



MEYDAN 03/26/2016 – DUBAI WORLD CUP DAY

Today's Best Bets:

RACE 5, #4 NOT LISTENIN'TOME — checks almost all the boxes in this dizzying turf dash – Group 1 talent, the ability to draft readily behind a frenetic pace before kicking on, strong current form, and maintaining tip-top shape after shipping. The result of a grand plan by trainer John Moore, he was purchased for A\$270,000 as an Inglis Easter yearling and remained in Australia to begin his racing career before advancing to Hong Kong. Originally under the tutelage of Team Hawkes, the Dylan Thomas gelding shaped as a prime prospect when hacking up in the Zeditave and finishing second to Zoustar and Appearance in a pair of Group 1s. His career, and life, were imperiled by a serious infection, but after joining Moore in Hong Kong, he steadily regained his strength. Now finally at his peak, Not Listenin'tome has won his past three attempts going this about 5-furlong trip down the Sha Tin straight. Last time out, he sizzled in a near-record :55.16, under the massive weight of 133 pounds (13 more than Golden Shaheen threat Super Jockey). He's no slouch turning 6 furlongs either, as indicated by his third in the Hong Kong Sprint, but the straight course suits him even better. Now he gets the all-world Ryan Moore in the saddle. The only possible negative is that he's drawn in post 4, and higher numbers (toward the stands' side) are generally favorable. On the other hand, they might end up congregating toward the middle anyway, and he'll get a perfect tow into the race by tracking Japanese speedball **BEL CANTO** next door.

RACE 7, #8 INTILAAQ — was all set to make an audacious dirt debut in the Dubai World Cup (G1), until Solow was ruled out of this race by an ill-timed injury. Sheikh Hamdan then called an audible, rerouting Intilaaq into a suddenly open-looking Group 1 on turf. If the son of Dynaformer and French classic winner Torrestrella is half as good as his reputation, he'll score a career high in this spot. Shadwell's retired jockey-turned-advisor Richard Hills paid Intilaaq an enormous compliment when comparing him to one of my old favorites, Nayef. Sheikh Hamdan's current number one rider, Paul Hanagan, has been similarly effusive, insisting that this is Intilaaq's year to shine. He demolished inferior opposition last season in the manner of a future Group 1 star, displaying a high cruising speed and relentless power. A strongly run nine furlongs is right in his wheelhouse, especially in his first start off a layoff. Trainer Roger Varian has won with both of his Dubai Carnival firsters this season, and Intilaaq could make it a hat trick.

RACE 8, #4 DURAMENTE — is in danger of becoming the wise guy horse, if he isn't already. Yet anyone who's seen his races in Japan will be probably be a believer in this dual classic-winning champion. Never worse than a close second in his life, this son of King Kamehameha and champion mare Admire Groove, and grandson of Japanese Horse of the Year Air Groove, has lived up to his pedigree. Duramente was betrayed by inexperience when mugged by Real Steel in the aforementioned Japanese classic prep, but a rider switch to Mirco Demuro helped. Next came a sensational score in the Japanese 2000 Guineas (in 1:58.2 for about 1 1/4 miles), followed by a sweeping success in the Japanese Derby (in 2:23.2 for this about 1 1/2-mile trip). Duramente was then sidelined by surgery to remove bone chips from both knees. Despite being rusty off a nine-month absence (and 18 kilograms heavier), he still traveled like a dream before striking the front in the Nakayama Kinen. His margin was reduced late as he tired, but he'll improve in quantum leaps. There's a lot more on the line here than the \$6 million purse: if Duramente wants to fly the Japanese flag in the Arc this October, he'll have to pass his international test. Trainer Noriyuki Hori has had Group 1 success abroad before, with Japanese Horse of the Year Maurice in Hong Kong and Real Impact in Australia.

Race 2, Godolphin Mile

#5 MAFTOOL (6-1) rates the slight preference in a contentious affair with a handful of legitimate win chances. Two-for-two over this track and trip, the son of Hard Spun denied Mubtaahij in last year's UAE 2000 Guineas (which ultimately cost him a sweep of the UAE Triple Crown), and in his reappearance, Maftool beat next-out Burj Nahaar winner **COOL COWBOY** in a handicap. The form of that race has received other recent boosts. Maftool also has back class as a Newmarket Group 3 winner at two and a onetime classic hopeful. Failing to build on that promise for Godolphin, he was subsequently gelded and transferred to Musabah al Muhairi, who had three winners on Super Saturday. Jockey Paul Hanagan said that gelding was the "making" of Maftool, and judging by his comeback win, we hope so too.

