



A CLOSER LOOK

by The Professor

In-depth analysis of races at The Meadows

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8

RACE 1 – NW 3800 PACE

1 – FOUR CARD MAJOR – Tough trip last time and only lost by a half-length at the wire. Moves to an inside post today which may not help, as he may only get away mid-pack. Still, he has the ability to get the job done.

2 – MCLUCKY – Shows one recent start locally, a 9th place finish in a different class. Hasn't been in the top three in two months, so he'll be a longer shot today.

3 – DAFINATY – Has had 37 starts this year without finishing higher than third, but 36 of those starts were for a different barn. Purchased by the Burke Stable, he went to Northfield and was bet to 3-2, but had an outside trip and couldn't reach despite a 32-second final quarter. He'll take a lot of play here, but he's still fighting a long streak.

4 – PH KENNY – Four straight top-3 finishes make this one a contender again. Has 6 wins this year, so he knows how to win, and is overdue for #7. He has gate speed and closing ability, so his versatility can also serve him well here.

5 – GOODY TWO SOCKS - Comes off a 9th place, well-beaten finish last time. He will be a longshot in here today despite the class change.

6 – THREE RIVERS DELL – Comes off his best line of the season, a second place finish in this class last week. That's certainly something to build on, but he does face a tougher task today with the post and some decent competition.

7 – JUMPIN JAKE FLASH – Made a big move going to the half last time, was parked on the outside, and was still game to the wire, only losing by a neck. Very strong effort last week, but today the post hurts. Will he go for the early lead? That's the big question here. He only used gate speed once in recent starts, but faded late.

SELECTIONS: 1-3-4-7

RACE 2 – NW 5 TROT

1 – RAILEEGOTAHOLDONME – Another strong effort last week, earning his second win in his last three starts. Moves up in class today but appears as though the class won't be an issue.

2 – DANCE HALL BOUNCER – Had missed 3 weeks prior to his local debut last time, and raced well. Very difficult trip, parked for the mile, yet still passing a horse in the stretch and picking up a fourth place finish. Draws inside today, shouldn't get parked, and should be a major factor in here.

3 – STRITCH – 1-for-1 since the auction purchase by the Stillings barn. Moves up in class today, but has shown the ability to contend in here. Shows several other recent starts in this class, and has a couple of second place finishes for the previous connections.

4 – PERFECT SUMMER K – Since returning from the Midwest, this one has yet to finish lower than second, including a pair of top-2 finishes in this class. She's yet another one that can contend in here, and in her favor is the fact that she has gate speed and can control the mile.

5 – MAYFAIR WELL – Finished 9th in local debut last week. Should improve in second local start, and draws a slightly better post. Will likely be one of the longer shots in here.

6 – TOM CATTIN – Didn't use his early speed last time, and was never able to get involved in the race. Look for him to revert to his former style this week and fire out of the gate early.

7 – SCRAMBLE CAMP – Used a little early speed last week, got away third, then was eventually shuffled back to sixth at the $\frac{3}{4}$ pole. Rallied late to get third, so it was a pretty good mile last week. Has gate speed and closing ability, but there is some speed to his left at the gate today, so he may have to take the more conservative route.

SELECTIONS: 2-4-1-3

RACE 3 – NW 5100 PACE

1 – HUDSONANDBERNARD – Missed a start prior to last week due to a scratch, and wasn't quite as sharp. Look for him to be a bit better today. He'll need a quick start from the rail to try to hold his position.

2 – BETTOR'S REWARD – Returns today after layoff of more than 2 ½ years. The qualifier was decent, with a good last quarter, but he'll likely need a few starts to get in 100% top shape.

3 – ONE BAD NIGHT – Good win two starts ago in a lower level, then jumped two classes last week and had a bad post. Today he drops back one level to a middle class, and gets a better post. Ignore last week and give him a look today.

