

Globeform's Kentucky Derby Weekend Special

KENTUCKY OAKS PREVIEW



GLOBEFORM ANALYSIS KENTUCKY OAKS

BELLAFINA (Benoit photo) is the clear favorite for the Kentucky Oaks, and it isn't exactly hard to see why the daughter of Quality Road holds this position. She has gone from strength to strength at her home track, Santa Anita, this winter / spring, winning all of her three races quite comfortably, and she has the best form in the book. She will be very popular with the horseplayers, though anyone taking very short odds about Bellafina must know that there are a couple of uncertain factors mixed in here. Bellafina ran way below her true form when fourth, beaten almost ten lengths behind **JAYWALK**, as she came to Churchill Downs for the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies last fall, and she is quite a speedy lady, whose stamina will be tested like never before. That said, Bellafina is the best filly in the lineup, except for Serengeti Empress none of the others come anywhere near her level of form, and perhaps she can win the Kentucky Oaks without truly appreciating 9 furlongs over this demanding track. Her run at the Breeders' Cup might have had more to do with the fact that it was the first time she shipped out of California, than the course. Still, Santa Anita and Churchill Downs are two quite different tracks and form does not always translate from one to the other.

If Bellafina performs as well here, as she does at home, and stays the trip, well, then she will be hard to beat. She was an easy 8 1/2-length winner of the Santa Ynez Stakes when making her sophomore debut back in January, beating Mother Mother while landing odds of 2/5. That was over 7 furlongs, and she went up to a mile in her next race, the Las Virgenes just over a month later. Hammered down to 1/10, she gave her >>>

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>>> supporters a bit of a scare that day, as Enaya Alrabb got within three parts of a length of her at the wire – but Bellafina won well enough, while spotting her runner-up four pounds, and she was earned a two-month break leading up to the Santa Anita Oaks on April 6. Tackling half a furlong more than in the Las Virgenes, and going off at 1/3, she blew home by 5 1/4 lengths from **FLOR DE LA MAR** with Chasing Yesterday 3 1/2 lengths further adrift in third place. Bellafina looked high class once again but a quick glance at the 1-2-3 result does not tell the whole story. Only four ran, with the badly outclassed Slewgoodtobetrue coming home 19 lengths behind Chasing Yesterday. In effect, the Santa Anita Derby had just three contenders, and the second placed horse was a twice raced filly with just a maiden win to her name. It was hardly a competitive Grade One.

Bellafina may not have beaten all that much but the way she has won suggests that she is up to handling much better. She was high class also as a two-year-old, when she won the Sorrento Stakes, Del Mar Debutante and Chandelier Stakes. In the latter she was an impressive 6 1/2-length winner from Vibrance, who went on to take third, 6 lengths behind Jaywalk, at the Breeders' Cup. Interestingly, Bellafina produced her best rating to date in the 7-furlong Santa Ynez, where she took the lead after half a mile. She led from gate to wire in the Las Virgenes, and in the Santa Anita Oaks she kicked on when entering the home straight, after having rated just behind the pace setter Chasing Yesterday. Bellafina raced wide in the Santa Anita Oaks, and she settled well enough to suggest that she will not need to lead to be happy at Churchill Downs. In fact, a stalking position just a few lengths off the pace would be her ideal scenario. She is the one to beat, no doubt, but Bellafina is also a filly coming into a full field of 14 runners, after having raced in fields of just five, five and four in her three races this term.

SERENGETI EMPRESS is the main danger to Bellafina, and she could well prove to be this year's Oaks winner. Recommended as an early value bet at 14-1 one week out, she is likely to be much shorter in the betting at Churchill Downs, where she has run so well in the past. Her preparation for this classic has been anything but ideal but she seems to be back on the right track now, and this talented daughter of Peter Pan winner Alternation gets the nod as my selection. Serengeti Empress ran to Globeform 119p when winning the Pocahontas Stakes here at Churchill Downs last year, a mark that puts her no more than a length below Bellafina, who returned Globeform 121 in the 7-furlong Santa Ynez in January. While Bellafina has won all of her three races this term, Serengeti Empress has had one good day at the races, followed by a very bad one. She absolutely crushed her rivals when winning the Rachel Alexandra on her seasonal debut, then bled when virtually pulled up as the long odds-on favorite for the Fair Grounds Oaks.

