



2017

## In Focus: January Stakes



Frank Vespe  
The Racing Biz  
1/21/2017

## Frank Whiteley, Jr. Stakes

**RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 4 (2:00pm EST), \$75,000 guaranteed purse for 3-year-olds, 7 Furlongs (dirt). 5<sup>th</sup> running.

**LAST YEAR** Never Gone South won by seven lengths in 1:23.92.

### The Picks

1. **#1 High Roller (7-2):** Nothing wrong with this guy's ledger to date. Debut winner ran third behind uber-talented El Areeb in the Lewis and fought on to the end – behind The Great Ronaldo – at probably too-short distance of 5 ½ furlongs. Added ground a plus and may allow him to be a bit closer to the early action.
2. **#2 – O Dionysus (6-5):** Big try last out in just-miss effort against undefeated Irish War Cry. That was his first try with blinks, and maybe they help this talented head case keep his eyes on the prize. The talent's there, for sure.
3. **#6 – Eastern Bay (10-1):** This one's bred to be a runner – half-sib to three \$100,000 earners, including \$329k John Jones – and rallied smartly to maiden score in second try. Finished behind Generous Jack on debut, rallying from the clouds to be beaten by two. Added ground figures to his benefit.
4. **#3 – Generous Jack (15-1):** Won nicely at first asking in mid-December, and two rivals from that one ran one-two in their return. His race was notably slower than Blackjack Buster's on the same day, but horses that rival beat were bested by ones Generous Jack defeated. Note that rider Toledo jumps ship for the favorite in here.



*O Dionysus. Photo by The Racing Biz.*

### The Rest of the Field

**#4 Blackjack Buster (12-1):** Archarcharch gelding got it done in his fourth try last out in the faster of two divisions. But none of five to run back from that effort has won. This one's best bet may be to reprise that maiden score by going straight to the front... **#5 In Arrears (8-1):** Jockey Victor Carrasco takes the reins on a horse who's shown speed and faded in all three tries against winners. His third-place finish – behind impressive runaway winner Greatbullsoffire – wasn't bad. He's been defeated by a couple of these, so he'll need to turn the tables. May be looking for a stalk-and-pounce trip.... **#7 The Great Ronaldo (6-1):** Improving sort took the measure of two of today's rivals last out in 5 ½ furlong allowance, though was thrashed by High Roller prior in the Lewis. Distance feels like a question mark here, and you wonder if he can repeat big last out effort at 13-1 today... **#8 Butch Walker (10-1):** Won nicely on debut at Monmouth back in September, but return, in Lost in the Fog Stakes at AQU was just middling; that was a somewhat suspect group which has gone 0-for-5 since.

## Marshua Stakes

**RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 5 (2:30pm EST), \$75,000 guaranteed purse for 3yo fillies, 6 furlongs (dirt). 29<sup>th</sup> running.

**LAST YEAR** Karen's Silk won by 1 ¼ lengths in 1:12.53.

## The Picks

1. **#7 Star Super (1-1):** Now placed in three stakes, two of them local, she was no match for Ms. Locust Point last out in the Gin Talking but was well clear of the rest, including two rivals in here. Looks like there'll be a pace to run at here, and while it's not clear the cutback in distance is a plus, all signs point to a good effort. Hate to eat the chalk, but...
2. **#4 Unaquoi (15-1):** Figgins trainee lodged best Beyer of her career on the lawn, but there's nothing green in sight here. After gacking up a five-length lead in the stretch last out, the cutback to six furlongs – and one turn – probably will be welcome, but she figures to be one of a few vying for the early edge.
3. **#8 Lucky in Malibu (7-2):** Awkward break didn't help her cause last out in the Gin Talking, but she ran on gamely for the show; half-sib to four horses that earned at least \$140k. Cutback in distance looks to be a concern for this one, who often has gate issues and usually is a little outfooted early. Like to see Carrasco in the irons.
4. **#3 Squan's Kingdom (5-1):** Nothing wrong with this McBurney trainee's work to date, and the fourth-place finish in the Smart Halo was solid. Wouldn't be surprised if she appreciates the cutback in distance, but

she's finished behind the favorite here three times already.

## The Rest of the Field

**#1 – Scarlett's Ransom (20-1):** Looked good winning last out in second try – but that was against maiden claimers, and her rivals are 0-for-6 in their return tries... **#2 Item (20-1):** Early promise of two career-starting wins now a question mark. Gutsy narrow winner of the Maryland Million Lassie has been sixth and seventh in two follow-ups, and though an improved effort here wouldn't a shock, she needs a big step forward to factor... **#5 I Am I Will (20-1):** Much improved effort last out in runner-up effort at 56-1 to undefeated Crabcakes. But, still – this is an awfully heavy lift... **#6 Ianthe (8-1):** First foray outside of state-bred company for PA-bred Rod Madrigal trainee, this runner a stablemate of Item. Two wins in last three and a decent second in Blue Mtn. Juvenile Fillies two back; last out set a solid pace, then held off the closers. She'll need a big one here... **#9 Clairvoyant Lady (20-1)** Toss the 30-1 win in the White Clay Creek, and this is a runner with no Beyer higher than 39. Pilot Trevor McCarthy goes with the favorite here over this runner. Interesting to see trainer Lynch wheel back on two weeks rest after a distant third-place finish; she did show improved speed last out.