4 – VODKA IS TERROR – Changes classes out of claiming ranks this week. Was in a claiming handicap the last two starts and put in for the higher price tag, so he got the outside posts. Today he is in a much better spot and can contend with the right trip.

5 – IMIDEAL HANOVER – Makes his third start back after a layoff and should be ready to go. Gets a class drop to the lowest level he's seen in a while, so he's a major factor in here. Could end up as the favorite.

6 – REGGIE RAIDER – Has been in this class three weeks in a row, and has improved his finish weekly. Post doesn't help him today, but he can still be a factor in here.

7 – WARP FACTOR THREE – Came a long way to get fourth last week from the worst post on the half mile track at Northfield. That was his debut for the Burke Stable, so he could be a big factor in here today. Never shows early speed, so he'll be at the mercy of the fractions.

8 – INDIGO ART – Gets a bad post for the second week in a row, but today he gets a class drop of one level. Finished third in his only other recent start in this class, so he has the speed to be good in here, but not the post position today.

SELECTIONS: 5-1-8-4

RACE 4 – NW 3800 PACE

1 – BROOKLYN FLIGHT – Has had bad posts the last 2 weeks, but lost by less than 5 lengths each time. I'd look for him to be a contender today, even though he hasn't won in a long time. The move to the inside post is the key.

2 – TSM CRUSIN USA – This one has the look of a longshot again today. He hasn't finished higher than 6th in any of his recent starts since returning from Pocono.

3 – CRANKIN' IT UP – Faded last week in the final quarter, losing positions and lengths. That was his second start in his new barn, and I had expected him to improve, so that leaves him as a bit of a mystery today.

4 – STARTHIMUP – Got off to a slow start from the rail last time, following two straight big closing efforts. I still think he's a big factor in this group today, he just needs someone else to set fast fractions up front.

5 – MARVALOUS TOWN – Closed late to get third last week, his best finish in at least 7 starts. Hopefully that's a sign that he's on the improve, and can be a factor today as a closer.

6 – R N NATE – Tried to leave the gate a bit last week and was hung to the first quarter. He made another move in the third quarter then held gamely late. That was the second straight week he's made two moves, so he's in better form than the lines may appear. He's a sleeper in here.

7 – HILLBILLYFAIRYTALE – Draws the outside post again this week, a tough spot for a horse than generally races from the back. He'll be at the mercy of the fractions, and there are some other closers that he'll have to find a way to pass late.

SELECTIONS: 4-1-5-6

RACE 5 – 10,000 CLAIMING PACE

1 – FINAL JUSTICE – Picked up a 5th place finish last week from post 10, and moves to the front row this week. That should help a bit, but he hasn't been better than 5th in a while.

2 – JK ONAROLL – Claimed last week and joins a new barn today, but Merriman sticks with this one among four choices in the race. Made an outside move in the second quarter last week and battled the rest of the way, but couldn't catch a very strong frontrunner.

3 – HICKORY LITTLE RED – Jumped two classes last week from the 7000 claimer to the 12,500 and was unsuccessful. This week he moves down one level, so he should fit a little better in here. He also moves to a better post today.

4 – THISWAYORTHEHIGHWAY – Has earned a shot at the 10,000 ranks this week. His last 5 starts have all been good, and he's now been on the ticket in 12 of 29 starts this year. He'll need to move to the outside early and flush some cover.

5 – DOCTOR RJ – Rallied in the final half to get third last week, not the easiest of trips. He should be able to find some cover this week, but I wouldn't be shocked if he decided to mix things up and try for the early lead today. He tried that route 3 starts ago, but got parked early and was roughed up to a 55.3 first half.

6 – R T LANGE – This one will probably need a start or two, as he returns today from a 5+ month layoff. The qualifier was good, but he'll likely need some time to get in total race shape.

7 – NATHAN FEELSGOOD – Comes off a distant loss in this class last week, but he was claimed back by his former connections. His last start in this barn was on 11/10, and he won handily in this class. So while the recent form may not look great, you can't completely overlook him.