#9 SLOANE AVENUE (3-1) missed by a whisker to track specialist Tamarkuz in the 2015 Godolphin Mile. Poorly drawn in post 15, he may have won with a halfway decent post. The English shipper is still toward the outside here, in post 9 of 10, but the smaller field could help. Sloane Avenue boasts a terrific pedigree, as a Candy Ride half-brother to Carve from the extended family of Nureyev and Sadler's Wells. He also has plenty of upside with only seven career starts, including a defeat of classy filly Cladocera in fall 2014. The one concern is that he's making his second start back off a year-long layoff. Trainer Jeremy Nosedá admits that it's been a tight fit to get a prep into him. Sloane Avenue was a solid second to loose-on-the-lead veteran Captain Cat in that tune-up, suggesting that he'll be ready for this major objective.

#2 MARKING (2-1) would be the top selection if you're going strictly by natural talent and future prospects, and he may well sail through this test. Nevertheless, given his history of gate problems, sweating up prior to his local starts, and resentment of kickback, you've got to wonder if the big occasion is going to get to him mentally. Post 2 may be a boon if he breaks sharply, but a debacle if he doesn't. Trainer Kiaran McLaughlin switched him from the Dubai Golden Shaheen (G1) to this easier spot over a metric mile, a decision that should theoretically be rewarded. At short odds, though, we're a little wary and prefer to use him defensively.

#4 FAULKNER (15-1) is one of a formidable triumvirate for trainer Doug Watson, whose fantastic Carnival has netted him a fourth UAE trainer's title, and you could easily side with any of them. **#8 COOL COWBOY** (5-1) is the choice of stable jockey Pat Dobbs, and he'd be a very worthy winner with his tactical adaptability and dominance of the final prep. **#1 ONE MAN BAND** (10-1) has landed in the perfect spot for a confirmed front runner – the rail – and if the track is as speed-favoring as it was on Super Saturday, the Meydan track record-setter is a serious threat to wire them. But Faulkner was the only horse to beat Godolphin Mile winner Tamarkuz at Meydan last year, he's as game as they come, and he's run admirably in all three legs of the Maktoum Challenge. Although he needed his first couple of runs at this distance earlier in the season, he'll enjoy the cutback in trip now.

Race 3, Dubai Gold Cup

#1 VAZIRABAD (6-5) is a skimpy price for a 4-year-old on his first international foray, but the Aga Khan homebred is already a high-class stayer who gets a 6-pound weight break from his elders. The Alain de Royer-Dupré pupil was a revelation over the course of last season, compiling a 5-race winning streak on all types of ground. Although he defeated older foes on soft ground in the Prix Royal-Oak, Vazirabad is regarded as better on a quicker surface. That view is justified by his emphatic victory in the Prix Chaudenay in a fast time on Arc weekend, which stamped him as an above-average performer in this division. His closing kick could be too much for these.

#8 MANATEE (4-1), the other French representative, brings useful form over shorter and a pedigree implying he should stay 2 miles. Previously compared by trainer André Fabre to the likes of Breeders' Cup Turf winner Shirocco, the Godolphin runner hasn't emulated him yet, but he is a multiple Group 2 winner who hasn't been disgraced in elite company. Fourth to Treve, Flintshire, and Dolniya in last summer's Grand Prix de Saint-Cloud, he was good enough to contest the Arc, where he came home seven lengths behind Golden Horn. Although only fifth to Vazirabad in the Royal-Oak, he was wheeling back just three weeks after the Arc. The son of Monsun resurfaced with a second on the Chantilly all-weather, edging Sheema runner Gailo Chop and Queen's Jewel, and should be spot on for this. The one question is if he'd prefer a little softer course.

#7 BIG ORANGE (5-1) is a gutsy 2-miler who will be in the front rank throughout, and a tough horse to pass. His major wins have all come in tight finishes, notably the Princess of Wales's at Newmarket and the Goodwood Cup at this trip. Handed a terrible post 23 in the Melbourne Cup, he set the pace and held on for a commendable fifth, beaten all of 2 1/2 lengths. This son of Duke of Marmalade can throw in a clunker, and he's yet to win first off the bench. But a typical effort would see him involved in the finish.

#4 NEO BLACK DIA (15-1) has raced just once over this trip in his 45 career starts, finishing a close fifth to Japanese star Gold Ship in the prestigious Tenno Sho Spring last May. (Sheema contender Last Impact was fourth.) While his record is otherwise uninspiring, he's competing on a tough circuit. A return to about 2 miles, to face a field lacking a great deal of strength in depth, makes him worth using.

