



By Jeff "Money" Taylor

RACE 9 - \$150,000 PIPPIN (4:22 p.m.): It is "Act 2, Scene 1" in the local older filly and mare division in today's headliner. The top three finishers as well as a tough trip also-ran from last month's one-mile Mistletoe are set to square off at 8 ½-furlongs. Handicappers will have to determine if the added distance or some other circumstance will produce a different outcome.

The connections of **Lovely Ride (#1)** would probably just as soon forget the Mistletoe. After breaking alertly that afternoon and showing the way through the first turn, she relinquished the advantage when straightened up onto the backstretch when attempting to rate. Still prominent while just a length or so behind the new leader, she was forced to check up in tight quarters into the far turn before quickly falling back and losing all chance. She appears to be the only true speed in this small field today and should once again make the early advantage and this time hold it, much as she did in capturing both this race a year ago and last season's Mistletoe in gate to wire fashion. She is also likely to benefit from the one start off a lengthy layoff and at around 5-1 on the tote board, her value will be square.

Butterbean (#3), listed at 5-2 in the morning line, will be a much shorter price today versus the 11-1 she was in annexing the Mistletoe. Her successful rally from well back opening Saturday was an excellent harbinger of a great start to the season for her rider, Julien Leparoux, and trainer Kenny McPeck. Each rank second in their respective standings and teamed up again last Sunday with a second stakes score in the Year's End to cap off a terrific December. That kind of momentum can be a true positive intangible, although she will not be a well-kept secret this time around.

Mistletoe favorite **Ice Orchid (#5)** had no visible excuse for her third-place performance other than perhaps a bit of a wide trip as she raced in the four path through both turns. She faces less than half the number of rivals this afternoon, which guarantees a more economical trip while once again the betting choice of the public.

Misty Veil (#2), who finished right between **Butterbean** and **Ice Orchid** when the trio met four weeks ago, enjoyed a very steady 2023 campaign while facing mostly stakes company. She was involved in the trifecta in seven of her 11 starts but could manage to find the winner's circle only once. The Mike Maker trainee could be the closest pursuer to **Lovely Ride** today, however, and could inherit the advantage should that rival stub her toe which could put her in position for a rare win.

Oaklawn newcomer **Tiz a Macho Girl (#4)** invades from her homebase of Delta Downs where she has posted two solid efforts recently, including a near miss in the Treasure Chest Stakes. The well-traveled 5-year-old continues a steady string of shippers from that south Louisiana oval and many have outrun their prices here this season. She has also competed in Arizona, where she was a stakes winner, as well as California and Washington State. Bettors often shy away from her type of vagabond history, and she is probably going to be the longest priced runner in this small field although she may not run like it.

Wagering Strategy - **Win: #1 (strong)**
 Flyer Exacta Box: 1, 4
 Trifectas: 1 w/ 2, 3, 4 w/ 2, 3, 4