8 – MADE WELL – Changes classes this week, leaving the 20,000 conditioned claiming ranks behind. However, he's still 0-for-32 on the year and has an outside post.

9 – LOW CARD – Lost by 27 lengths in this class from the same post last week, so he'll likely be a longshot in here today.

SELECTIONS: 5-4-2-7

RACE 6 – NW 3500 TROT

1 – UBER DOOBER DO – Shows a second place finish in this class three starts ago, but has had some bad trips the last couple of weeks, which have resulted in slower final quarters. Inside post could make things interesting today.

2 – I WANT KANDY – Drops in class a bit today after a 5th place finish against mares last week. Has shown consistent final quarters, so if she's close at the $\frac{3}{4}$ pole, she's not out of the question here.

3 – JUMPINTHEJAILHOUSE – Cut a fast half last time and faded late. Drops in class today, and even though he hasn't won in a while, I think he's the one to beat in here. It's been a while since he's seen a level this low, so I expect him to make the most of it.

4 – WHAMBAMTHANKUMAAM – Earlier in the year, she would have won easily in a level this low. But she's been struggling of late, and comes off a 9th place finish in this class last week. She could turn things around at any time, so you can't ever count her out.

5 – STIRLING DIVA – Finished second in this class two starts ago, but the trip wasn't the best last week so she wasn't able to follow it up. She made two moves last time, so she'll need an easier route today.

6 – BROADWAY JO ELL – Came a long way to get sixth last week from a bad post, and finished fourth in here two starts ago. She has yet to hit the board in limited action this year, but she's a contender in here today in my opinion.

7 – ICE HOCKEY HANOVER – Changes classes from the 17,000 conditioned claimer this week after a couple of bad posts. Doesn't draw much better in here today, so he'll need fast fractions up front to try to catch a piece of the action late.

8 – DON'T RUSH – Drops in class this week after four straight finishes of 7th or lower. However, you can't overlook the fact that in his last start in this level, he drew clear to an easy 4+ length win. Post hurts a bit today, but he may try to overcome the post by using some early speed.

9 – CLAIRE AND KENNY – This one has been troubled by breaks lately, but stayed flat last week and passed a few horses. Today, he gets the outside post for the second straight week, so he'll be a higher price.

SELECTIONS: 3-2-1-6

RACE 7 – NW 5 PACE

1 – SIN CITY BOOGIE – Big late rally last week to get second from a second tier starting spot. The prospects are much better this week from the inside post, the best this one has drawn in a while.

2 – HEZASHININGKNIGHT – 1-for-1 since adding Lasix, an easy 5-length win last week after making a move in the third quarter. However, Merriman opts off this one today in favor of #6, so you have to take that into consideration.

3 – PC'S EXPRESSO – Returns today after taking a month off. The qualifier was good, with a 28.2 last quarter mile, but he may need a start.

4 – WINBAK WILLY T – Very, very sharp right now. On a 2-race win streak, both in this class. However, again note that Merriman has opted off this one as well. Still, he should be a major contender in this group for the third week in a row.

5 – CIRRUS DE VIE – Had no chance from outside post last week. Ignore that mile. Two starts back, put in a decent effort and finished 4th. He'll likely race from the back today, and there will be a lot of talent in front of him to try to pass late.

6 – VENIER HANOVER – This one makes the race very tough to handicap. The 22-time winner has paced some very fast miles in his career. He took a month off, and returns today in a new barn with a new driver, and adds Lasix. He'll draw plenty of attention, especially since Merriman chose him over several other options.

7 – MR BILL G – Won two straight in a lower level, but found this group to be a bit tougher last time. Nonetheless, he held his own, finishing third and pacing a fast mile. He definitely fits in this group

8 – BAY MEADOWS – Won his first Meadows start in a lower level. Moved up to this group last time but had post 9 and was never able to get involved. Draws another outside post today, so the prospects aren't great for him. He'll be a high price.

