



In Focus

Laurel Park stakes

March 12, 2016

PRIVATE TERMS STAKES

THE FIELD

1. **Marengo Road (9-5)** – Mike Trombetta trainee turned the tables on *Never Gone South* en route to a Miracle Wood win last out, wearing that runner down and then holding off the late rally of *Charmed Victory* to win by less than a length... Connections have liked this horse all along, trying him in the G2 Remsen as a 2yo, and he delivered third career win last out... Figures to sit a similar trip as last out, stalking Abiding Star from second in a race without a lot of early lick...
2. **Flash McCaul (5-2)** – Friesan Fire gelding snapped a streak of four straight runner-up efforts with comfy win against allowance rivals last out. Ran second in a pair of earlier stakes, the Md. Million Nursery and, by a head, Maryland Juvenile Futurity. Connections believe he'll like the stretch out in first try around two turns -- but note that regular pilot Julian Pimentel jumps ship to *Marengo Road*, who beat this runner in November..
3. **Whiskey Tree (12-1)** – Big step forward last out for Misremembered gelding in first start after Reid Nagle claim, winning off by 12 lengths against starter allowance foes; none of five to run back has won... Career-best effort in that win netted his top Beyer (66) in first try beyond six furlongs on natural dirt; sire wanted two turns, so stretch out may work... Picks up solid local pilot Horacio Karamanos, but this is a tough assignment.
4. **Let Me Go First (6-1)** – First start in over two months for Blaine Servis trainee who was a

RACE DATA

- Race 6, 3:40 p.m.
- 3-year-olds, Abt. 1 1/16 miles
- \$75,000 guaranteed purse
- 27th running of a race named for Maryland-based runner who won four times in graded company for trainer Charles Hadry, including the 1988 Wood Memorial (G1).
- 2015 winner: Bridget's Big Luvy
- The race has been conducted at distances from 1 mile to 1 1/8 miles; it was last conducted at 1 1/16 in 2004, prior to Laurel's renovation.
- Notable prior winners includes multiple graded winner Ameri Valay, Preakness runner-up Magic Weisner, and 2014 General George winner Bandbox..

THE PICKS

1. **#5 – Charmed Victory (2-1)**: Stretch out to two turns might benefit this runner more than any here, and sluggish pace last out did him no favors. Presence of *Abiding Star* suggests livelier early pace, and added ground might put him in the garden spot.
2. **#6 – Abiding Star (15-1)**: Why, yes, this is a stretch -- but Uncle Mo colt is likely to be loose on the lead here after consecutive gate to wire strikes in sprint races. Then it's up to rider JD Acosta to nurse this guy along just as far as he can..

distant fifth in the G3 Jerome last out, at long odds. Likely longshot here, *Abiding Star*, ran third when this runner broke his maiden two back. Blinks go on for Paddy O'Prado gelding, who brings regular pilot Roberto Rosado for the ride... One of three here -- Marengo Road and Charmed Victory the others -- to be nominated to the Triple Crown.

5. **Charmed Victory (2-1)** – Rally came up a bit short to *Marengo Road* in the Miracle Wood, but no shame in that: moderate pace was always going to be a challenge for this rallying sort. First try around two turns for a Flatter colt of which Rodney Jenkins has said, “He’s got a stride; he’s gonna hurt someone going a mile and an eighth”... Most lightly raced runner here still has plenty of upside and has two wins from three starts... Shows a couple solid works since Miracle Wood effort and retains regular rider Victor Carrasco.
6. **Abiding Star (15-1)** – Likely longshot took seven tries to break his maiden - and had to drop down to claiming ranks to do it - but doubled up by winning first level allowance last out... Comes back on short rest -- having raced Feb. 29 -- with regular rider JD Acosta... Uncle Mo colt backed up late in both his prior two turn dirt tries... Figures to be the controlling speed here and take the field as far as he can.

3. #1 – Marengo Road (9-5): Morning line favorite delivered on his promise last out and had to do the heavy lifting of chasing leader (and favorite) *Never Gone South*. Unfortunately, he may find himself chasing again here, and the added ground points to top selection.

4. #2 – Flash McCaul (5-2): Wouldn't surprise anyone to see this guy get the money. If last-out win plus added ground equal a step forward, he could be right there on the wire.

CAESAR'S WISH STAKES

THE FIELD

1. **Great Soul (9-2)** – Game effort last out to get the money in stakes bow last out in the Wide Country, picking her way through traffic before an inviting rail seam opened up just in time to earn narrow win... Great Notion filly retains Trevor McCarthy in the irons and has won two of three... Top three from the Wide Country are here; no others have run back.
2. **Disco Rose (15-1)** – Boy, has this Butch Reid trainee kept some good company, competing in three graded events, including, two back, in the Davona Dale, won by ultra-talented Cathryn Sophia... Gave some nice efforts as a juvenile, including a show effort in the G2 Demoiselle, but she's been throttled in two tries as a sophomore and will need a big form reversal here.
3. **In the Navy Now (8-1)** – Ran second to *Great Soul* in a maiden test two back, then broke her own maiden -- by six -- last out; one of two to run back has won... Regular rider Julian Pimentel remains aboard for runner showing a couple good works in preparation, but she's another who needs to step it up here.
4. **Sophia's Song (3-5)** – Pletcher runner took eagerly to first try on natural dirt, romping by six in GP allowance, and place and show horses came back to run three-one in Ocala stake, respectively... Hasn't run since December 30, but lengthy layoffs generally aren't an issue for Pletcher runners, who usually doesn't come to Laurel without designs

RACE DATA

- Race 8, 4:40 p.m.
- 3-year-olds fillies, 1 mile, \$75,000 guaranteed purse
- 28th running of a race named for multiple graded stakes winner trained by legendary Dickie Small, who called her "the fastest horse I've ever had."
- Race begun at Bowie in 1978.
- 2015 winner: By the Moon
- Just the fourth running at one mile, with the fastest two of the three finishing in 1:38 ½
- Top three from last month's Wide Country -- who won this race in 1991 -- reconnect here.

THE PICKS

1. #1 – Great Soul (9-2): Sneaky good effort in getting it done last out for this Tim Keefe trainee, and with just three races under her belt, there's no reason to think she can't improve here in second off a layoff.

2. #4 – Sophia's Song (3-5): Let's be honest: here's the most likely

on getting the money... Victor Carrasco will ride.

5. **Prognosis (5-1)** – First or second in four straight since adding Lasix and switching to dirt; no shame in Gin Talking thrashing, since the thrasher was multiple G2 winner Cathryn Sophia... Had aim but was outfinished by Great Soul in the Wide Country, her first start in more than two months. Owns the right to move forward but has to find a way to turn the tables on Great Soul.
6. **Clare's Dowery (12-1)** – Wide Country show horse stretches out to route distance for the first time in her six-start career; closing sort will either need some pace help or to get active earlier here than she was that day... Rallied nicely for third last out but was never a threat to win... Regular pilot Forest Boyce remains aboard and runner has shown improved form since addition of blinks three back.

winner of this race, who owns the best speed figures, comes for the powerful Pletcher barn, and still has plenty of upside. But... you sure you want 3-5 on a horse facing stakes runners for the first time and not having raced in 75 days?

3. #6 – Clare's Dowery (12-1): Nice step forward in first try against winners last out, closing for third at 23-1, continuing steady progress since addition of blinkers. May not get the pace help she'd like to get the money.

4. #3 – In the Navy Now (8-1): Gradual improvement netted easy maiden win last out for pricey Midshipman filly, and runner-up won next out, then ran second in PRX allowance. She'll need to move forward here.