

Race 1 Selections

THE HORSEPLAYERS JOURNAL by Mike Hamilton

6 CLASS ME NICE looks to build on last week's win at this same level so we'll treat him as the one to beat. Of course things might have been a whole lot different last week had race favourite Mego Moss not made a break at the start. Just two back Mego Moss got the best of Class Me Nice after that one did all the work but tired noticeably in the final eighth. We'll cut him some slack as the track was rated good-4 and no doubt tiring.

5 MEGO MOSS is one that we dismissed when he returned to Woodbine on 01/12. We made a conscious decision to watch him once and that proved to be a missed opportunity as Trevor Henry worked out an ideal trip and he knew what to do with it. Soon after that win trainer Mike Weller connected with Emma Ivy (\$19.30) and Sky Lav (\$12.70) at Woodbine and Bs Terrific (\$3.90) at London so we jumped on the bandwagon last week only to watch Mego Moss go up in the air at the start. He made a nice recovery but simply had too far to come.

9 NATURAL KEMP is off to a good start this year with back-to-back second place finishes to show for starts at both NW3000L5 and this \$20K-\$25K claiming class. I can see him hitting the board but it will obviously take a bit of racing luck now that he is shunted out to Post 9.

8 LEXUS ROCKY has a little more gate speed than Natural Kemp but unfortunately he rarely finishes off his mile as strong as he starts.

1 ANDOVERS CHOICE is taking a serious step up the class ladder so we'll list him fifth from the top until he proves himself at this level.

ON THIS DATE...

1721 – Regular mail coach service was initiated between Quebec and Montreal.

Race 2 Selections

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7 ARTISTIC MADISON will have to work for anything she gets in this well-matched edition of the NW15000L5 class for fillies & mares. It shouldn't come as a surprise that she'd be picked in the top three as she has hit the board in each of her last five starts, but can she win? I think she would have got to P L Hurricane one week ago tonight if only she had made her move a bit earlier and/or avoided the horrible cover provided by Request For Parole. While she eventually made a three-wide move and got around that back-peddling mare, she simply ran out of racetrack before she could take down the PLH. The Trackus system indicated that she had traveled a whopping 40' further than the winner.

6 P L HURRICANE took no prisoners last week and it paid off with her first win of the season and her second in the last five starts. I cannot rule out a repeat performance but I certainly wouldn't count on it. She now lacks the element of surprise she's probably in a bit tougher with the addition of Buttermilk Hanover.

8 RUBIS PRESCOTT is one that we originally pencilled in for fourth but are now second-guessing after catch-driver Bob McClure turned down Buttermilk Hanover to retain this drive. She's superfecta material at the very least and perhaps a bit better than we originally thought.

10 BUTTERMILK HANOVER returns to roughly the level at which she was a winner as recently as 12/22 when she pulled off a 15-1 upset. She's rarely closer than fifth or sixth at the quarter so much will depend on "pace" and "flow." I can see a path to victory but I'm leaning to Artistic Madison who figures to be at least a position closer as they round the last turn.

ON THIS DATE...

1756 – Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, born in Salzburg, Austria.

1854 – The Great Western Railroad inaugurated service between London and Windsor, Ontario.

1880 – Thomas Edison was granted a patent for the electric incandescent lamp.

Race 3 Selections

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5 HIGHLAND TOP HILL has been remarkably consistent of late so we'll give her a slight edge as she looks to double up at NW4. She proved to be the best last week despite a tough first-over trip and here she faces many of the same horses while leaving from what is generally considered to be a better post position. I'd like to see her make a snap move to the top or flush cover on the backstretch as these first-over trips will take a toll on her at some point.

4 MYSTICAL MISSION was our top pick when he contested this same class with many of these same horses on 01/13. We fully expected that he'd be the favourite so it was a pleasant surprise when he went off at better than 3-1 and still steamrolled over the competition. Like many, we envisioned a fourth consecutive win when he went to the gate on 01/20. And like many, we ripped up tickets when he made a break on the last turn. It's not clear if he shied from a whip in the face and then went off stride, causing a hopple to break, or whether the hopple broke causing him to go off stride. Either way, he was perfectly positioned and would like have given Highland Top Hill a run for her money in the stretch drive.

