



A CLOSER LOOK

by The Professor

In-depth analysis of races at The Meadows

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22

RACE 1 – NW 11,000 PACE

1 – BEACH HOUSE – Obviously the last line is a bit tough to read, but prior to that he's been pacing consistent fast miles. His most recent local start was a 6th place finish in this class after a win in a lower level. The rail post certainly doesn't hurt.

2 – ATTA BOY DAN – Lost by a neck last time, ending a 5-race win streak in this exact class. He may have been caught last time, but he's still the horse to beat today.

3 – THE DARK SHADOW – Hard-used twice during the mile last time, so it was a very strong effort. He'll move up in class today, to a level where he was fourth just 2 weeks ago. He's been a consistent top finisher, but hasn't gotten a win in a while.

4 – KNOCKING AROUND – Sat at the back last time and made a move early, but couldn't catch the frontrunners after they backed the half off to 58 and sprinted home in 55.3. He raced well, so don't count him out if the trip works out a little better this week.

5 – UNLOCKED – Sat the pocket and couldn't reach last time, but he was still a top-3 finisher. Look for him to use his early speed again this week.

6 – NITRO SEELSTER – The rail was not a great starting spot for him last time as he got away mid-pack. From the outside this week, don't be surprised if he leaves the gate and tries to get close to the front early.

SELECTIONS: 2-4-5

RACE 2 – HOLIDAY CLAIMING SERIES

1 – T'S ELECTRIC – Skipped the first leg of the series to race in a lower level. After a win in the 7000 ranks, he'll step up today and try the series. He's sharp, so it's well worth a shot for him, but he's going to need a top finish to earn some points to make the final. Look for an aggressive drive.

2 – DEALIN DAN – Sat the pocket and couldn't reach the frontrunner last time, but that was only his third start back after a layoff, and he had missed a start. I'm looking for him to be a bit better today.

3 – NORM AT WORK – Newcomer raced in Ohio last time and has opted to try our series this week. Has three wins this year but nothing recent. He's the morning line choice, but I'm not convinced of his chances in here today.

4 – LIMA RAIDER – Joins a new barn this week after a claim. He's been a consistent top finisher with four recent wins, but he will need to prove himself in the new surroundings today.

5 – JK ONAROLL – Returns to one of his former stables today. Finished third for the Goldberg barn two starts ago, his only effort on the front. He's not out of the question here, but while he has 6 wins this year, he hasn't won in a while.

6 – LOW CARD – Finished fourth off a decent trip last time. He's 1-for-32 this year and will likely be a longshot today.

7 – TWIN B WRANGLER – Was parked early last time but held well after getting passed in the second quarter. Needs to avoid another speed battle this week.

8 – MADE WELL – Has drawn an outside post for the fourth straight time, which makes it difficult to pick him. He's been competitive and has had a good season, but has yet to pick up a win in 2018.

SELECTIONS: 2-4-5-1

RACE 3 – HOLIDAY CLAIMING SERIES

1 – SIR JACK – Hasn't been in the top-3 in quite some time, and comes off a 7th place finish in the series last week. He'll be a high price in here.

2 – FAIRYTALE PRINCE – Won in the series last week by more than 2 lengths, as the favorite. It was a successful debut in the Burke Stable, so look for this one to be the favorite today.

3 – STONEHOUSE ADAM – Finished second in his division of the series race last week after cutting the mile. Not a bad line for his first local start. Changes drivers this week.

4 – THISWAYORTHEHIGHWAY – Made a successful debut in the 10,000 class last time, and the trip wasn't the best. Got away second, but was shuffled back to 5th at the $\frac{3}{4}$ pole. He rallied late to get second at a price of 8-1. He deserves a look in here today.

5 – LOUIE'S SO BOSSY – Dropped to the 10,000 level last time but had a bad post and finished 8th, losing by 10 lengths. Has a better post today, but hasn't gotten away well in any of his recent starts, regardless of the post.

6 – ALBIONKINGINFINITO – Finished sixth last week, only losing by $6\frac{3}{4}$ lengths, the closest he's been in a month. His final quarter of 28.4 could be a sign that he's turning things around.

7 – CATHERINE'SDIAMOND – Raced from the back again last week and passed a few horses coming home. I still think he's more of a front-end type, and I would prefer to see him get out of the gate. However, I'm not sure that's possible due to the inside speed in the field.

8 – NOBETTERPLACETOBE – Joins a new barn today after a 7th place finish in the first leg of the series. Unfortunately, he draws the worst post in this group and will likely be a longshot.