## Nellie Morse Stakes

**RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 6 (3:00pm EST), \$75,000 guaranteed purse for fillies and mares 4yo and up, about 1 1/16 miles. 34<sup>th</sup> running.

**LAST YEAR** Love Came to Town won by 5 ½ lengths in 1:45.50.



Off in the '16 Nellie Morse. Photo by Laurie Asseo.

## The Picks

1. **#7 Bawlmer Hon (5-1):** The outer post is sub-optimal, but this one likely has the speed to clear and save ground and might enjoy the same sort of pace-controlling trip here she benefited from last out. Spotless ledger at the trip, and Lynch remains aboard.
2. **#3 – Winter (6-1):** Formful Lynch trainee loves this distance (5-3-2-0), benefited from track bias last out en route to two-length score. With just nine starts to date, still has upside, and jockey McCarthy remains aboard.
3. **#6 -- Love Came to Town (4-1):** Defending champ entered last year's edition in better form – four straight in the exacta – but last out might be better than it looks, as top pair are killers and were well clear of the rest. Note rider switch to Cintron, and expect improved effort here; she won her only prior two-turn try over the strip.
4. **#9 – Marabea (9-2):** Arrives fresh off a win in the Claiming Crown, but that, like all 12 of this runner's starts, was on the lawn, which is what she's bred for. Trainer Gaudet has a 4-for-39 record going turf to dirt. This runner's best work has been closing into a pace, which she may not get, and in a wide open group, odds feel just a little short for a horse trying something for the first time.

## The Rest of the Field

**#1 -- Addibel Lightning (5-1):** Improving sort's been away since early December, will need to take a step forward here; still eligible for second allowance, but she does like to win – five times in 11 starts – and brings rider Anthony Salgado for the ride... **#2 -- Moon Virginia (6-1):** Versatile type's connections hoping for plenty of rain: Jump Start filly has a 4-2-1-0 mark on off tracks versus 3-0-0-0 on fast. Career-best effort came two back when loose on the lead... **#4 -- E Lizzy (15-1):** Most recent win came against nickel starters back in July, was defeated last out by Winter. Would need the pace to completely fall apart to have a shot at the top spot, and that seems unlikely... **#5 -- Mecke's Madalyn (8-1):** Eight straight losses and winless in four at the trip make this a tough one to endorse on top; two-back effort might be a bit better than it looks, as winner Bar of Gold is multiple graded placed... **#8 Alpine Sky (12-1):** Blacktype could be a huge asset for this Indian Charlie mare, and she does own two wins in two tries at the trip, but she was crushed last out in the Thirty Eight Go Go and will need to get it turned around here...

## Native Dancer Stakes

**RACE PARTICULARS:** Race 7 (3:30pm EST), \$75,000 guaranteed purse for 4yo and up, about 1 1/16 miles (dirt). 49<sup>th</sup> running.

**LAST YEAR** Page McKenney romped by 3 ½ lengths in 1:44.70.

## The Picks

1. **#1 – Red Dragon Tattoo (9-2)** – Speedster owns a spotless ledger and did it easily last out in his first two-turn try; late-running runner-up that day scored next out. Late arrival to track, two-month gap between races here of slight concern, but runner has worked forwardly for this and has major talent.
2. **#4 – Page McKenney (8-5)** – He's been a warhorse since coming to the Eppler barn via the claimbox in '13, logging over \$1 million in earnings since, plus a graded win; never worse than second in nine tries at the trip. He's got the class to defend title, but he's been away nine months – and Eppler is 0-for-8, with a single third place finish, bringing horses back on 230-plus day layoffs. Include him in your multi-race picks, but if you want to take a shot against him in the win pool, now's the time at expected short odds.
3. **#8 – Charitable Annuity (8-1)** – WV-bred owns 13 wins and third-highest earnings of the group; though the bulk of that came at CT, don't be fooled: this guy can take his show on the road, as evidenced by perfect-trip score in the \$100k Swatara at PEN. He's shown the ability to lead, stalk, or close, and the last of those may come in handy here.
4. **#2 – Jeezum Jim (12-1)** – Has three wins at this trip; one of three to run back from narrow win last out won on return. Continued improvement a must.



**1** Page McKenney won the '16 Native Dancer. Photo by Laurie Asseo.

## The Rest of the Field

**#3 Warrioroftheroses (20-1)** – Veteran's lone shot here is to beat Red Dragon Tattoo to the early punch and drag 'em all the way 'round the track; big efforts back in May-June when third at monster odds in the G3 Pimlico Special and easy winner in DEL allowance, but this is a tough assignment... **#5 Bodhisattva (20-1)** – Back-to-back summer wins, including the Hanford Memorial, seem a long time ago, and this one off a half-dozen pretty blah efforts; should appreciate returning to a trip where he's four-for-eight, and may find a lively pace at which to aim, if he can recapture his form... **#6 Cosmic Destiny (20-1)** – Another runner with early zip and not much chance to control it. With no named rider, he's a strong scratch candidate... **#7 Kid Cruz (2-1)** – 2014 Preakness runner is two-for-two at Laurel and has run well at the distance. But he's failed three straight at odds of 2-1 or less, twice as the favorite, and he's been off since August (trainer Rice 16% off similar breaks). Trevor McCarthy takes the reins and probably will want a mid-pack trip – off the major speedsters but not dawdling back with Bodhisattva.