3 WARRAWEE SHIPSHAPE didn't give in without a fight but ultimately he did give way to Highland Top Hill in his most recent so we'll rate him top-three in this rematch.

8 MUSCLE HIGH had a ringside seat for the 01/20 battle between Warrawee Shipshape and Highland Top Hill and the best he could do was a steady third. I see no reason to expect a dramatic turnaround.

6 JILONA might have a little more to say about the outcome of this one now that she has landed mid-gate which is a dramatic improvement from the 10 hole that she occupied in her last two starts.

Race 4 Selections

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9 WINDSONGMAGNIFIQUE didn't have too much difficulty in winning a similar race just one week ago so we'll turn to her this time. We had sided with Larjon Lachlan over Windsongmagnifique in that 01/19 contest but will now admit that Larjon Lachlan was clearly second best as she failed to convert from the pocket.

8 EVERY TIME is the only mare coming out of that 01/19 race that we can see substantially improving her outcome with just a bit of racing luck. She wound up fifth in a field of nine thanks to a tardy start and stalled cover on the final turn that forced her three and possibly four-wide coming off the turn. Roy has previously had her in a contending position at the half and she does show two wins from her last five starts. There's real upside potential here.

4 LARJON LACHLAN made a believer out of us when she paced the opening quarter in 27 seconds and still finished in a photo for win on 01/12. What was remarkable about that effort was that there was a significant headwind in that first quarter and the judges allowed 4 seconds to qualifying time as a result.

3 BAD IN PARADISE looks a lot better here in a claimer than she did in the NW3 class on 01/13. As expected, Louis Philippe Roy dropped her in favour of the Moreau-trained Every Time.

5 SODWANA BAY is trifecta material but no longer considered the horse to beat, as was the case as recently as 11/24 when she was coming off a win at NW4.

ON THIS DATE...

1903 – US Steel magnate Andrew Carnegie offered to donate \$350,000 to the City of Toronto for the construction of a central public library and two branch libraries. The offer was accepted on February 23.

Race 5 Selections

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2 MR CENSI failed to secure a cheque in his latest despite the fact that he was on top shortly before the half, covered up for the third quarter, and clear on the cones through the stretch. On the surface that sounds like a sub-par effort. The main reason we're giving him the benefit of the doubt is the fact that he had missed a month going into that race. He's back on a more regular schedule this time AND he gets to drop back to roughly the level at which he was a battling winner on 11/11 and 09/23.

1 MAJOR HILL has raced once since Mr Censi and he too is dropping in class so we'll give him serious consideration as well. He wasn't nearly as good when he did last win on 12/16 and it was one notch below this at NW9000L5.

9 REGAL SON is much like Major Hill in that his last win came at NW9000L5 and he needed every inch of racetrack to get it. On a more positive note, he did put up a very good fight in his latest and it still took a photo finish to separate him from Velocity Driven who is now 2-for-2 in 2018.

8 ASLAN is the one horse in the field who offers serious upside potential and at least the possibly of a double-digit price. We had him pegged as a value play on 01/13 when we believed that he was rounding into winning form and well spotted to win his second start off the truck from Yonkers. Maybe this time?

4 MAKE SOME LUCK burned some money when he dropped to this level on 12/23 and he was no better at 11-1 in his latest. I won't rule out a reversal of fortunes but neither am I in a hurry to back him when he's about to drive a win off the bottom of his last five starts.

Race 6 Selections

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2 P L JERICO is one of three who appear to be getting some class relief in this week's edition of the NW6000L5 Trot and as such he's an instant contender. While he didn't get much support or have much luck in any of his last five starts at NW10000L5, he was unstoppable as the chalk when he raced a notch below this on 12/04. At the time we mention that he "rarely goes more than six starts without a win and at this point his last win is sitting six lines down the page." Let's see if he can add to this pattern.

3 KAMIKAZE LINDY worked pretty hard for the first seven-eighths of a mile on 01/12 but ultimately he got a little leg weary on the track rated good-4 and three respectable horses got by him in the shadow of the wire. That was just his first start for trainer Richard Moreau who has a long history of getting results with "project horses" like Kamikaze Lindy. Tonight might be the night!

