could see him pass tired rivals; exits a third-place effort in the \$125k Jazil Stakes at Aqueduct on Jan. 16.
11. **Kid Cruz (7-2)** – Graded stakes winner has the gaudy Brisnet speed figures to challenge the defending champ as he was runner-up behind *Page McKenney* three races back at Penn National; won only start at Laurel Park ('14 Private Terms Stakes) but needs to shake recent efforts where he has hung in the stretch.

RACE OVERVIEW

Millionaire Page McKenney and graded winner Kid Cruz seem to own a class edge on this group and are the only two with a win at the trip.

THE PICKS

1. **#2 – Page McKenney (7-5):** Can this gelding continue this amazing string of victories and/or runner-up finishes? Of course he can! He's been nothing short of a machine and only a speed favoring track can derail him.
2. **#7 – Souper Lucky (8-1):** Took a break from races and training in the Fall; work tab since resuming A.M. drills has been phenomenal; has won in 1st race off the bench in the past.
3. **#3 – Kobel (15-1):** With sub-freezing temps expected on race day, the track could well be speed favoring, which greatly increases this one's chances to go gate to wire.
4. **#11 – Kid Cruz (7-2):** Looks to go 2 for 2 at Laurel Park as he won the Private Terms in '14; latest races indicate he's not in top form so using him underneath is the way to go.

Grade 2

BARBARA FRITCHIE HANDICAP



Figure 1 Lady Sabelia won the '15 Fritchie. Photo by Laurie Asseo.

THE SCOOP

1. **Sweet On Smokey (20-1)** – Looked impressive in winning the \$75k What A Summer stakes here in her last outing; takes major step up into graded stakes in an effort to complete a natural Hat Trick; never off the board at Laurel Park (5:3-1-1); was runner-up to a next out winner in only race going seven-furlongs, three races back.
2. **Clothes Fall Off (8-1)** – Connections should be doing a rain dance (3:2-1-0 on an off track) but there is no chance of precipitation in the forecast; her only off-the-board effort came this past summer in the G2 Prioress at Saratoga for trainer Kiaran McLaughlin, seeking his first win from four starters at the current Laurel Park meet; tries seven-furlongs after sprinting shorter distances in her first nine career races.
3. **Hot City Girl (9-5)** – Ships in from NY for Linda Rice off a second-place finish in the G1 La Brea at Santa Anita Dec. 26, which followed three consecutive victories by a combined 14 lengths, including

the seven-furlong \$100k Safely Kept at Laurel Nov. 14 and the G3 Charles Town Oaks in September. In the La Brea, she set a strong early pace, as she did in her three previous wins, before finishing a half-length behind the winner.

4. **Princess Violet (6-1)** – Winner of the seven-furlong G1 Madison at Keeneland last spring and was runner-up to *Lady Sabelia* in the Fritchie last year, her only two races at this distance; was most recently fourth in the \$100k Interborough Stakes at Aqueduct on Jan. 9 and is winless in her last four. NY-based trainer Michael Hushion seeks his second win in as many starters at the current Laurel Park meet.
5. **Lady Sabelia (2-1)** – The defending champion trained by Robin Graham is coming in off victories in the \$100k Willa On the Move at Laurel on Dec. 5 and the \$100k Pumpkin Pie at Belmont on Nov. 1. The 6-year-old daughter of *Majestic Warrior* has won 10 of 18 starts, including 8 of her last 11; has won five consecutive start over the Laurel Park dirt oval.
6. **Dancing House (5-1)** – McLaughlin's other starter who exits a second-place finish to the 2015 Eclipse Award winning Champion Female Sprinter, *La Verdad* in the \$100k Interborough Stakes at Aqueduct on Jan. 9, her first start since mid-April; with only ten races on her resume', this versatile 5-year-old daughter of *Tapit* has been successful

on turf (6:2-1-2) as well as dirt (3:2-1-0) along with a third-place finish over a sloppy Saratoga surface in the G1 Spinaway.

7. **Wonder Gal (10-1)** – This NY-bred from the Leah Gyamati barn cuts back in distance after a disappointing third-place finish as the 4-5 favorite in the one mile and seventy yards \$100k Ladies Handicap over a sloppy Aqueduct track on Jan. 9; she competed in seven straight graded stakes races early in her career following her debut, a 14½ length victory in the \$125k Lynbrook Stakes at Belmont.

BARBARA FRITCHIE FACTS

- ✓ Race 8, 3:43 p.m. EST
- ✓ 7 furlongs, \$300,000 purse
- ✓ Fillies and mares, 4yo and up
- ✓ 64th running, named for Frederick resident immortalized in Whittier's 1864 poem for standing up to invading Confederate troops. "Shoot, if you must, this old gray head, but spare your country's flag," she said."
- ✓ Race began at Bowie in 1952, moved to Laurel in 1985.
- ✓ Stakes record at 7 furlongs: Tappiano (1989), 1:21 2/5

RACE OVERVIEW

Speedy Lady Sabelia seeks to become first repeat Fritchie winner since the great Xtra Heat ('02-'03). Other multiple winners includes Too Bald ('68-'69), Twixt ('74-'75), and Skipat, who won in '79 and '81. But G1 winner Princess Violet and G1-placed Hot City Girl may have something to say about that.

THE PICKS

1. **#3 – Hot City Girl (9-5):** *NFL network fans will relate to this... BOLD PREDICTION: This gal will set a new track record for seven-furlongs, which is 1:20.95, in gate to wire fashion*
2. **#6 – Dancing House (5-1):** *Any runner who can be runner-up to La Verdad, 2015 Eclipse Award winner, deserves a shot no matter where she lands in her next race... which is here.*
3. **#2 – Clothes Fall Off (8-1):** *Visually impressive lately with a running style that indicates she'll get the additional distance; McLaughlin turns to local jock (J. Toledo) to pull the upset.*
4. **#5 – Lady Sabelia (2-1):** *May not be in top condition this year due to snowstorm two weeks ago that interrupted training schedule; might get cooked by Hot City Girl if Karamanos tries to run with her*