

By PAUL MALECKI

# Belmont

JUNE 30, 2004

WEDNESDAY

★★★

No one can match Todd Pletcher's output at the meet, but Richard Dutrow Jr. continues to march along at a 25 percent clip both at the meet and during 2004. He gave leading rider John Velazquez a leg up on **PAM'S RUCKUS** (1st, \$6.10) and the filly, bouncing back from two wet-track disappointments, gave nothing else a chance in this maiden claimer. Her every fraction went quicker than the second race (for \$35,000 winning claimers), so she can be dangerous if wheeled back against modest winners at the conclusion of the Belmont meet.

Today seemed the long-awaited graduation day for **CONFIRMED**, emerging from a second to 2-5 Philanthropist, but he could not capitalize on a terrific stalking trip behind **GOAL POST** and upsetter **BANDIT NAILHEAD** (3rd, \$22.40). A 47-1 newcomer, **GRACIE TERRACE**, kin to two stakes-winners, may be an intriguing longshot upon switching to grass for sneaky turf trainer Roy Lerman.

Would someone step forward in another statebred route with little form? Look no further than 17-length runaway **SHADY LANE** (5th, \$6.50). Trainer Christophe Clement had her prepared for dirt off the single grass try and now has options for the N1X assignment. Funny Cide's half-sister **ROCKCIDE** caught on with the fans at 3-1 but is only slowly getting the hang of the racing game. She lacks the tactical speed (not to mention acceleration) of her famed sibling.

JULY 1, 2004

THURSDAY

★★★

Trainer Richard Dutrow Jr. scratched Speed Hunter and got the money with **LOTT** (2nd, \$3.60), now 2 for 2 off a freshening. The 7-for-19 5-year-old is a versatile, dangerous claimer in current form. Trainer Robert Corrado made a name for himself during the winter at Aqueduct and was able to squeeze much-improved speed out of the game 18-1 runner-up, **MOMBO LOCO**. The venerable **CLIFF NOTES** could only manage third, but that 12-time winner kept fighting after appearing hopelessly beaten. Here's hoping new trainer Scott Lake can keep this often-laid-off warhorse sound.

Allen Iwinski, who announced he is dispersing his stable because of illness, and Ramon Dominguez, second in the United States in riding victories, nearly pulled off a double. Their juvenile filly **BOARDWALK BABE** looked home free in midstretch, only to be run down by **EXTENT** (3rd, \$36.80). The trainer's 3-percent clip with firsters created the unusually large mutuel for Mott/Prado. **PERSONAL TOUCH** (5th, \$7.50) had no such difficulty in the lane as the easiest kind of one-length winner seen in a while. The upwardly mobile colt has been patiently managed, capturing 7 of 15 on dry dirt.

**MAGICAL ILLUSION** (8th, \$3) acquitted herself nicely in the Grade 1 Acorn and took care of business here with a double-digit score. Owner William Clifton and trainer James Bond, who struck gold with \$4 million-earning Grade 1-winner Behrens, have another nice one on their hands.

JULY 2, 2004

FRIDAY

★★★

**COURRIEL** (2nd, \$6.50) pulled herself up to contention along the rail under Jose Santos but needed the pacesetter **LUHAN** to retreat before finding a hole to run through. When she did, school was out. The runner-up, **SELL THE RALLIES**, still hasn't delivered upon the potential flashed in her debut.

Leading rider John Velazquez can snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat, and he saved the chalkies here with **DONT KNOCK AMERICA** (4th, \$4.20). Supporters of first-time turfer **TRUE CRIMSON**, 24-1 for low-profile trainer Gregory Garofalo, were heartbroken, but can't fault the ride by seven-pound apprentice Rajiv Maragh. Edgar Prado didn't take advantage of **SHOALIS TALE**'s positional zip from good draw but the runner still finished willingly for third. Perhaps trainer Gary Contessa can get him into the winner's circle before we ship up to the Spa.

