

Saturday

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AQUEDUCT

Solar Flare healed, prepped

By David Grening

OZONE PARK, N.Y. – Solar Flare had been impressive enough in his first two North American starts that bettors sent him off as the favorite against 10 others in the Grade 1 Whitney Handicap at Saratoga.

Though he disappointed his backers that day when he finished seventh, there was a valid excuse – the horse wrenched his ankle. Now fully recovered, and with a successful prep race under him, Solar Flare looks like a deserving favorite against seven opponents in Saturday's Grade 3, \$100,000 Stuyvesant Handicap at Aqueduct.

Solar Flare began his career in Argentina, winning 3 of 7 races. He was purchased privately by Rick Porter's Fox Hill Farm, and in his first North American start he won a third-level allowance race

at Delaware. He then came to New York and finished second to longshot Frost Giant in the Grade 1 Suburban Handicap at Belmont on June 28.

Solar Flare then got injured in the Whitney and, according to trainer Larry Jones, the horse reagravated that injury when he was a well-beaten third in the Owners' Day Handicap at Delaware on Sept. 6. He bounced back with an easy 2 1/2-length score in a fourth-level allowance race at the Meadowlands on Oct. 27.

"It was as good a prep as you could ask for," Jones said. "He's a quality horse."

Solar Flare figures to work out a good stalking trip under jockey Terry Thompson from post 5.

The once highly regarded Ravel has yet to regain the form he displayed early in his 3-year-old year, when he won 3 of his first 4 starts before suffering an eye injury. He is winless in his last four

starts, including a fifth-place finish to Curlin in the Grade 1 Jockey Club Gold Cup at Belmont.

Trainer Todd Pletcher is adding blinkers to Ravel's equipment for the Stuyvesant.

"I thought he ran a decent race," Pletcher said of Ravel's Gold Cup effort. "We're going to try some blinkers on him, see if we can get him a little more focused than he's been in the last couple of starts. He's had two good breezes with the blinkers on, so we'll see if that kind of renews his enthusiasm."

Stud Muffin is coming off a solid victory in the Empire Classic and is 2 for 3 over Aqueduct's main track. Temporary Saint won the Grade 3 Excelsior in front-running fashion here in the spring and wheels back on eight days' rest after running third in a one-turn allowance race.

Phil the Power, Helsinki, Brilliant Son, and Dry Martini complete the field.



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News and Notes

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Races of the day

Nothing went right for Solar Miss in her stakes debut, but she's capable of a much-improved effort in Saturday's Audrey Skirbal-Kenis at Hollywood Park. **Page 3**

Trainer Eric Heitzmann goes for his first stakes victory at the track where he grew up when he sends out Autobecat in the Mr. Sulu at Fair Grounds **Page 3**

Opinions

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Formulator

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Hitting the road

Callwood Dancer makes a rare appearance away from her home base of Woodbine on Saturday in the Grade 3, \$100,000 Cardinal Handicap at Churchill Downs. **Article, page 3.**