Race 4, UAE Derby

#2 POLAR RIVER (3-5) would be worth opposing if any of her challengers were persuasive. They've got even more questions to answer, though, so the filly will probably remain unbeaten at prohibitive odds. Untouchable when conquering her first 3 starts by more than 31 lengths, she was briefly threatened as her margin evaporated late in the UAE Oaks. Watson, who's tabbed her as the best horse he's trained, and accordingly his top chance of the night, offered an explanation: Polar River had a tooth extracted prior to that race. Back on song ever since the Oaks, she turned in a strong half-mile move Sunday, and we might well see the old Polar River again.

#3 LANI (10-1) reinforces the stereotype of excitable Tapit progeny, for the Japanese shipper can be a handful. But if he ever puts it all together, he'll be quite good. Lani is the only US Triple Crown nominee in the race besides **FRANK CONVERSATION**, and a modicum of improvement would put him right there. Trained by Mikio Matsunaga, who sent out Red Desire to win the Maktoum Challenge Round 3 here in 2010, Lani captured two dirt races in quick succession last November. The gray weighed in 12 kilograms heavier for his sophomore bow in the Hyacinth, where he made a huge circling move before hanging late in fifth. Lani will be fighting fit for this engagement. If he can't score enough Kentucky Derby points, Matsunaga has a back-up plan to go Peter Pan/Belmont. The youngster's very much worth following: his dam, the Sunday Silence mare Heavenly Romance, beat males in one of Japan's most significant contests (the Tenno Sho Autumn) and has already produced a couple of stakes winners.

#1 FRANK CONVERSATION (8-1) has flown half a world away to try dirt again, implying that he's not exactly close to stablemate Nyquist on the Kentucky Derby depth chart. The switch to synthetic at Golden Gate has brought out the best in him, and so far, he's performed better on surfaces other than dirt. Still, as a May 13 foal, the Doug O'Neill trainee may have been behind developmentally when unplaced in his previous dirt races. The grand-looking son of Quality Road deserves another shot on the dirt, and this is by far the easiest of the 170-point Kentucky Derby preps.

#5 VALE DORI (9-2) was responsible for Polar River's late fright in the UAE Oaks. By proving herself over this track and trip, in a belated debut for Mike de Kock, the Argentinean Group 1 heroine put herself in the forefront of UAE Derby consideration. By de Kock's UAE Triple Crown winner Asiatic Boy, Vale Dori has yet to finish worse than second in four starts, and her reliability is a definite plus in this field. The biggest caveat is that she's the 127-pound highweight, and it's a tall order to give Polar River 10 pounds and a beating. Vale Dori is also conceding 6 pounds to the males – and for all of their question marks, they've got potential. She's got to be that much better to overcome it. The weight assignment may be the reason why no Southern Hemisphere-bred filly has won this race.

Race 5, Al Quoz Sprint

#4 NOT LISTENIN'TOME (10-1) is one of today's best bets.

#10 MUTHMIR (7-1) has a similar profile to the top selection in that they can never go too fast for him early, and the faster they go, the kindlier he settles. Likely to be overlooked as Sheikh Hamdan's second string, behind the highly fancied **ERTIJAAL (Ire)**, Muthmir may represent better value. As great as Ertijaal's looked this Carnival, he's yet to pass Group 1 muster and faces the sternest test of his career. Muthmir, in contrast, is a multiple Group 2 victor on the verge of a Group 1 breakthrough. He went close when third in last year's King's Stand at Royal Ascot and filled that same spot in the Prix de l'Abbaye on Arc Day. **GOLDREAM** bested him both times, but disappointed in seventh in his Meydan Sprint prep last out. That leaves Goldream's current form more of a question mark. But Muthmir turned in an ideal prep over Lingfield's Polytrack, rattling into third, and hinting that he's eligible to reverse form. Interestingly, Muthmir is trained by William Haggas, who also had Ertijaal (Ire) before he became a permanent Dubai resident. Haggas regarded both highly.

#9 BUFFERING (8-1) is better known as a six-furlong type in his native Australia, but since he'll be part of the scorching early pace here, maybe that's a good thing. A folk hero for knocking heads with Australia's world class sprinters for years – from Black Caviar to Chautauqua – and finally winning 6 Group 1s of his own, the pride of Queensland has amassed more than A\$6 million in earnings the hard way. Trainer Robert Heathcote feared Buffering's career might be over after an injury early last year, but "The Buff" has come roaring back to his old self. He's enjoyed a freshening since scooting home versus lesser in his Magic Millions race, and with his characteristic pluck, he'll be somewhere in the top four.

