

# Cal Cup XIV A Final Preview



by DEBRA GINSBURG

Early bird nominations closed Aug. 18 with 430 horses named for California Cup XIV. Scheduled to be run at Santa Anita Park on Saturday, Nov. 8, California Cup Day once again promises full fields of many of the state's best Thoroughbreds competing for \$1.325 million in purses. Here's a rundown of some of the possible top contenders in each race.

## Classic

Following his tour-de-force in the grade III Longacres Mile in August, Ren-Mar Thoroughbreds' Sky Jack is proving he's a cat with nine lives. He was a runaway winner of this race three years ago, then spent nearly two years on the shelf recovering from knee and colic surgery that nearly killed him. He captured last year's Hollywood Gold Cup like a champion, but another knee injury forced him to miss the 2002 California Cup. A victory here would make Sky Jack the first two-time winner of the Cal Cup Classic.

Multiple graded stakes winner Grey Memo is always a threat with his late-running style. He had bad luck in last year's Classic. Also seeking revenge is 2002 runner-up Continental Red, California's defending Horse of the Year. Various ailments kept last year's winner Calkins Road on the sidelines until this summer, but he will be trying to defend his title if he runs.

## Mile

That ageless veteran Native Desert won this race in 1999 and 2001, so he is due for a three-peat this year at 10 years of age. Sea to See upset Native Desert in an oddly-run Khaled Handicap at Hollywood Park in April and returned with a good third in allowance company on Oct. 9. Ninebanks captured his second consecutive California Turf Championship in September at Bay Meadows and became a graded stakes winner earlier this year. Menacing Dennis is a turf sprint specialist who is trying to stretch out.

## Matron

Cee's Elegance, sporting many of the same connections as Tiznow, has been pointing toward this race all season. She has three stakes wins in the past 12 months, including a victory over grade I winners You and Affluent in the A Gleam Handicap (grade II) at Hollywood Park in July.

Royally Chosen should find the Matron easier fare after running against Azeri and Got Koko in the grade II Lady's Secret Breeders' Cup Handicap. Old English Rancho's homebred In Excess (Ire) mare is twice graded stakes-placed. Double Scoop has been competing in graded stakes back east, while defending champ Super High returned to the racing wars this summer with encouraging efforts in a pair of stakes.

## Sprint

Following a good third in the California Sprint Championship at Bay Meadows, H. E. (Gene) Reed's veteran

Men's Exclusive is in a good position to win his first Cal Cup race at the age of 10. The 2003 Sprint could also feature two of California's newest equine millionaires, Echo Eddie and Full Moon Madness. The latter won this race in 2000. Also eligible is Trapper, who captured the California Sprint Championship Handicap at Bay Meadows on Oct. 4.

## Distaff

Winner of the Survive Stakes last January at Santa Anita and a game third down the hill in the Oct. 11 Senator Ken Maddy Handicap (grade III), Icantgoforthat could be peaking at the right time. Other contenders include Bold Roberta, a double stakes winner at Fairplex Park, Dream of Summer and Grant Marty a Wish.

## Juvenile

The connections of impressive Cavonnier Stakes winner Race for Glory have opted for the Breeders' Cup Juvenile, but this Cal-bred Cape Town colt might show up in the Cal Cup Juvenile too. After all, his owners Robert and Beverly Lewis sponsor this race and won it with Ebonair in 1991. If he doesn't run, other promising runners might step up to bat. Don'tsellmeshort has already won two stakes, Dave the Dude captured the I'm Smokin Stakes at Del Mar and P Town John won the Beau Brummel Stakes at Fairplex. Pleasure Honor, a Cal-bred Honor Grades colt and graduate of last year's Del Mar Yearling Sale, was an impressive allowance winner at Santa Anita on Oct. 6.

## Juvenile Fillies

Free House's daughter House of Fortune moved to the head of the class with her impressive victory in the Oct. 1 Cover Gal Stakes at Santa Anita. The \$40,000 graduate of the 2002 Del Mar Yearling Sale battled back after Nicole and Ben collared her at the top of the stretch and powered home to a 2 1/2-length victory. Also being considered for the Juvenile Fillies are the second- and third-place finishers from the Cover Gal, Nicole and Ben and She's Gottogetaway. The latter captured the Generous Portion Stakes at Del Mar in September. Other contenders include The Usual, an impressive allowance winner at Santa Anita on Oct. 15, and Silent Sighs, who broke her maiden at Santa Anita in fine style on her Oct. 13 debut.

## Distance Handicap

Shalini lost this race by a nose last year and she's seeking revenge after three impressive stakes wins on the turf in 2003. Breeder-owners Jim and Richard Briere gave the Urgent Requent (Ire) filly the entire Del Mar meet off to point for this race. She also has an impressive second to Continental Red in the 1 1/2-mile Quicken Tree Handicap during the summer. Valentine Dancer is coming off a record-breaking victory in the Oct. 12 Harold C. Ramser Sr. Handicap at Santa Anita. Other contenders should include last year's Juvenile Fillies winner Summer Wind Dancer and the multiple stakes-placed Sunset Serenade.

