

ARIMA RACE CLUB
RACE DAY PREVIEW
DAY 18 SATURDAY 15TH MAY 2010

Mouth-watering clash on the grass

IT is not a Graded event, but Saturday's main bout certainly has enough star power to be one. The Stakes & Lower contest is billed for 3.28 p.m. and will be the sixth event of a nine-race card at Santa Rosa Park, Arima. Heading the field of nine are Raging Halo and Perfect Circle, the top two finishers respectively, in the Grade I Champagne Stakes over course and distance (1,600 metres on the turf) a month ago. And it does not end there, as Chief Commander, one of only four millionaires in the history of local racing, and Sikhara, a winner of her last four starts, are also in the line up along with several other respected grass lovers.

Raging Halo gave Allan Madoo's Perfect Circle three kilos and held off the Jamaican-bred five-year-old to win and retain his crown in the "Champagne" by a neck on April 17. The American-bred four-year-old still has the edge as the difference in weight remains three kilos. But Raging Halo's only defeat on turf had come one month before when Perfect Circle had beaten the S.I.R. Stables-owned chestnut into third by more than three lengths at level weights over 1,700 metres. Chief Commander, who missed the 'Champagne', was also in the field for that March 20 Stakes & Lower contest and the 2008 Gold Cup ended up almost six lengths adrift in fourth, receiving four kilos. The Poon Tip Stud Farm-owned son of Freshly Squeezed must still be respected, but it looks like age is finally catching up with the nine-year-old Chief Commander now.

He will be receiving 2.5 kilos from Perfect Circle and 5.5 from his JohnO'Brien-trained stable-companion Raging Halo, who has been allotted the top impost of 58.5 kilos. Sikhara has more form than any of the other runners in the field but she maybe the toughest to assess. After finishing second over course and distance in November, the Zanim Meah-John'-owned filly is yet to taste defeat this season. She has won over 1,200 metres and 1,300 metres on the main course as well as 1,100 metres (in the Top Of The Class Handicap) and today's trip - when she dead-heated with Dream Girl on January 23 - on the turf.

Their time of 1:39 seconds matched the time of the Champagne Stakes and Sikhara, who must have improved significantly since the dead-heat. Dream Girl, who has only run once since, is also in this field and will run with about 46 kilos, one less than the weight she carried in that nail-biting finish. The Welsh Wizard and Sonata's Melody are also involved and they must have at least place chances at the weights. The Welsh Wizard, the most successful horse in this field on the grass with eight wins, placed fifth in the 'Champagne', but will be down about three kilos this time.

Sonata's Melody will come down about four kilos after trailing the field in the "Champagne." It should be noted, however, that before that disappointing seventh-place performance, the front-running American-bred four-year-old finished in between Perfect Circle and Raging Halo on her turf debut in the 1,700-metre Stakes & Lower contest. Forwardtracking is another who cannot be taken lightly as although he won at a lower level last time out, Stephan Narinesingh's Jamaican-bred five-year-old scored in a quick time of 1:38.20 seconds on April 24 and will come down about six kilos off that Conditional Handicap B score.

The field has such depth that not one horse can be discounted, not even Ksar Ghilane, who has been disappointing since coming across from the United States, but has never run on the lawn. The other spotlight event is also extremely competitive on paper as all the contestants, with the possible exception of out-of-form Music Maestro, must be considered in the Starter Allowance. Honest Hero, who finished fourth last Saturday in the Santa Rosa Dash, returns and has been allotted the top weight of 56.5 kilos for the 1,200-metre affair. Also in the field for the day's penultimate event at 4.52 p.m. are talented American-bred three-year-olds Rewardsinheaven, Young Elite, Officer Ike and hat-trick bound Exquisite Touch as well as Luca's Gold, who shares the 1,000-metre record with 'Rewards', Stewards Cup fourth Mister Kingston and 2008 Stewards Cup runner-up Divine Bull with just 51.5 kilos.

The \$35,000 Optional Claimer is another very intriguing contest on the card and a rousing battle is expected over 1,300 metres between Savvy, last year's Republic Bank Derby runner-up Mission King and last year's Santa Rosa Classic runner-up Regal Honour in the day's second event at 12.52 p.m. For the third time in succession the HI-5 betting races will be the fifth (2.50 p.m.), seventh (4.13 p.m.) and curtain (5.37 p.m.) events on the card. And the Pick 6 will get going at 2.08 p.m. with 12 West Indian-bred three-year-olds set to attempt 1,600 metres on the turf in the day's fourth event.

Post time for the 18th round of the Arima Race Club's 2010 Season is 12.15 p.m. and fans at the track will also get the opportunity to be part of the Preakness Stakes experience at about 6 p.m. The second jewel of the American triple crown as well as the rest of the card will be simulcast from Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore, Maryland.