

By DAVE LITFIN

Belmont

JULY 21, 2004

WEDNESDAY

The main track played extremely fast, roughly a full second faster than par in terms of pace and final times, as the final week of the meet began. There were no apparent trends in terms of paths or running styles.

In the three six-furlong sprints, 3-year-old mid-level claimers went in 1:09.84, and \$14,000 older claimers flew in 1:09.43, which puts the final time of 1:08.77 for **WILDCAT HEIR**'s (8th, \$6.10) second-level allowance win in perspective. It was a solid performance from a lightly raced 4-year-old who has never finished worse than second, but not as brilliant as the raw time suggests.

Apprentice Jose Lezcano rode both ends of the early daily double – **GOLDEN DIAMOND** (1st, \$12.60) first time off the claim by Dominic Galluscio, and the Ed Barker-trained **KRAFTY KAPER** (2nd, \$7), who stretched to 1 1/16 miles to handle \$40,000 maiden claimers after beginning her current form cycle in a pair of sprints. Barker also used Lezcano aboard statebred maiden winner **SASSY AGAIN** (\$14.40) on July 16.

Jean-Luc Samyn had his best day since returning from a broken leg suffered last fall. He gave **WHERE WE LEFT OFF** (8th, \$5.70) a vintage "Samyn on the Green" ride in an advanced optional claimer, saving ground throughout and finding a seam to rally outside pacesetter **FEISTY BULL** in midstretch.

Samyn also won the nightcap aboard **BOUNDARY BAY** (9th, \$26.80), who returned from a four-month layoff and won the faster division of a seven-furlong allowance for New York-breds in 1:23.33 for George Weaver.

DYLAN'S DESTINY (5th, \$8.50) won the slower heat in 1:24.05.

JULY 22, 2004

THURSDAY

The main track was playing only two ticks faster than par.

The turf Tomlinson rating and trainer Dave Donk's \$4.98 ROI with first-time turf horses suggested New York-bred **GATES AVENUE** (1st, \$23.80) was to be taken seriously off the surface switch, and that proved to be the case. Dropping out of the fast-paced Mike Lee Handicap into a \$50,000 claimer, Gates Avenue contested the pace with second-choice **DIXIE BOY**, drew clear in midstretch and held off drifting-out favorite **SHINING HAWK**.

If the Breeders' Cup Sprint was scheduled for Belmont this year, **MIKE'S CLASSIC** (3rd, \$2.90) would have to be considered. He isn't a stakes winner yet, but improved his record on this track to 4 for 4 after dueling last fall's Sport Page winner, **VOODOO**, into the ground in a six-furlong classified allowance. Look for Mike's Classic in the upcoming A.G. Vanderbilt at Saratoga, a race he ran third in last year.

Two \$50,000 claimers at 1 1/16 miles on the Widener course went to pace-pressing chalk winners **ROLLED STOCKING** (5th, \$5.80) in 1:41.33, and **MORNING WATCH** (7th, \$6.70) in 1:41.31.

Rolled Stocking enjoyed a perfect trip, saving ground off the leaders, went clear approaching midstretch and maintained a safe margin over wide-rallying **LORD LANGFUHR**, who went well in his first try on grass.

FREE OF LOVE (8th, \$16), winless since the Westchester Handicap here in May 2002, wore down favored stretch-out **PERSONAL TOUCH** in deep stretch of the \$61,500 Seeking the Gold Stakes. **CONSERVATION** raced wide and outfinished **REGAL SANCTION** for third.

JULY 23, 2004

FRIDAY

The racing gods apparently still do not care for the 3 p.m. twilight racing programs on Fridays at Belmont Park. It seems like virtually every twilight card was run under threatening weather, and the finale was no exception, as rain moved in and intensified through the last two-thirds of the card.

The main track was wet-fast and harrowed for the first three races and sealed thereafter, as it got progressively wetter. Good luck coming up with turf variants, because one was run on good ground, the next on yielding, and the last on soft footing, in which the European import **SPOTLIGHT** (8th, \$4.30) easily won a second-level allowance for trainer Christophe Clement.

It took 65 tries, but seven-pound apprentice Rajiv Maragh finally notched his first win at the meet, in a head-bob finish aboard **PUNCTUAL STAN** (1st, \$7.70). It was also the first win of the year for trainer Bruce Johnstone. **KAKAPO** battled inside the winner through the stretch and just missed under Shaun Bridgmohan, who won the next two races with **BURST OF DAWN** (2nd, \$5.90) and **BLAZING SONG** (3rd, \$9.40).

Blazing Song, winless from 14 prior starts, slipped through on the rail turning for home and outfinished **DRIVINGTHELANE** and **MACAO**. Macao, a first-time starter trained by Shug McGaughey, was bet strongly and galloped out past the wire.