SELECTIONS: 2-3-1-7

RACE 4 – NW 8 PACE

1 – BOBBY K HILL – Ignore that last effort, as he had a bad post and sat at the back throughout a fast mile. He has a much better chance today from the inside post. He's a contender in here.

2 – WELL OF FIRE – Made his Meadows debut last week and finished 7th, but he has a couple of factors in his favor today. First, he should improve in his second start in the barn, now that they know him a little better. Second, he changes classes this week. While this is a tough group, they are all younger and less experienced than some of the horses he faced last week.

3 – ZERO THE HERO – A former Meadows regular, he returns today in his 5th barn since late October. He's coming off a scratch, so he may not be at his best this week.

4 – CLASSY HILL – Moves up in class this week, but he's earned a shot in here after winning by open lengths last time in the conditioned claimer. He's a front-end horse, so he'll likely try that same route today, but will have better horses lined up behind him.

5 – HERE COMES TEDDY – Newcomer won in a similar class last time at Harrah's Philadelphia, off a very good trip. It was a fast mile for a horse that has shown plenty of talent since arriving in PA from Iowa in October. He can be a factor in here.

6 – REAL PEACE – He was bet to 1-2 last time and failed to get the win, but he still raced well. He sat at the back of the pack and paced a strong final quarter on a sloppy track, picking up a second place finish. He's the one to beat today, as I expect him to use his gate speed in this group.

SELECTIONS: 6-1-4-5

RACE 5 – HOLIDAY CLAIMING SERIES

1 – ZONE BLITZ – Adds Lasix this week after a 6th place finish. Only lost by 4 lengths last time, so if the Lasix can pick him up a few lengths, he can contend for the win today. The inside post certainly doesn't hurt his chances.

2 – LYONS KING – Raced well last week after a slower start. Came on late to finish third with a 29 flat final quarter on a sloppy track. He's been bouncing around in different classes lately, but has been competitive in nearly all of them.

3 – ONE BAD NIGHT – Joins the Rhoades barn this week after a 4th place finish in the first leg of the series. He'll draw some attention in here for certain, especially given the fact that Merriman had a choice among three horses in this field and selected this one.

4 – MAYTIME TERROR – Has only hit the ticket once since moving up to the 20,000 level. It just appears as though this group is a bit too tough for him right now.

5 – VODKA IS TERROR – Got away fourth but slipped to 7th by the half last week. Showed good late foot, coming home in 28.4 and passing a few horses. He's got a shot here if the trip works out.

6 – BEGINNER'S LUCK – Finished second in his local debut last time, a strong effort. Used some early speed, got shuffled back to 5th, then paced home with a strong final quarter for a quick 1:53.4 mile. He could be one of the main contenders in here today.

7 – VALIANT IVY – Joins a new barn this week after a claim. He's had a stellar summer and fall, hitting the board in 2/3 of his starts. Didn't fare quite as well last week, so he might be a bit of a price today. Has some gate speed, but hasn't used it in a while.

8 – LATEST DESIRE – Draws the 8 post for his Meadows debut which comes after a hard-earned fourth place finish at Hollywood Dayton last week. Made a 3-wide bid and came on in the stretch, not a bad effort at all. He'll need plenty of late speed this week if he's going to be able to contend.

9 – CLASS SIX – He was bet to 5-2 last time and just missed in his local debut, losing by less than a length. Today he gets the worst post, but I think he's still a major player in here. He has gate speed to help overcome the post, and the Burke Stable has done very well in the various series races in the past couple of weeks.

SELECTIONS: 9-6-2-1

RACE 6 – 7000 CLAIMING PACE

1 – FINAL JUSTICE – Comes off his best race in a while, after dropping to the 7000 ranks. He was claimed, so today he joins a new barn but stays in the same class. He should be a factor here with the inside post.

2 – DANCE LIFE WELL – He's been inconsistent lately, putting in a top effort every other start. If that pattern continues, today could be his day. He's been tough to handicap for that reason, as he's been a beaten favorite three times now.

3 – CAPITAL ACCOUNT – He had an excuse last time, after being used early trying to get to the front from post 10. It was a very good effort given the trip. His previous efforts in here were good as well, but he is still winless on the year in 12 tries.

4 – R T LANGE – Has now had 2 starts back after some time off, and has lost by double-digit lengths both times. This week he drops to the bottom class, so this could help to rejuvenate him.

5 – BERGERAC – Used some gate speed last week, a rarity for him. Still ended up in mid-pack by the half, but held well, only losing by 3 lengths. I would look for him to return to his usual closing style this week.

6 – STARRY NITE TEEN – Hasn't been higher than fourth in a while, so he has the look of a longshot in here today. Still, he picks up Dave Palone, and he may be worth a look as a longshot in here.

