

Saturday

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BELMONT
MONMOUTH
PIMLICO
PHILADELPHIA
DELAWARE
CHURCHILL
HOLLYWOOD

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Races of the day

It's tough to look past turf marathon specialist Spice Route in Saturday's Louisville Handicap at Churchill. **Page 3**

Indescribable will have a tough time defending her title against 10 rivals in the Matron, one of four six-figure stakes on the card at Arlington. **Page 4**

Game Face holds a distinct class edge but comes back on short rest for the My Juliet at Philadelphia Park. **Page 5**

Opinions

Owner Marty Wygod tells columnist Jay Hovdey that the perfect outcome of Saturday's showdown between stablemates Zenyatta and Life Is Sweet would be a dead heat. **Page 8**

News and notes

Trainer Nick Zito, who has a knack for pulling surprises come Belmont Stakes time, has two longshots in Brave Victory and Miner's Escape. **Page 12**

HOLLYWOOD



BARBARA D. LIVINGSTON

Zenyatta, unbeaten and coming off a championship year, will face barnmate Life Is Sweet, winner of three big Santa Anita stakes.

Milady looking like match race

By Steve Andersen

INGLEWOOD, Calif. - Usually, either Zenyatta or Life Is Sweet would be a standout selection in a race such as Saturday's \$150,000 Milady Handicap at Hollywood Park. With both of them starting, trainer John Shirreffs has a nearly unbeatable team.

The problem for bettors is choosing between the two.

Zenyatta, unbeaten in nine starts, was the champion older female of 2008 and is making her first start since an emphatic win in the Breeders' Cup Ladies' Classic at Santa Anita last October.

Life Is Sweet enhanced her reputation as the nation's most-accomplished 4-year-old filly with three major stakes wins during the Santa Anita winter-spring meeting earlier this year.

Add similar running styles as closers, and many race-watchers will

be focusing on the action at the back of the field through the first half of the Grade 2 Milady. As the race unfolds, it is easy to envision the pair several lengths off the pace on the backstretch, moving closer to the front-runners entering the turn, being just behind the leaders in early stretch, and then . . .

That is when Shirreffs declines to make a prediction.

"I'm not paid to figure it out," Shirreffs said with a smile.

Shirreffs acknowledges that Zenyatta's experience is a significant advantage, but Life Is Sweet's turn of foot could put her in position earlier than Zenyatta. Conversely, Zenyatta is a mare with an extended rally that can wear down even the best of rivals. She was last of eight on the turn in the BC Ladies' Classic and won by 1 1/2 lengths under a hand-ride from jockey Mike Smith, who retains the mount on Saturday.

Continued on page 6

BELMONT

Criticism can either lead or hang back

By David Grening

ELMONT, N.Y. - The versatile and consistent Criticism returns to New York on Saturday in hopes of continuing her ascent through the filly and mare turf division when she meets seven rivals in the Grade 2, \$150,000 Sheepshead Bay Stakes at Belmont Park.

Since beginning her North American career in the fall of 2008, Criticism has three wins, a second, and a third from five starts. Last year, she won the Grade 3 Long Island at Aqueduct from off the pace. This year, she posted victories in The Very One at Gulfstream and the La Prevoyante at Calder while setting the pace.

Thus, when trainer Tom Albertrani says "she doesn't have to be on the lead," he actually has the evidence to support his theory.

"She inherited the lead in her last couple of races because there was absolutely no speed," Albertrani said.

Entering the Sheepshead Bay, Albertrani is suspicious that Colina Verde could be used as a pace factor by trainer Kiaran McLaughlin, who also has the Grade 1 winner Backseat Rhythm entered in this race.

"Whatever happens, she doesn't have to be on the lead," Albertrani said. "If they go slow, she's there; if not, she'll go her own pace. She's been training well. She seems like

she's on top of her game."

Criticism will break from post 3 under Javier Castellano.

Backseat Rhythm is 3 for 3 at Belmont Park, including a victory in the Grade 1 Garden City last September. This year she finished third to Criticism in The Very One before winning the Grade 3 Hillsborough at Tampa in the last jump. Owner Paul Pompa Jr. transferred her to McLaughlin after that race. In her first start for McLaughlin, Backseat Rhythm finished fifth in the paceless Jenny Wiley at Keeneland.

"The pace scenario is not in our favor," McLaughlin said, looking at this field. "Hopefully, he can get her

covered up. If we're laying second or third, just cover her up and then wheel out and let her see daylight and run."

Mushka broke through with a new career-best figure winning a third-level allowance on Polytrack last out for trainer Bill Mott. She was defeated only 2 1/2 lengths by Backseat Rhythm despite a troubled trip in the Hillsborough.

"She never had a chance to run," Mott said. "Distance never seems to be an issue for her. Her strength is in her pedigree."

Venetian Causeway, who did not ship to Arlington as expected, completes the field along with Shadiyna, Russian Rosie, and Caprice.



STAT OF THE DAY

Track: Delaware Park, Race 2
Horse: Racingwiththewind
Trainer: Hamilton A. Smith
Stat: Last 3 years with first time starters in maiden claiming races on dirt

| STS | WINS | ITM | WIN % | ITM % | ROI |
|-----|------|-----|-------|-------|--------|
| 44 | 11 | 22 | 25% | 50% | \$3.97 |

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