

ARIMA RACE CLUB
RACE DAY PREVIEW
DAY 45 SATURDAY 18TH DECEMBER 2010

Calm before Boxing Day storm

ALTHOUGH rain has not been letting up for this Christmas season, this Saturday's day of horse racing at Santa Rosa Park, Arima, is usually referred to as the "calm before the storm." The 'storm' to which we are alluding is the Boxing Day programme, the singlemost popular day of horse racing in Trinidad for as long as any of us can remember. So whenever racing is scheduled the week before, it becomes like the "calm" as many owners and trainers rest their horses for the big day. Still the Arima Race Club has managed to not only get as many as seven races on the 45th round of the Arima Race Club's 2010 Season, but also able to field ten or more horses in five of them. And there will be two of last year's major classic contenders in action as the Republic Bank Trinidad Derby runner-up Mission King will be involved in the second, and the Carib Brewery Guineas hero Santa Rosa Boy will line up in the penultimate event.

Despite being very early in the day, the second race is, in fact, the feature and Mission King will face six horses over 1,350 metres in the Allowance at 1.35 p.m. And although the field is the smallest of the day, it is a very competitive event with the only horses not expected to be battling for the top prize of \$22,500 being the Glen Mohammed-trained pair of inexperienced American-bred juveniles Schylers Gold and Destiny Train. Both Douglas Bennett and champion trainer Glenn Mendez will also be saddling two horses, while Personal Exchange comes from the stable of certain 2010 champion trainer John O'Brien. Personal Exchange finished runner-up in his last two "extended sprints" and only found winner's enclosure when he attempted two turns. So the question is would Charles James' roan colt be able to go back down in distance and triumph after scoring in two straight 1,750-metre races. Mendez is being represented by the Dayne Harford-owned pair of American-bred three-year-olds Wispy Cut and High Mas, who finished behind Personal Exchange in both staying races.

But High Mas will be far more dangerous in an "extended sprint" as the son of Proud Accolade proved when he bounced back to win over Saturday's 1,350-metre distance in a really good time of 1:20.95 seconds last time out on December 4. Wispy Cut has been struggling with injury and has run only once since late April, but this chestnut is very talented as he proved early in the year with a victory, three seconds and a third from six starts. Bennett will send out the only two West Indian-bred horses in the race Mission King and Dionysus. The latter is one of the most improved horses in training as he has been proving in the last few months. The transformation began when Dionysus won the 1,200-metre Santa Rosa Classic at odds of 30/1 on October 9 and his very best came just last Saturday when he proved that he could be a factor over a longer trip by destroying a Conditional Handicap A field over this Saturday's trip in a quick time of 1:20.97 seconds.

Dionysus is stepping up in class and the question is can the only locally-bred horse in the field handle his stable companion and American-bred horses the likes of High Mas and Personal Exchange. Mission King has competed at a higher level than any of the others and could be the one to beat on his return from a six-week break. The Jamaican-bred chestnut has already won five times this season and crossed the finish line a very respectable third behind the very impressive Montejo last time out on October 30 after three sub-par performances. Santa Rosa Boy was declared to run on the grass for the first time since the early part of the year. But rain has been persisting and it looks like the 1,600-metre Restricted Handicap will be contested over 1,750 metres on the main course. If this turns out to be the case, three potentially dangerous turf horses with penny stamps, Call Of The Wild, Dream Girl and Cherokee Wells, will be scratched along with American-bred juvenile Badge D'Argent, and the field will be cut to eight.

The 4.15 p.m. contest will then probably turn into a battle between Santa Rosa Boy, a winner of three of his last five starts, and Handsome Warrior. This American-bred three-year-old has improved tremendously in his last two starts and was beaten a short head by Personal Exchange last time out on November 27 after a runaway victory over the same 1,750-metre trip on September 11. If the weather improves and the race remains on the main course, Handsome Warrior will stay indoors, along with Exquisite Touch and Truculent, and the three turf horses mentioned earlier will probably battle for top honours, along with the versatile Santa Rosa Boy. Sara's Music, who has struggled in his few starts since winning the Trinidad Derby way back in 2007, is also in the field. There are still two race days remaining in the season, but almost all the major categories have already been decided.

Ricky Jadoo will not be crowned champion jockey for the third straight year as he is a distant second to multiple champ Brian Harding, who had scored 50 times and leads by 14 lengths. The race is closer in the monetary category, but Harding should also get home ahead of Jadoo. O'Brien is certain to take both the wins and monetary category among the trainers by a very long way. Allan Madoo will retain his title as champion owner in the wins category, but the monetary category is a neck-and-neck battle at the moment. The Poon Tip Stud Farm has a marginal lead, but Tres Amigos will win going away if Bruceontheloose takes the First Citizens Gold Cup for the second successive time on the Boxing Day holiday (December 27). The first prize in the country's richest and most prestigious open staying race is \$300,000 and if 'Bruce' collects this sum he will become the first horse in the history of local racing to surpass \$2 million in career earnings.

The Jetsam Awards will not be presented until early next year, but even without a victory in the Gold Cup, Bruceontheloose should be named Horse of the Year for the second consecutive year. Saturday's card will get going at 1 p.m. and will include three HI-5 betting races (the third at 2.15 p.m., the fifth at 3.37 p.m. and the curtain event at 5 p.m.) and Pick 6, which begins with the feature at 1.35 p.m. and had a carryover of a little more than \$2,000