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MARK JOHNSON

Mark Johnson, one of the most popular and acclaimed horse racing commentators in Britain, joined an elite group in the spring of 2009 as only the sixth track announcer in Churchill Downs history. The only announcer to have called the action for both the Kentucky Derby and the Epsom Derby, Johnson brings a unique handicapping perspective to the Spotlight Selections!

As far as track commentators go, he has been described as the complete package. "Mark's passion, descriptiveness, and knowledge of the sport make for a wonderful and entertaining combination," said John Asher, vice president of Communications of Churchill Downs.

SPOTLIGHT SELECTIONS FOR ARLINGTON MILLION XXX

TUESDAY, JUNE 19

RACE 7 - AMERICAN ST. LEGER

1 11/16 Miles on Turf

RACE ANALYSIS

This is the first running of the race named after the world's oldest Classic - The St Leger run by three-year-olds at Doncaster in September over 1 mile 6 furlongs and 132 yards.

Trainer John Gosden is a huge fan and supporter of that Classic (he has saddled the winner three times in the past five years) and he has publically stated on several occasions that he would like to win the inaugural running of the American version. Gosden earmarked several likely contenders for the assignment, but it should be noted that his chosen representative Zuider Zee was not his original first choice. However, Zuider Zee is certainly no back number and should give a good account of himself.

Ironically both of Zuider Zee's career wins have come at Doncaster (both over 1 1/2 miles) including the ultra competitive, 23 runner, November Handicap late last year. On soft ground he pulled cleared of the field to win by six lengths. Interestingly on his final start last year he made the long trip down to Toulouse in France to contest Prix Max Sicard (Listed). He finished third beaten by only 3/4's of a length, but for me the most significant aspect of this defeat was that in a race run very much in an "American" style (a tight turning right handed turf track) he failed to show to show tactical speed at crucial stages of the race.

This season he has consistently gone up in distance, most recently finishing fourth in the longest race of the British flat racing season, the 2M6F Queen Alexandra Stakes at Royal Ascot. Yes, this horse will stay all day, but he also looks pretty slow.

Jakkalberry also ran at Royal Ascot in the 1 1/2 mile Group 2 Hardwicke Stakes in which he was beaten into fifth by 8 3/4 lengths by Breeders' Cup turf runner up Sea Moon with Melbourne Cup winner Dunaden less than five lengths ahead of him. Previous to that he was beaten just 3 3/4's lengths by Cirrus des Aigles in the Group 1 Shemmas Classic at Meydan, staying on strongly, but too late to catch the principals. Jakkalberry is a legitimate Group 1 performer in a non-graded race (he won the Group 1 Gran Premio di Milano in 2010), and he has consistently run well in the highest grade since. In the care of one of Europe's leading young trainers, Italian born but Newmarket based, Marco Botti, Jakkalberry is the class act of this party.

Bridge of Gold represents British-based Scandinavian trainer Mikael Magnusson, but he was totally outclassed in the Group 1 Gold Cup at Royal Ascot last time out so former Italian trained Lake Drop (formally trained by Marco Botti's trainer, but now having a first run for Graham Motion) looks to be of more interest. He won his first graded race in Italy last time out (back in May) and although virtually all of his best form in Italy has come on soft ground he has an American pedigree which suggests he should be well suited for faster conditions.

The best of the home team should be Ioya Bigtime who is Arlington based, owned and trained and who won the designated trial for this race, the Grade 3 Stars and Stripes Handicap, last month. Connections believe that there are no doubts now about his stamina, however I do not believe that he would have necessarily won that race if it had been over this distance.



PICKS & BETTING STRATEGY

1. Jakkalberry
2. Lake Drop
3. Zuider Zee
4. Ioya Bigtime

Jakkalberry is likely to be too short for a win bet, however I might consider singling him in exotic wagers. On the morning line Lake Drop represents a little bit of value, far more than Zuider Zee and Ioya Bigtime, so to provide some depth to tickets I might Jakkalberry and Lake Drop in exactas and I would definitely use Zuider Zee as a bottom horse in trifectas.