1 MEADOWBROOKCHARLIE is worth a look now that he has dodged Jilona, Cagey, Wesmont, Rosesareexplosive and other very competitive trotters that he has been facing at NW3. Of course he'll have to stay trotting to win and that's something he has had trouble with of late.

8 MUSCLES FOR LIFE is yet another reclassified trotter with plenty of upside potential. He had an abbreviated campaign at age four and is now three starts into a comeback as a five-year-old. Let's mark him down as "risky but intriguing."

ON THIS DATE...

1916 – Manitoba became the first Canadian province to grant women the right to vote.

1926 – John Baird, a Scottish inventor, demonstrated what he called a "pictorial transmission machine " but which would later be known as television.

1949 – John Burns, born in Collingwood, ON.

Race 7 Selections

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1 NICKLE BAG is a classy old campaigner with 34 wins and now over \$950K in earnings. It sure would be nice to see him hit seven figures, and if he continues to race as well as he has in the last three starts that feat should come this spring or summer. Last time out he took things into his own hands and it took His Boy Elroy and Aslan to beat him. While the recent vet scratch is mildly troubling, we'll trust that .666 trainer Bill Robinson will have him ready to rock.

3 BRILLIANT STRIKE N returned a healthy \$11.60 when he came though as our top pick on 01/13. At the time we reasoned that he'd be very competitive if he'd just avoid the first-over trip that didn't open out on 12/26 and the heavy traffic that he could himself in on 01/13. He's in a little deeper tonight but still a serious threat to our top pick.

8 CULTURAL PARADISE is a high risk option for those who want to stick with a top trainer-driver combination but aren't thrilled at the price that will be offered on Nickle Bag. This guy's price should creep higher after a break on 12/23 and a first-to-eighth slide on 12/09. There are few Moreau recruits who don't turn things around and this guy wouldn't have to be much better than he was pre-layoff on 10/28. (Note that he missed the entire month of November.)

5 SHADOW PLACE was handed a very nice opportunity on 12/23 and he knew just what to do with it. Filion sent him to the top and he went wire-to-wire. The catch is that was at the NW6000L5 level and here he's facing a better group at NW15500L5. He should get a good share but I can no longer treat him as the horse to beat.

ON THIS DATE...

1979 – Keith Linton won six consecutive races at Cloverdale Raceway (now Fraser Downs) in BC

Race 8 Selections

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5 JINS SHARK didn't look out of place going into his most recent start but we made a conscious decision to leave him off the ticket in the belief that he'd likely need another start and possibly a class drop before he popped. That theory still held water as they rounded the last turn and announcer Chad Rozema stated: "And Jins Shark would have to sweep the field." Well, that's exactly what he did, and he couldn't have looked any sharper in doing so. He's baaaack!

3 AMERICAN VIRGIN was sent off as the 4-5 favourite when he faced most of these same horses on 01/20 and yet he failed to crack the top three. Unlike his two previous starts where he came first over and got the win, he just couldn't get by a 24-1 shot like Physicallyinclined. However, it would be a serious mistake to write him off on the basis of one disappointing finish. Those with long memories will recall that one year ago this week American Virgin won the Preferred and then went on to win six of his next eight at this same level!

7 NIRVANA SEELSTER can be counted on to give us his best effort – it's just that his best effort seems to be a bit less than what is required to win at this elite level right now. It wasn't always the case, however. Unlike Jins Shark who has been rested, Nirvana Seelster has NEVER had a gap long enough that required a qualifier.

4 CHAMPAGNE PHIL didn't have a lot to offer last week so we'll take a pass until he gets some class relief. That might come as early as next week as he will drop a win from his last five with this race.

8 THE REV has been racing at Yonkers since we last saw him finish sixth in the 06/17 edition of the local Preferred. With fairly recent wins in the "winners over" at Yonkers and now \$452K in lifetime earnings, he's obviously no slouch, but I simply don't see him winning his first start of the season.