9 – GUNNAR BOY – Put in another strong effort last week, but that was in the 20,000 conditioned claiming level. This is a tougher group today, plus he draws the toughest post.

10 – NAILED IT – Has finished sixth in both local starts. It appears that this class may be a bit over his head, and he may need to find a different option in order to hit the ticket.

SELECTIONS: 6-4-1-2

RACE 8 – PREFERRED PACE

1 – ROYALTYHASARRIVED – Moves up in class this week after a 6th place finish in a lower level. He'll be a higher price in here. Will need a quick start from the rail to try to hold some position.

2 – FLASH LAUXMONT – Another one that moves up in class after a 6th place finish. Hasn't fared well in his two local starts, so he will also be a price today.

3 – ROCK N TONY – Returns from Ohio and is up in class as well. Won in a lower level two starts ago and faces a tough task today off a second place finish last week. Faced the top level once at Northfield recently and finished 8th.

4 – KNOCKING AROUND – Has put in some good efforts lately, including a second place finish last week. Draws a middle post and should get away mid-pack. He'll likely be able to find some cover, so the trip could work in his favor.

5 – ANYTHINGFORLOVE A – He's been close lately, but hasn't been able to get a win at this level locally. Today could be his day. He'll likely use his gate speed and set the tempo this week.

6 – DAPPER DUDE – Finished a solid fourth last time in his first start after missing more than a month. He should be much stronger today and can definitely be a factor. However, it should be noted that the Bercury Stable, which always uses Aaron Merriman, has opted to put Merriman on stablemate Anythingforlove A, an indication that they believe that one may be the stronger of the two this week.

7 – HAWK'S RED CHIEF – Moved to the top level last week and put in a strong mile, finishing second at a high price. Gets the worst post this week, so he may be hard-used early if he tries to get to the front of the pack.

SELECTIONS: 5-6-7

RACE 9 – 12,500-15,000 CLAIMING PACE

1 – RIP THIS JOINT – Won in this class three starts ago, then finished third for Merriman in this class last week. He should be a contender here today as well.

2 – CARMENS BEST – Last week's winner in here, got a 29.4 second quarter then held off the pack coming home. He faces many of the same horses this week and should be the one to catch. He's now won three out of his last five.

3 – LOUIE'S SO BOSSY – Hasn't finished better than 6th since the claim, and hasn't been better than 5th since late September, so he'll likely be a price in here. He's been consistent with his times, but the races have just simply been a bit too tough for him.

4 – TWIN B WRANGLER – Moves up in class again this week after going 2-for-2 in the 10,000 ranks. He's certainly earned a shot at the higher group, after hitting the board in 14 of 19 starts this season. He'll need to work out the right trip in here.

5 – TERROR O – Makes his second start back after taking a few months off. Finished fourth in his return effort, not a bad mile at all. He should improve a bit this week.

6 – UNCLE COZ – Bounced back with a strong effort last week, his second start since the claim. Got out of the gate last week, as usual, and sat the pocket behind Carmens Best. Needs a similar trip today, but the post is a little tougher this time around.

7 – LYONS KING – Faced a tougher group last week in his first start after the claim. Held his own, finishing fourth, but today he will drop back to the claiming ranks. Has gate speed, but if he leaves from this post, there is plenty of inside speed that could cause him issues.

8 – I'M FEELIN GOOD – Dropped to this level last week and put in a good mile, given the fact that he'd missed a start due to a scratch. Today he gets another outside post by going in for the higher price tag, so he'll need to find a way to stay close enough to the action without burning up too much energy early.

SELECTIONS: 2-4-1-7

RACE 10 – 7000-8000 CLAIMING PACE

1 – MATCHPLAY HANOVER – Finished third in this class in late October, then followed with a 4th place finish the following week, but after returning to an inside post last time, he was unable to finish higher than 7th. Draws the inside again today, but will likely be a bit of a price.