7 – COLOSSAL – Very sharp right now, riding a 2-race win streak. The post is a bit tougher today, but he should be able to handle it. He pulled away by 2 lengths last time, so if the post costs him a little bit, he could still have enough to get the job done if he's left alone.

8 – DRUNK ON YOU – Dropped back to this level two starts ago and has been well supported on the board in both recent efforts, but hasn't hit the top-3 in a while. Post hurts today, so he'll be a higher price than the past couple of weeks.

9 – EPIC UNION – Broke last time, which means he has now made breaks in 2 of his last 3 starts. However, that line in the middle is what makes you have to look at him, as he was a very game winner that day. The biggest obstacle this week is the post position.

SELECTIONS: 1-7-3-2

RACE 7 – 14,000 CD CLAIMING PACE

1 – WHAM BAM GUCCIO – Drops to a claimer this week after a solid local debut. He had missed a full month prior to his first Meadows start, and was a strong third place finisher after going right to the lead. He's the one to beat today.

2 – FRISKY REBELLION – His previous efforts weren't bad, but he went the wrong direction last time, getting out of the gate 13 lengths back and finishing 21 behind. He'll be a high price again today.

3 – SCHNICKEL FRITZ – A proven winner in this class, he was the 9-5 favorite last week but couldn't catch a runaway winner. He faces a tough horse from the rail today so he may not be able to get the win, but I think he can be second best.

4 – PUERTO RICO – Bounced back from a dismal effort two weeks ago with a much better mile last week. He has good gate speed, so I expect him to use it again this week.

5 – FREEZE LINE – Except for a break two starts ago, his recent efforts have all been good. He has early speed but can also race from behind, as he showed on October 31. He can definitely be a factor in here today if the trip works out.

6 – SHE'S SWANDERFUL – This one was parked last time and faded late, but the previous two starts she also showed slow final quarters. She will definitely need a stronger finish today. Picks up Merriman this week, which will draw some attention.

7 – AD HOC HANOVER – Comes off a third place finish last time in a higher level at a high price. It was a good effort for sure, as was the mile three starts ago, also in a higher class. The only recent start in this level was a 9th place finish, but she had the worst post that day and seemed disinterested. She can be a factor here.

8 – TWO TWO'S – Finished 8th in his local debut, far back from the winner. It was his first start in over three months, so he should improve this week, but is likely a few weeks away from his best effort.

9 – ANDOVER EXPRESS – Post hurts this one today. Had post 9 three starts ago and raced from the back of the pack, putting in a good mile but he was just too far back to contend.

10 – MILLVILLE ROAD – Finished third last week, his best finish since coming to The Meadows. He's definitely improving, so if he can work out a trip from the second tier, he can hit the ticket.

SELECTIONS: 1-3-7-10

RACE 8 – PREFERRED PACE

1 – HAWK’S RED CHIEF – Finished second in this class twice in the last three weeks, so he’s definitely a factor in here, especially with the inside post. He’ll need to hold his position out of the gate and hopefully avoid making a first-over move.

2 – ARTHUR PENDRAGON – A winner of two in a row, he moves up to the top level today. Raced in this class three starts ago, and finished a decent fourth, but that was only his second start back after a layoff. He should be more competitive in this group today.

3 – ANYTHINGFORLOVE A – Won in this class two starts ago and was a solid second last week. He’s always a factor in here, especially when he has post advantage on his main rivals, as he does today. He’s been in the top-3 in 14 of 17 starts this season.

4 – PHOENIX WARRIOR N – Had missed a couple of weeks prior to last week’s effort, so he may show a bit more today. He’s been chasing Windsong Leo in the last 4 tries, but with that one off this week, he’s likely the one to beat.

5 – VAGUE TRACES – Well-traveled pacer made his way to Yonkers last week and won in a tough class. Today he returns to The Meadows and moves back up to the top level. Shows one recent start in this level, a 5th place finish.

6 – NEW EVIDENCE – Returns today after making breaks in three straight efforts at Northfield. Gets the outside post in a tough field, so I don’t expect him to hit the board. The most important thing will be for him to stay on stride throughout the mile.

SELECTIONS: 4-3-1

RACE 9 – HOLIDAY CLAIMING SERIES

1 – MARVALOUS ARTIST – Joins a new barn this week after a claim. Has been racing very well, with all top-3 finishes in recent starts. The big question today is how he will take to the new connections.

2 – JD'S MACCA LODGE – Drops in class this week and makes his second start back after taking 6 weeks off, two positive factors in his favor. There really isn't a lot from last week's line to indicate he's ready to win, and he's 20-1 on the morning line, but I'm going to take a chance on him as a longshot in here today.