It was obvious that **SPARKLING BLUE** (5th, \$5.50) was the fastest horse in the race, but could she produce her best off an 11-month layoff and class drop? She answered those questions affirmatively, but an uncontested lead clearly helped. Let's see what claiming guru Scott Lake can do with her now.

A peek at Belmont's post position stats proves how difficult it is to win out of the outside posts on the inner turf. That meant **FORTUNATE DAMSEL**'s (8th, \$11.60) effort from the 10 slot in the Grade 3 Sands Point was indeed a huge effort. She continued her advance since landing on turf for Hall of Famer Phil Johnson.

JULY 3, 2004

SATURDAY

★★★

A stretch-runner was poised to capture this rare 5 1/2-furlong heat when **WIND GLIDER** and **WAVERING TRUTH** hooked up through fractions of 21.83 and 44.66 seconds. **HOGO TOW** (3rd, \$12.60) was the beneficiary, scoring for the fourth time in eight starts, despite bothering entry-mate **DANNYSUPERMARKET** while swinging out for room in upper stretch. The stewards did not even take a second glance. Favored drop-down **RATING AGENCY** broke slowly and offered little.

**FUNNY CIDE** appeared to have **PEACE RULES** and Jerry Bailey put away when he slipped inside them turning for home in the Grade 1 Suburban, but he could not seal the deal. Neither could **NEWFOUNDLAND**, who sat perhaps the best stalking trip. Peace Rules (7th, \$8.40) was the resurgent winner in 1:59.52 over a glib strip. He was helped by subpar efforts from the favored **DYNEVER** and **BOWMAN'S BAND**.

**FRIENDLY MICHELLE** (8th, \$5.70) proved her Acorn third was no fluke with this powerful Prioress triumph. **FOREST MUSIC**, a useful sprinter, made the lead surprisingly easily and fought gamely, only to lose the place to change-of-pace **FELINE STORY**.

JULY 4, 2004

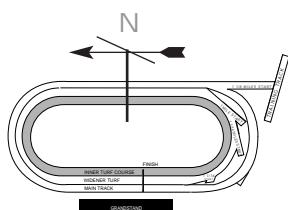
SUNDAY

★★★

Stakes-winning 3-year-old **LA REINA** (4th, \$7.70) passed her initial turf test vs. elders, benefiting from setting slow 23.68- and 46.80-second fractions. The Shug McGaughey trainee's 5-2 price was just fine with her backers, however, as English-bred **SHOOT** took most of the action at 4-5. Shoot can do better with contested fractions next out.

On paper, the eighth race on the holiday card was inscrutable. The result was a fitting dead heat between **PRETTY WILD** (8th, \$2.80) and **COLITA** (\$3.70). A onetime Triple Crown prospect, Colita will be even tougher with this effort under his belt. We learned that **ROGUE AGENT** is no longer the same horse he was during the spring.

Javier Castellano was the July Fourth riding star with three victories, and there was no doubt who took equine honors. **GHOSTZAPPER** (9th, \$4.70) proved his dominating Vosburgh was no fluke, coming off a respite to stop the clock in a blistering 1:20.42. Trained by Bobby Frankel, he dazzled, racing in striking range early and putting away his three rivals with a four-wide sweep. **AGGADAN** duplicated the Vosburgh exacta, but both **LION TAMER** and **UNFORGETTABLE MAX** will likely be looking for slightly softer spots in the near future.



TRACK TRENDS

DATE	CONDITION	FORECAST	WIND/TEMPERATURE	COMMENT
WED. JUNE 30	Fast/Good	Clear	Light wind, 80°	Pace stalkers did well on dirt, turf.
THURS. JULY 1	Fast/Firm	Clear	Variable wind, 78°	Tactical speed helped on dirt.
FRI. JULY 2	Fast/Firm	Cloudy	Variable wind, 80°	No apparent trends.
SAT. JULY 3	Fast/Firm	Clear	Variable wind, 80°	Inside paths slightly favorable dirt.
SUN. JULY 4	Fast/Firm	Clear	Light wind, 80°	Even but quick main track.