It's risky to back a horse that has bled through Lasix, but what happened last time she ran appears to have been a one-off. Serengeti Empress has scoped clean after her training sessions since, and she put in a strong 5-furlong work on April 23. Stopping the clock in 58.2 in an energetic bullet work, she looked to be in rude health. After another perfect scope, Amoss announced that she would go for the Kentucky Oaks. She is the only threat to Bellafina, in what does look a two-horse affair.

If Serengeti Empress takes her best form to the contest, well, then Bellafina's supporters will get something to worry about. Both these fillies have excellent tactical speed. The question will be; which one has the best stamina? That could well turn out to be Serengeti Empress, whose best two runs to date both came over 8.5 furlongs, in a 19-length romp winning the Pocahontas, and in a most comfortable 4 1/2-length stroll winning the >>> Rachel Alexandra. One big plus, comparing her to Bellafina, is that she has shown winning form over this track. Bellafina's best runs have all come around the more speed favoring Santa Anita oval and it is interesting to note that her best rating came when she covered seven panels. Of course, one can counter this by pointing at Serengeti Empress' inconsistent record, as she was well below par also at the Breeders' Cup (when she raced to freely and tired, in a race where Bellafina also flopped), but her Breeders Cup Juvenile Fillies and Fair Grounds Oaks results may be more of a product of coincidences, rather than an indication of inconsistency. Serengeti Empress is a very smart, game runner, with a big chance here.

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JAYWALK was a very efficient two-year-old last year, when she produced Globeform 118 with a dominant win in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies here at Churchill Downs. The daughter of Cross Traffic was coming off a wide margin win in the Frizette Stakes over a mile at Belmont Park, and tackling another half-furlong was no problem. She went straight to the lead and the further she went, the better she looked. Her winning margin was 5 1/2 lengths, with the second placed filly, Restless Rider, half a length better than Vibrance, who was a bit of a surprise in third place. Restless Rider franked the form – to a certain extent – when beaten just a nose by Liora in the Golden Rod Stakes next time out. Jaywalk was a success story at two, but things have not gone so well this year. She is not a very big filly and she was clearly precocious. She does not seem to have developed much with age. Of course, if Jaywalk returns to her best she will be in with a winning chance here, but it does seem unlikely. Her two runs this season were both disappointing, though at least she did move forward on her second outing, when third behind Out for a Spin and Restless Rider in the Ashland Stakes at Keeneland. Beaten 2 lengths that day, she might be capable of better this Friday, and it probably won't take more than GF 110 - 112 to be a trifecta horse, but lack of positive, recent form and a question mark over her stamina must be a worry for Jaywalk's connections.

OUT FOR A SPIN, trained by Dallas Stewart – not a stranger to big price surprises in championship races – was 52-1 when taking the Ashland Stakes over 8.5 furlongs at Keeneland in early April, and this filly has certainly come good at the right time. She raced in the first two throughout at Keeneland, and battled on well when being challenged by the oncoming **RESTLESS RIDER** in the closing stages. Out for a Spin held on to win by a neck, while Jaywalk was a non-threatening third. Out for a Spin had won an allowance race by over three lengths at Fair Grounds on her preceding start, when she was also prominent all the way (over a muddy track). Both she and Restless Rider posted a career best rating in the Ashland and they are obvious trifecta / superfecta candidates. Restless Rider may turn the tables though. The Ashland was her first run since her runner-up effort in the Golden Rod last November, she is proven over this track, and she appears to have more stamina than Out for a Spin.

POSITIVE SPIRIT is another to consider for tri / super players. This Pioneer of the Nile daughter has already won a valuable stakes race over the full Oaks distance, having romped home in last year's Demoiselle, and the way she performed when second to Always Shopping in the Gazelle at Aqueduct last month suggested that she's heading back into form. Positive Spirit's seasonal debut was completely wrecked when she became restless in the gates prior to the Rachel Alexandra in February, and it makes sense to see the Gazelle as her first run at three. She shaped like a horse in need of the race, and returned GF 107+. Positive Spirit earned Globeform 111p when running away with the Demoiselle at Aqueduct six months ago, making her joint third on the ranking in this year's Kentucky Oaks.

GLOBEFORM SELECTIONS

A: 13 SERENGETI EMPRESS

B: 4 BELLAFINA

D: 1 OUT FOR A SPIN, 6 POSITIVE SPIRIT, 7 JAYWALK, 14 RESTLESS RIDER

BETTING PLAN

EW / Win & Show: 13 Serengeti Empress (take 14-1 bookmakers)

Trifectas: 4, 13 with 4, 13 with 1, 6, 7, 14 / 4, 13 with 1, 6, 7, 14 with 4, 13 (16 lines)

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