2 – MANOLITO MONTOYA – Here's a sleeper that I think could make some noise in here today at a decent price. Made a move coming to the half last time, but was unable to clear and faded a bit. Still, he came back and passed 2 horses in the final quarter and actually made up ground as well, so he could be poised for a good mile today.

3 – COLOSSAL – Raced well in the 10,000 ranks, but after dropping back down to the 7000 level a few weeks ago, he's been unable to find success. Finished 4th last week, but the trip was good and he couldn't quite reach.

4 – IT'S A DEW THING – Won in this class 2 starts ago at 90-1, then was 4th last week at 22-1. He'll be a bit of a price today, but not nearly as high as he has been. He's put in some decent miles and deserves a look in here.

5 – CATHERINE'SDIAMOND – Joins a new barn today and drops from the 10,000 level in for 7000. Has been racing well for some time, but the slower final quarter last week is a bit of a cause for concern. Hopefully the class drop can offset the slower times.

6 – DANCE LIFE WELL – Has won 2 of 4 starts since the barn change, but last week he was parked to the quarter in 27.1 and tired to a 31 second final quarter as a 1-2 favorite. He'll probably take a lot of play this week and certainly could win, but he doesn't necessarily deserve to be the favorite in here.

7 – INCREDIBLE DRAGON – Has struggled the last few weeks, and will likely be a longshot again today. You don't often see a Palone-driven horse go off at 60-1, but that was the case with this one a week ago.

8 – HONEEMOON SUITE – Has had outside posts the last 2 starts, and has tried two different racing styles, both with similar results. Shows a win in this class a little over a month ago, but isn't quite as sharp right now.

9 – ALBIONKINGINFINITO – Drops in class this week to the 7000 level after another out-of-the-money finish last week. However, he won't likely get a chance to show how well he can fit in this level, due to the outside post.

SELECTIONS: 5-2-6-4

RACE 11 – 7000-8000 CLAIMING PACE

1 – LOUIE THE SHARK – Finished 5th last week, following a second place finish in this class two starts ago. He's been somewhat consistent, so if the race goes in the 156-157 range, he can be right there, especially with the inside post.

2 – STARRY NITE TEEN – Lost by 25 lengths in this class last week, after missing a start. Hopefully he'll be a bit stronger today, as he did put in a good mile two starts ago from post 9 in this level.

3 – DUNSIDE ART – Finished 4th in this class for a different driver and trainer two starts ago, his best effort in a while. Tried a race at Northfield last week but had a very tough trip. Returns to The Meadows today and returns to his previous barn. He'll be a price in here.

4 – SKULL OF ROSES – Makes his return to the races today for the first time in nearly 6 months. The qualifier was decent but not overpowering, a sign that he may need a few starts to get back into total racing shape.

5 – CAPITAL ACCOUNT – A third place finish last week, repeating his finish from three starts ago. He'll need the right trip in here, but has been consistent and could be a factor if things go his way.

6 – EPIC UNION – Broke before the start last week, so ignore that mile. He's had nothing but horrible posts five straight starts, so a move to post 6 is significant today. Hopefully he can be patient early and pick up some ground late.

7 – DRUNK ON YOU – Had missed a few weeks prior to his most recent start, but was still raced very aggressively. Tired in the third quarter, but certainly had reason to get a little weary. Drops in class today, and the last time he saw this level, he was a 3-length winner from post 8.

8 – BERGERAC – Moves to a poor post today after a 6th place finish, so he'll be a longshot in here. However, his previous three starts in here weren't that bad, so it's not outrageous to think he could hit the ticket today if there's a speed duel up front. He'll likely be sitting last early.

9 – T'S ELECTRIC – Look for him to blast out of the gate and try to take the field wire to wire in here today. Hasn't been worse than second in the last 4 starts, so he's certainly in good form right now.

