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JENNIE REES SIZES UP INDIANA DERBY FIELD AT INDIANA GRAND RACING & CASINO



By Jennie Rees, Eclipse Award-winning freelance writer

SHELBYVILLE, Ind.; - July 15, 2016 - If all 12 start, this will be the largest Indiana Derby field ever. Here we take a look at the pros and cons of

getting each horse:

Post 1 - Discreet Lover (jockey Jose Flores, trainer Uriah St. Lewis, owner Trin-brook Stables)

Pros: Philadelphia shipper has been knocking at the door, including finishing third in the Ohio Derby at 87-1 odds. He's been working very well and could pull off the upset if there's a hot pace.

Cons: Other closers are faster than he is. His 1-for-13 record doesn't inspire confidence as far as hitting winners circle, though he has four seconds and two thirds.

Post 2 - Cherry Wine (jockey Luis Saez, trainer Dale Romans, owners William Pacella, Frank Jones and Frank Shoop)

Pros: No other horse in the field ran in the Triple Crown, and he finished second in the Preakness, beating Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist. His 100 BRIS speed figure in the Preakness tops the field.

Cons: Finishing seventh in the 1 1/2-mile Belmont might have taken some starch out of him. He needs a fast pace up front, which is no sure thing.

Post 3 - Pilot House (jockey Richard Bracho, trainer Tom Amoss, owner Maggi Moss)

Pros - He has a race over the track and previously trained at Indiana Grand. Amoss is among the winningest trainers at the track (and the country), and jockey Bracho is having a fine meet here. He has the tactical speed to be in good position in a big field, including the run into the first turn.

Cons - He could "bounce" off his big effort in winning a Thistledown allowance in his last start June 20. None of his other races come close to the 97 BRIS speed figure he earned that day. He could get cooked if he's up on the lead with Cupid and The Player.

Post 4 - Takeittotheedge (jockey Miguel Mena, trainer Dale Romans, owner Bakster Farm)

Pros: Trainer Romans has been extremely high on this horse since he won his debut March 5 by 7 3/4 lengths at Gulfstream Park. After recovering from a foot injury, he was third in a very strong allowance race at the distance and should greatly improve. Romans has a saying, "When they're doing good, run 'em big."

Cons - Romans is extremely high on most of his horses. Others are more seasoned, and this is asking a lot.

Post 5 - The Player (jockey Shaun Bridgmohan, trainer Buff Bradley, owners Bradley and Carl Hurst)

Pros: He is absolutely the talking horse of this field, getting rave reviews for his training and works at Churchill Downs. He has shown he's game and fast, and could make things very tough on Cupid. Consider yourself lucky if you get the morning-line 6-1 on him. He's a major Player indeed.

Cons: He's one of only two horses in the field (the other recent maiden-winner Seeking Blame) having never before run in a stakes. He's the only horse in the field who hasn't raced around two turns.

Post 6 - Cocked and Loaded (jockey Willie Martinez, trainer Larry Rivelli, owners Richard Ravin and Patricia's Hope LLC)

Pros: When he's on his game, he can compete with almost anyone, as his victory in Churchill's Iroquois last year showed. His close fifth in what's proving a very tough running of the Breeders' Cup Juvenile is another indicator of his class. He made a big improvement in finishing fourth in the Ohio Derby and could finally be back on his best stride.

Cons: But he still lost his last four races by 6, 17, 19 and 11 lengths.



Post 7 - Seeking Blame (jockey Brian Hernandez Jr., trainer Dallas Stewart, owner Charles Fipke)

Pros: He looked very good winning a maiden race at the Indiana Derby's 1 1/16-mile distance from an outside post. He was third to The Player in Seeking Blame's first start May 3. He'll be rolling at the end.

Cons: There's a big difference between looking good in a maiden race and looking good in a \$500,000, Grade II stakes.

Post 8 - Whateverbodywants (jockey Robby Albarado, trainer Kellyn Gorder, owner The Farm on 4 LLC)

Pros: He has improved in all three starts and looked very good winning the two-turn Prairie Mile in Iowa. Robby Albarado is riding lights-out these days, and the colt has been working extremely well. A very live play at a price.

Cons: He's still not as fast as the favorites, his best BRIS speed figure being 89.

Post 9 - Torrontes (jockey Albin Jimenez, trainer Kellyn Gorder, owners Beckett Racing and David Thornton)

Pros - His last two works are as good as you could ask from a horse. Trainer Gorder has always liked the horse and believes he has a breakthrough race in him. You always have to watch the lesser-regarded horse when a trainer has two running in a race.

Cons - They still payoff in the afternoon at the races, not in morning workouts.

Post 10 - Call the Colonel (jockey Santo Sanjur, trainer Jon Cowan, owner C J Equine Service)

Pros - Throw out his last start on turf. Two races back he won a very nice entry-level allowance race. If the pace is hot, he could get a piece at a huge price. You've got to root for a horse who was sold for \$1,000 as a yearling and has made \$104,596.

Cons - One thing to root for; another thing to bet. You'd like him better in a second-level allowance race.

Post 11 - Cupid (jockey Rafael Bejarano, trainer Bob Baffert, owners Mrs. John Magnier, Michael Tabor and Derrick Smith)

Pros - Trainer Bob Baffert doesn't make many mistakes when he ships. Throw out his last two races: Cupid was too rank racing around one turn in Belmont's Easy Goer and had a breathing obstruction when he was 10th in the Arkansas Derby. Look for him to run to his snappy victory in Oaklawn Park's Grade II Rebel.

Cons - The Player will ensure Cupid doesn't get an easy lead. Off two bad races, it's hard to be sure the good Cupid will show up.

Post 12 - Star Hill (jockey Corey Lanerie, trainer Rusty Arnold, owner Calumet Farm)

Pros - Trainer Arnold long has been high on his homebred son of Elusive Quality. He's high quality, going from a maiden victory to finishing third in the Tampa Bay Derby behind Belmont runner-up Destin and Wood winner Outwork. He's due some luck after drawing a very wide post for the fourth straight race.



Cons: He drew a very wide post for the fourth straight race. His best races have been around one turn. Key him in the bottom spot in the trifecta: He has five thirds in eight career starts.

Post time for the Grade II \$500,000-added Indiana Derby is slated for 9:41 p.m. EST and will be carded as Race 9 on the program. The Grade II \$200,000-added Indiana Oaks will lead into the Derby as Race 8 with an estimated post time of 9:11 p.m. EST. First post on Indiana Derby Night is 6:05 p.m. EST.

Live Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing is conducted Tuesday through Friday at 2:05 PM EST with Saturday racing beginning at 6:05 PM. The 120-day season runs through Saturday, Oct. 29.

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Cupid schools in the Indiana Grand paddock Friday morning to get acclimated to new surroundings at the track. (Photo provided)