#7 SOLE POWER (5-1) and **#5 PENIAPHOBIA (7-1)**, the one-two from last year's Al Quoz Sprint, could well fight out the exacta once again, and I wouldn't dare leave either one out of wagering calculations. They're relegated a little lower on this list partly because of the incredibly contentious nature of this division, making it harder for them to replicate that old result. Sole Power can also find traffic trouble, and he just ran almost too well to miss in a photo in his comeback in the Meydan Sprint. Can the 9-year-old back that up on a 3-week turnaround? Peniaphobia has the opposite quibble: he's raced only once since landing the Hong Kong Sprint, and he enters this off a two-month break. We'd feel better about **LADY SHIPMAN** if there were a turn involved, but she may get an assist by being on the stands' side in post 13.

Race 6, Dubai Golden Shaheen

#3 X Y JET (9-5) is the proverbial speed of the speed, and barring a mishap at the break, he's eligible to run them ragged. A stumbling start is a risk, given what happened last time at Gulfstream, but he blitzed them anyway over 6 1/2 furlongs. Now X Y Jet reverts to his pet distance of about six furlongs. And by drawing well in post 3 here, he won't have to worry about cutting across the field from wider out. Although it's fair to point out that he's excelled of late in South Florida, and perhaps a question mark elsewhere, note his overwrought mental state earlier in his career. With the help of Dr. Isabel Jimenez Acquarone, an equine temperament expert, trainer Jorge Navarro has turned around his attitude – and his performance. All reports are that X Y Jet is loving life in Dubai, suggesting that he'll turn on the engines Saturday.

#2 MASTER KOCHANWONG (12-1) isn't the most accomplished of the Hong Kong quartet, but he's a real trouper in the form of his life at the moment. Trained by David Hall, whose past luminaries include Makybe Diva, Master Kochanwong returned from a layoff to win handsomely on the Sha Tin dirt in a sparkling 1:08.07. He's stayed sharp by capturing a pair of barrier trials in the interim, recently holding **DOMINEER** in a smooth and polished display. Capable of getting away to a flyer out of the gate, Master Kochanwong projects a ground-saving trip in the slipstream of the leader – or, if the scenario somehow presents itself, he can even lead. That's unlikely in a race so loaded with pace, but he won't be too far behind. An admirably consistent runner who has won or placed in 14 of 18 lifetime, he's been hailed as a "little bulldog" by erstwhile Hong Kong champion rider Douglas Whyte.

#6 SUPER JOCKEY (7-1) was a fast-finishing second to Secret Circle in the 2015 Golden Shaheen, and connections have said he could lie closer this time from a much better post. Another Hong Kong resident who lacks proper opportunities on the dirt, the Tony Millard veteran hasn't been seen on his favorite surface since World Cup night last year. Super Jockey warmed up with a terrific second to Al Quoz threat Not Listenin'tome in an about 5-furlong turf handicap in blistering time. That performance was arguably better than the dirt race he won prior to last year's Dubai venture.

#10 REYNALDO THE WIZARD (12-1), the 2013 Golden Shaheen winner, is another who will be rolling late. While the 10-year-old may not be able to make history as the first to win this race twice in non-consecutive years, he looked as good as ever when taking the Dubawi in his reappearance. Trainer Satish Seemar reported that "Reynaldo" was a bit flat afterward, when third to **RICH TAPESTRY**, but he's really sprung to life in recent days. Rich Tapestry is tough to ignore as a placegetter in this race for the past two years, but he exited his recent loss to **MUARRAB** with plenty of mucus and had to be treated with antibiotics. Can Rich Tapestry bounce back quickly enough to deliver a peak performance? While Muarrab is capable of firing a big effort again, his task is complicated by the presence of X Y Jet. **CONFRONTATION** wouldn't have been in this race if stablemate Marking had been ready for prime time, and that gives us pause.

Race 7, Dubai Turf

#8 INTILAAQ (2-1) is one of today's best bets.