3 – POACHER N – Returned from a 5-month layoff right into the series last week, a tough spot for his first effort. He managed to pass a couple of horses in the stretch, so he definitely has a license to improve today.

4 – SILVERHILL BLAZE – An upset winner in here last week at 33-1, he worked out a perfect trip by using his early speed, something he hadn't done in any of his other recent starts. This week, look for him to try to take a similar route, since it worked very well last week.

5 – BELIEVEINTHESPIRIT – Sat at the back of the pack due to a poor post last time and made the most of it, picking up a 5th place check with a good final quarter. It was a good effort for him, so if he can work out a cover trip today and sit closer to the action early, he can be a factor here.

6 – MISTER VIRGIN – Very tough trip last time, battling to the ¾ pole before tiring in the stretch. Two weeks ago, he encountered interference, so he's had some tough trips lately. Joins another new barn this week after a claim. Don't be surprised if he shows some early speed in here.

7 – LINKJACK HANOVER – Claimed from a 12,500 race at Batavia a few weeks ago, he moved up to a couple of Open classes, which are tough to read as far as a comparison to this group. The big thing to note is his early speed. He rarely races from the back, so look for him to fly out of the gate today.

8 – REGGIE RAIDER – Comes off a closing victory last time in the series at a 5-1 price. However, Dave Palone chose off this one today, as he has drawn the worst post. He has early speed and closing speed, but there is a lot of speed to his left at the start.

SELECTIONS: 2-1-6-7

RACE 10 – 20,000 CD CLAIMING TROT

1 – ZORGWIIK SOPHIA – Made her Meadows debut on 12/8 but had the outside post and made a break before the start. Requalified five days later and looked good. Draws the inside today and should be OK in here.

2 – STRITCH – Drops back to the claiming class this week. Shows one recent start at this level, a winning effort three starts ago. Raced well in the higher level the last couple of weeks, so she's still in good form. Hopefully she can avoid a first-over move this week.

3 – MEME HANOVER – Raced well last week trying to overcome an outside post. Managed to drop in fourth and held well throughout the mile. Draws a much better post this week.

4 – JOHNY VICTORY – Has had bad posts the last couple of starts and finally draws a decent spot. Was also overmatched last time in the straight NW5, and gets a drop in class to the claimer today to go along with a better post, two positive factors.

5 – MEETMEINTHEMIDDLE – Won in the 17,000 level two starts ago, then tried a tough conditioned field at Northfield last week. Held his own in that group, so he could fit well into this class today.

6 – MIDNIGHT ZETTE – Has lost by a combined 26 lengths the last couple of weeks. Was the favorite two starts ago after a win in this level three starts back. He'll be a higher price today, but does pick up a new driver this week.

7 – TOM CATTIN – Drops to a claimer this week after several starts in the straight NW5. Raced well in that level with three top-3 finishes in the last 5 starts. Last week he finished 4th, but only lost by $\frac{3}{4}$ of a length. Post hurts a bit, but he has the early speed to overcome it.

8 – TRAK – Won three in a row prior to last week. Moved up to the NW5 group and finished 5th, so today he opts to go down to the claimer. This will be his first start at this level, but it looks like he'll fit well in this group.

9 – SWEETCHAP – Newcomer has been getting some tough trips the last few weeks, and today he gets the worst post. He'll be a price in here.

SELECTIONS: 2-8-5-7

RACE 11 – 12,500-15,000 CLAIMING PACE

1 – I'M FEELIN GOOD – Has had bad posts the last couple of weeks, but today moves to the inside. Has put in two good efforts in a row, so he can definitely be a factor today from the inside.

2 – NATHAN FEELSGOOD – An impressive winner last week, this one challenged first-over and took the lead at the top of the stretch. However, Merriman had a choice between this one and #7, and chose the other one this week.

3 – TERROR O – Got off to a slow start last week and came on late to get fifth. It wasn't a bad effort, so he can contend today if he can get off to a slightly better start and stay closer to the action early.

4 – UNCLE COZ – Joins a new barn this week after a claim. Had a bad post last time and only lost by 5 lengths, so it wasn't a bad effort, just not up to the standards of his previous two starts. The big question today is how he'll perform for the new trainer.

5 – JUMPIN JAKE FLASH – Came a long way from 8th at the half to finish third last time. Paced a very quick final quarter on a sloppy track. He's in good form, but trip and posts just haven't worked out for him lately. I'm going to take a shot on him today.

6 – FOUR DIAMONDS – Newcomer was claimed last time off Batavia's top trainer after an easy win. Has 7 wins this year with a mark at Fraser Downs in western Canada, so he's well traveled. He's a bit of a mystery here today.