Jose Santos was thrown from first-time starter **LAUREN'S CHARM** (4th) in the paddock, aggravating old injuries to his right collarbone and arm. He is expected to miss 4-6 weeks, a shame because he was riding in top form.

JULY 24, 2004

SATURDAY

After about two inches of rain Friday, the track was muddy and sealed, and four scheduled grass races were taken off.

The track conditions were just fine with **ASHADO** (8th, \$3.50), and the mud lark galloped away from **STELLAR JAYNE** and **MAGICAL ILLUSION** to win the Coaching Club American Oaks impressively. Ashado, who won a muddy Kentucky Oaks in the spring, is now 4 for 4 on wet tracks, and headed for the Alabama on Aug. 21. Magical Illusion enjoyed a perfect stalking trip just outside the leaders but failed to stay the 10 furlongs and tired in the lane.

MELLOW CIELO (1st, \$14.60), who had shown speed in two recent starts at the maiden special-weight level, was perhaps the day's biggest overlay – scoring a front-running win versus maiden claimers. His sire, Conquistador Cielo, was a 14-length winner of the Belmont Stakes on similarly wet footing.

MAHZOUZ (6th, \$16.80) is now 2 for 2 since a trainer change to Laurie LaFavers, after following up his recent maiden win with an entry-level allowance score in the solid time of 1:23.10 for seven furlongs. By way of comparison, the veteran older male **SECRET RUN** (7th, \$5.40), who has Beyer Speed Figures of 111 and 107 this year, ran the same distance in 1:22.61 in a \$100,000 claimer.

BAILIE'S BAND (9th, \$4.10) was 0-for-15 lifetime going in, but had little trouble on the lead versus overmatched rivals in the off-the-turf nightcap for New York-bred maidens. **LOYAL ROYAL** (0 for 14) was second, followed by the 0-for-13 **HERE'S YA SOUVENIR**.

JULY 25, 2004

SUNDAY

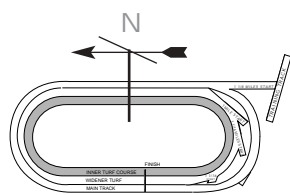
The drying-out main track was wet-fast early, played roughly a full second faster than par, and was strongly favorable to horses who rallied in the outside lanes around the far turn. All seven dirt winners were positioned well away from the rail. Two scheduled turf races were switched to the main track. The two that remained on were won by outside ralliers **BAYMONT** (6th, \$13.60) and **SAILAWAY** (7th, \$4.50) on rain-softened footing.

Sailaway, beaten a neck by multiple graded stakes winner Kicken Kris as a 3-year-old, has been no worse than second in four turf starts this year for McGaughey. **BRICKELL**, coming off a maiden win for trainer Bill Mott three weeks earlier, held stubbornly on the inside but couldn't contain the winner late in a promising first try versus allowance runners.

The Allen Jerkens-trained **SPITE THE DEVIL** (8th, \$7.80) benefited from an outside trip to get past **ROGUE AGENT** and **MR. DETERMINED** approaching midstretch, and then held off a late wide run from **SHERPA GUIDE** to take the Evan Shipman Handicap. It was Edgar Prado's fourth winner of the card, and seventh of the weekend. The late surge pulled him to within 77-73 of top rider John Velazquez as the meet concluded.

Prado also won with Mt. **MAJESTY** (1st, \$4.10) for Clement, **CLARKSBURG QUEEN** (2nd, \$7) for Kenny Nesky, and **MIKE GREENFIELDS** (5th, \$12.40) for Tim Ritvo.

The track still had moisture in it in the early races, an edge for Clarksburg Queen because third-place **FABULOSITY** is much more effective on a dry track.



TRACK TRENDS

DATE	CONDITION	FORECAST	WIND/TEMPERATURE	COMMENT
WED. JULY 21	Fast/Firm (Rails @ 9 ft. Widener; 0 ft. Inner)	Clear	Light variable wind, 83°	Lightning-fast main track.
THURS. JULY 22	Fast/Firm (Rails @ 9 ft. Widener; 0 ft. Inner)	Hazy	Crosswind backstretch, 83°	No apparent trends.
FRI. JULY 23	Good-muddy/Yielding-soft (Rails @ 9 ft. Widener; 0 ft. Inner)	Showery	Crosswind backstretch, 75°	Main track sealed after the third race.
SAT. JULY 24	Muddy/Off turf	Cloudy	Crosswind backstretch, 75°	Sealed throughout.
SUN. JULY 25	Fast/Soft (Rails @ 0 ft. Widener & Inner, 3rd & 9th off)	Clear	Crosswind backstretch, 77°	Outside paths preferred on the main track.