#14 REAL STEEL (8-1) is a real threat if he can avoid the dreaded loss of ground from his poor post. Although he finished second to champion Duramente (see the Sheema) in the Japanese 2000 Guineas and just missed in the Japanese St Leger, he's arguably best suited by this trip. Indeed, he handed Duramente a rare loss in an about 1 1/8-mile classic prep early last year. And Real Steel is a dependable type who has finished unplaced only once, a fourth when injured in the Japanese Derby. He recently resurfaced with a close third (again to Duramente) in the Nakayama Kinen, the same prep that propelled Just a Way to his record-setting win in this race in 2014. The likely hot pace will set it up for this closer, and with Ryan Moore masterminding his passage, concerns about his post may prove groundless. Pedigree aficionados will find even more to love: he's by Deep Impact and out of a Storm Cat half-sister to Rumpelstiltskin (dam of Tapestry), and his third dam is Miesque.

#7 THE CORSICAN (15-1) is an under-the-radar contender who is likely to outperform his odds for the astute David Simcock. Under serious consideration for last summer's Arlington Million before deciding to stay at home, the well-bred son of Galileo (and full brother to Aidan O'Brien classic prospect Deauville) has shown nifty acceleration going longer. While only a Group 3 winner, The Corsican was a better-than-appears fourth in the Prince of Wales's at Royal Ascot. The combination of a stiff pace, and quick ground, presents him with ideal conditions.

#10 EURO CHARLINE (15-1) is a must-use in the exotics, as is **#2 TRYSTER** (2-1), who has the look of a vulnerable favorite but can still grab a share. Euro Charline was fourth in this race a year ago, when everything went wrong – rushing to get fit in time after undergoing surgery, racing too keenly on the lead, and she still wasn't beaten far by The Grey Gatsby for second (and Mshawish for third). This time around, trainer Marco Botti was able to bring her along in more deliberate fashion. Euro Charline got in an encouraging tune-up over this course and distance, finishing second to loose-on-the-lead **VERY SPECIAL** in the Balanchine. At times her own worst enemy when headstrong, Euro Charline should find it easier to settle off the swift tempo. Tryster has clocked brilliant finishing times when inhaling lesser foes here, but the slow starter may find it entirely different trying to overtake rivals of this caliber.

Race 8, Dubai Sheema Classic

#4 DURAMENTE (3-1) is one of today's best bets.

#7 POSTPONED (9-5) treated the smart **DARIYAN** like a claimer in the Dubai City of Gold at this course and distance, barely coming out of a canter to win in a fast time. The winner of a slightly substandard renewal of the King George VI & Queen Elizabeth last year, Postponed is eligible to keep improving as a son of Dubawi. Indeed, new trainer Roger Varian expects him to move forward off that prep. Yet it's tough to do much better than that in scarcely three weeks, and no horse has ever graduated from the City of Gold to take the Sheema. Of course, few as good as Postponed have even tried it, and he's well qualified to annul that stat.

#8 HIGHLAND REEL (4-1) is a major chance, especially having beaten Flintshire and **DARIYAN** in last December's Hong Kong Vase. American fans may remember him best for turning the Secretariat into a one-horse show in Arlington's driving rain. Jockey Ryan Moore has tipped him as his best chance of a winner on the card too. There's one nagging question: trainer Aidan O'Brien's record here. The master of Ballydoyle is 3-for-21 over the past five seasons at Meydan, and two of those wins came in the UAE Derby on synthetic. More tellingly, O'Brien runners have been out of the top three 15 times. Highland Reel has never won first up, it's a long year, and this could be a great place to knock off the cobwebs while earning a big check for a placing.

#1 LAST IMPACT (12-1) came agonizingly close to winning last November's Japan Cup under a brilliant Moore ride. Although he loses Moore here, he picks up another international ace in Joao Moreira. That's particularly important to Last Impact, who has at times been hampered by problematic trips. For example, he never saw daylight when a frustrating seventh in the 2014 Arima Kinen, and he collided with the rail when 12th in the Tenno Sho Autumn. Switched to globetrotter extraordinaire Katsuhiko Sumii this season, Last Impact was a useful sixth to Duramente in his debut for the yard in the Nakayama Kinen. Sumii says he's figuring out the son of Deep Impact, who promises to do better over the added ground here. **#9 DARIYAN** (10-1) is becoming famous for his placings, and while that downgrades him as a win chance, it makes him a lively exotics player.