SELECTIONS: 9-5-7-3

RACE 12 – 20,000 CD CLAIMING TROT

1 – MISS LADY HALFMOON – 1-for-1 since being purchased by the Stillings barn, and actually gets to drop in class this week from the NW5 to the 20,000 conditioned claiming level. Should be a big factor in here today.

2 – NOTHING BUT MUSCLE – Moves up in class this week after a second place finish, not a bad line at all. He can definitely be a contender in here today.

3 – SWAN'S WHEY – Has now won 2 of his last four starts, and moves up in class this week. She's in very good form, and certainly deserves a look in here today.

4 – PEMBROKE MORGAN – Consistent top finisher in recent weeks. Hasn't won in a while, but has been close, and certainly could end that winless streak at any time.

5 – MISTER OF ALL – Very sharp right now, having won three of his last five starts. Now a 6-time winner this year, he has early speed, which gives him the ability to control the mile. He's yet another one that's worth a look in here today.

6 – FANTASY ROCKET – Made his debut for a new barn last week and finished 5th, but the rail wasn't the best starting spot for this one. Should get away toward the back of the pack this week but there is plenty of early speed in here to set up the fast fractions that this one needs.

7 – WHEELS A TURNING – Has been on the ticket in this class the last two starts, but had better posts in both efforts. Gets a new driver this week as well.

8 – MEME HANOVER – Won in a lower level two starts ago, but didn't fare well in this group last week. Gets an outside post today, and will likely be a longshot.

9 – ZORGWJK SOPHIA – Newcomer ships in from Canada. Hasn't raced since October 22, so it's difficult to tell how long this one has been here and how hard she has been trained in preparation for today's race. The outside post adds another complicating factor.

SELECTIONS: 1-4-5-7

RACE 13 – NW 7800 PACE

1 – RUFFLE UP – Finished third in this class a week ago, following a win in a lower class. He's in good form, and has been very consistent in recent weeks. The mile last week was even more impressive given the sloppy track conditions.

2 – MISTER VIRGIN – Drops back to the 20,000 level after three tries in a tougher group. Won his last start in this class by more than 4 lengths. However, Rawlings had a choice among 4 horses in this race, including this one, and picked #9.

3 – MAYTIME TERROR – Finished third in this class last week, his best finish in three efforts in this class. Draws the same post as last week, but this is another one that Rawlings could have driven but chose off.

4 – BELEIVEINTHESPIRIT – Makes his second start since the claim in Philadelphia, and raced well the first time around. Sat the pocket early through fast fractions, so he was a bit hard used in the first half. The knock on this one is that he only has one win in 31 starts this year.

5 – ZONE BLITZ – Moves up two classes this week after a win. He finished third in this class three starts ago, so you can't completely write him off because of the class jump.

6 – STIRLING ESCORT – Has been third on the outside at the $\frac{3}{4}$ pole in four straight starts, but his final quarter has gone various ways. Shows a win in a lower level, but in this group has been 6th in both efforts.

7 – THE DARK SHADOW – Finished 4th last week, trying the closing route again. Two starts back, he reversed his usual racing style and closed very well to finish second. This week, I'm thinking he may go back to his frontrunning style.

8 – VALIANT IVY – Another one that has shown some versatility in recent weeks, he gave up his frontrunning style after leaving the conditioned claimers, and has done well as a closer in this tougher group. Today will be a challenge, as it's the worst post he's had in a while.

9 – TARPORT ANDY – A newcomer from New Jersey, this is the one that Rawlings picked over several others, despite the outside post draw. There isn't much to like about this one on paper, given the scratch last time and the last race date of November 17, but you have to give the horse consideration off the driver choice alone.

10 – HAPPY TRIO – Won in a lower level in his local debut, then broke the following two weeks. That leaves him as a risky play today, especially given the class change this week. He's technically down in class because of the purse, but he's facing some tough older horses this time around.

SELECTIONS: 2-7-1-3-8