Race 9 Selections

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7 IMSPORTY hasn't had the public's full support for some time and yet he has hit the board in his last three starts and he even won at this same level as recently as 01/13 when he circled from eighth at the half. He was in a similar position last week but unfortunately they were going considerably faster and he was behind a wall of horses for much of the third quarter. By mid-stretch he had found clear track in the four-wide path and he got up to finish second thanks to a 27.3 last quarter that was the best of that bunch.

8 RESISTANCE FUTILE didn't race too badly on 01/20 but I'm not sure he ever deserved to be the favourite in that race and I doubt that he'll get that much support this time around. Might this be the time to jump in? He is a 20-time winner and now making his fifth start off a rest. I could be way off base on the amount of support he'll get and I can definitely see him sweeping this field. Beware!

6 BRAVE WORLD is a serious contender if not the one to beat now that the Valedictory Series has wound up and he has been a close second in a pair of races for non-winners of four. We didn't see him beating the red hot Classy Dragon on 01/15 and neither did many of the win pool bettors who made CD the 1-2 favourite. The encouraging part is that Brave World worked hard for the lead and only gave up the lead in the closing strides of a race contested over a snow-covered and likely tiring track.

5 SINGLE WHITE SOCK had one of the shortest trips of any who contested the 01/20 race won by East End but at least he had something left at the end. I can see him hitting the board once again but building on a 2-for-42 season might be unrealistic until he drops a notch.

ON THIS DATE...

2005 – TrackPower, Inc. announced that it would enter into a joint venture with Jeff Gural in an attempt to purchase Vernon Downs.

2 EXHILARATED isn't the richest or the winningest in this field of eight mares but she does have the attractive combination of back class, current form, AND an inside post to go with those 25 wins and near \$400K in earnings. She was "right there" at a somewhat tougher level on 01/20 and that was after traveling 20' further than the race winner. Her last win came on 11/10 when she was bet down to 4-5 at this same level.

3 MUCH ADOO has done some time in the f&m-Preferred and until very late in the 12/22 race it looked like she was going to be compensated with a win. Buttermilk Hanover had other thoughts. She has been somewhat disappointing in her last two starts at this level or one level higher so we're reluctant to call for the win as long as other top mares are hanging around the class.

4 ART ANGEL BABY is definitely top-three material now that he has been priced at \$25K but whether she can improve on last year's 2-for-33 boxscore remains to be seen. I'm leaning to the "no" side but will concede that anything's possible in a field of eight well-matched mares.

5 TEACHERS VET was our top pick when she faced non-winners of four on 01/20 and until very late in the mile it looked like she'd get 'er done. In the end it was V String who converted off the pocket trip at better than 5-1. Both mares will have to up their game to beat the likes of Exhilarated and Much Adoo.

Race 11 Selections

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8 KINGSLEY B deserves a tip of the hat for a thoroughly convincing win in the circuit's final race of 2017. Unfortunately he wasn't quite as effective when he moved up a class and out to Post 10 for his first start in 2018. He might be able to bounce back now that he has drawn a bit better post in a race with no real standout. When in doubt, stick with Moreau.

5 LUKE AND DUKE is similar to Kinglsey B in that he won at the NW2500L5 level in late December and then got a minor shoe when up to NW6000L5 for his latest. I like the fact that he was a totally dominant winner when he did connect and now has sub-28 last quarter stacked four deep. Post five seems like an ideal spot as well.

3 IDEAL JET is bound to get a lot more support than was the case last week when sent off at 20-1 at the NW7000L5 level. He had a grand saving trip and got by four horses in the last quarter mile to finish a game third, just 1-3/4 lengths off a very legitimate winner. Some will say he's the one to beat at this level but I'm not 100% sold given that he lost to Luke And Duke by seven lengths on 12/14 and LAD isn't even my top pick in this race.

2 MR CARROTTS might turn things around now that he has dropped down one level and drawn inside. He was simply too far back in an evenly rated mile on 01/20 and proper to that he was charged with an 'ix' when the judges rule that he went inside one pylon and broke "while coming back out."

4 SUNNY BEACH DAY is a much better prospect than most who go this long between wins, especially if you're looking for one to round out the trifecta or superfecta. Unfortunately he seems to lack the killer instinct even though he is often gaining at the end.