Race 9, Dubai World Cup

#9 FROSTED (2-1) might have been an American classic winner if he hadn't been foaled the same year as Triple Crown champion American Pharoah. A clear second in the Belmont after a rallying fourth in the Kentucky Derby, the Kiaran McLaughlin trainee can continue to flatter the retired American Pharoah. He kicked off his 4-year-old campaign in the best possible way in the Maktoum Challenge Round 2 at this track, drafting behind the leaders before storming clear in track-record time. In light of that monstrous effort off the bench, McLaughlin opted to skip Round 3 and train him up to the World Cup. In the quiet seclusion of Sheikh Mohammed's Marmoom complex, Frosted has been working well, and his tactical versatility should come in handy in a race where several want to go forward. Jockey William Buick (who also rides Tryster in the Dubai Turf) unhesitatingly named him his most exciting ride on the night. Godolphin has been the most successful owner in World Cup history, and Frosted can add a new chapter to that ongoing legacy.

#2 MSHAWISH (8-1) had success at Meydan in the 2014 Zabeel Mile, during his former life as a French-based turf star. Judging by how enthusiastically he's taken to the dirt here, he can give Al Shaqab Racing and trainer Todd Pletcher a first World Cup victory. Although Mshawish earned a Grade 1 laurel in the 2015 Gulfstream Park Turf, he has often settled for minor awards on that surface. He was fourth in the French Derby (his only attempt at the vicinity of this distance), St James's Palace, and Dubai Duty Free for trainer Mikel Delzangles. And for Pletcher, he was third in last year's Dubai Turf (after being under an injury cloud) and fourth in the Breeders' Cup Mile. But the switch to dirt has brought something new from the son of Medaglia d'Oro. Mshawish has won two straight at Gulfstream, notably the Donn, the major U.S. pointer to this race historically. Is he merely the latest Gulfstream wonder for Pletcher? Perhaps, but given his longstanding class, and his appearance on track at Meydan, he rates a fair deal better than that. Al Shaqab's top rider, Frankie Dettori, figures to work out a good trip from just off the pace in a ground-saving post 2.

#11 CALIFORNIA CHROME (3-2) couldn't have scripted a better comeback – a professional stalk-and-pounce in the San Pasqual, an easy handicap win over the World Cup trip at Meydan, and a steady stream of strong works. But he's going to get the same kind of pace-chasing trip that resulted in a fine second here last year. Even allowing for Chrome's physical improvement since his Taylor Made vacation, this World Cup is simply a lot deeper than the 2015 running. Chrome may indeed be five lengths better, as trainer Art Sherman believes, but he'd need to be just to duplicate his runner-up finish, never mind win the World Cup. Although Chrome is surely happy to be out wide again in post 11, his psychological requirements put an excessive physical burden upon him to cover that much extra ground. Nevertheless, the 2014 Kentucky Derby and Preakness champion will run his heart out, as he always does, and that will keep him in contention longer.

#4 MUBTAAHIJ (15-1) may be the likeliest candidate to obstruct an American sweep. He wasn't far off **#1 KEEN ICE** (20-1) when they were both owned by American Pharoah in the Kentucky Derby and Belmont, and like Frosted, they can keep the Triple Crown champion's form in the headlines. Back here on Mubtaahij's home course, the tables have already been turned on Keen Ice. Both ran below their best behind track record-setting **#5 SPECIAL FIGHTER** (15-1) in the Maktoum Challenge Round 3 last out, where the blatant inside speed bias never gave closers (or anyone on the outside) a chance. Mubtaahij ran a sneakily good fourth in the circumstances, and trainer Mike de Kock forecasts him to hit the World Cup superfecta. As far as Keen Ice goes, blinkers-on (plus an honest pace and a fair track) may work the oracle. He might actually get his preferred set-up for the first time since his infamous upset of American Pharoah in the Travers. If you tore up Keen Ice tickets in Round 3, now is not the time to bail. By the same token, even if Special Fighter is an improbable type to pull the Round 3/World Cup double, he is a rapidly progressive local who can hit the board. While **#10 HOPPERTUNITY** (12-1) isn't the best Bob Baffert has sent over, he stands to pick up the pieces, like Keen Ice, if the favorites falter.

Bomb potential: #12 TELETEXT (30-1) isn't your garden variety Saudi shipper. A Juddmonte-bred son of Empire Maker who placed in the 2014 Grand Prix de Paris and Prix Niel, he has blossomed on the dirt. He's three-for-four on the surface in Saudi Arabia, including a resounding win in the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Cup in his latest. The World Cup is obviously a world apart from that, as a massive class hike and an abrupt cutback from about 12 furlongs. Still, there's precedent for an Empire Maker to improve beyond all recognition when going turf-to-dirt – remember Icon Project? Teletext also gets an intriguing jockey booking in Silvestre de Sousa, who rode African Story to 2014 World Cup glory during his Godolphin days.