7 – CARIBBEAN BEACH – Has been first-over on the outside at Northfield each of the last four starts, not an enviable position. Has done well to get the finishes he has. Let's see how the move to a new track and a drop in class affect him today.

8 – P H KENNY – Consistent top-3 finisher in recent weeks, he joins a new barn off a claim. Goes in for a higher price tag today so he drew for an outside post. Gets a new driver as well this week.

9 – CRANKIN' IT UP – Has won 2 in a row in conditioned company, and today shifts to a claimer. Puts in for the higher claiming tag, so they knew they would end up with the outside post when he was entered. Has the speed to win, but the post is the big concern today.

SELECTIONS: 5-2-1-6

RACE 12 – NW 5000 PACE

1 – MATTAMERICAN - Gets a class drop today for the second week in a row. Parked last time to a fast first quarter on a sloppy track, so he had reason to get tired in the stretch. Despite two straight 7th place finishes, I like his chances to be in the top-2 and contend for the win today.

2 – FOUR CARD MAJOR – Made an early move to the outside last week and got up as high as third, then held that spot in the final quarter. Not a bad effort, but today he moves up in class despite not picking up a win in the lower level.

3 – CYRUS SEELSTER – Another one moving up in class, this one would still fit the lower level but that race isn't being contested today. He'll be a longshot in here.

4 – ROYALTYHASARRIVED – He's been racing at the top 2 levels in recent months and today gets a drop in class to a level that he hasn't seen in quite some time. He should be the horse to beat in this group today.

5 – HUDSONANDBERNARD – The rail may not have been the best spot for him last time as he got away mid-pack. He did make a move into the third quarter, but lost a few positions late. Has one big burst of speed, it just needs to be timed right.

6 – INDIGO ART – Has had the 8 post in back-to-back starts, which hasn't helped him at all, but he still managed a pair of 5th place finishes, so he hasn't been racing badly at all. He has some gate speed and could elect to try and use it today.

7 – BETTOR'S REWARD – Made his return last week after 2 ½ years away from the game. Raced well, staying within 6 lengths of the winner at the wire. He should be stronger today.

8 – WARP FACTOR THREE – Moves up in class after a second place finish. While he wasn't able to win last week at the lower level, he actually crossed the wire first in this class two starts ago before being disqualified for interference. He's a factor here despite the post.

9 – STIRLING ESCORT – Drops in class this week after a 4th place finish, a very positive factor. However, the drop in class is kind of offset by the post position draw.

SELECTIONS: 4-1-8-2

RACE 13 – NW 5 PACE

1 – MCFLY – Comes off a scratch, and hasn't raced since November 17. Makes a big switch to the inside post this week, but the big issue is the time off. He'll likely be a longer shot in here.

2 – ALL ABOUT HEAVEN – Returns today after a 3-month layoff. Only raced 12 times this year, but has been on the board in 8 of those efforts. Has plenty of speed, and qualified well, so he could be ready to win in his first start back.

3 – MR BILL G – Finished fourth in this level last week, a nice turnaround from the previous week, when he had a bad post. He left the gate last week then got shuffled, and had some pace at the end. He can be a factor here with a better trip today.

4 – WINBAK WILLY T – His hot streak ended last week after he got parked early and pushed to the half. He definitely had an excuse to get tired late, so you can't count him out today after just one off the board finish.

5 – VENIER HANOVER – He makes the race tough to handicap. Joined his new barn last week after returning from a month off. He was bet to 1-1 and went right to the front in what was also his first start on Lasix. However, he tired in the stretch and finished off the board. He didn't race last week and is back today as a big question mark. Logically, he should improve this week.

6 – PC'S EXPRESSO – Tough trip last time, battling his way to second at the top of the stretch before fading a bit late. From this post, unless he elects to challenge early, he could work out a cover trip and improve today.

7 – SCRUB HANOVER – This one had been struggling for a couple of weeks, but turned things around nicely last week with a 3rd place finish at 40-1. He deserves a look today.

8 – DEW A LITTLE DANCE – Returned from a long layoff with a fifth place finish in a qualifier. He's been off 7 months, so don't look for much today. Keep an eye on him for future weeks.

9 – UNCLE HAL – Newcomer from Philly has posted decent finishes the last couple of weeks, but he's facing a tougher class today and has the worst post. He'll be a longshot.

10 – WHATS HIS IS MINE – Joins a new barn today after a come from behind win in NW2 last week. Draws the second tier, so he'll be at the mercy of the fractions, but his closing style should fit well in here if he can find live cover.

SELECTIONS: 5-2-4-6-10