

xb wager guide

GOLD CUP AT SANTA ANITA

JUNE 27, 2015 • SANTA ANITA PARK



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Get to know the Horses

1. Batti Man (ARG) – 30/1

Owner: Tom Mansor

Trainer: Kristin Mulhall

Jockey: Fernando Perez

This feels like a very optimistic spot for Batti Man to make his Grade 1 debut. After all, he's just 4-for-32 in his career and has hit the board only once in seven prior stakes tries. Those trends aren't likely to turn around against this field, either. He's been competitive in recent starts against lesser competition, but he loses the services of Hall of Fame jockey, Mike Smith, who has ridden him lately. We'll be looking elsewhere for our winner.

2. Hard Aces – 12/1

Owner: Hronis Racing, LLC

Trainer: John Sadler

Jockey: Victor Espinoza

It's a good time to be Hronis Racing. One of their recent purchases, Stellar Wind, has won three graded stakes races and went favored in the G1 Kentucky Oaks. Another, Hard Aces, has the chance to spring the upset in the Gold Cup. This son of Hard Spun has yet to win a race for his new owners, but closed resolutely to finish 3rd in last month's G2 Californian Stakes, beaten just 4-lengths. And while we're not sure he wants to run this far, or if he's good enough to compete at the Grade 1 level, we do think he's a good longshot to include on your tickets.

3. Poshsky – 30/1

Owners: Silver Ranch Stable and Wachtel Stable

Trainer: Peter Miller

Jockey: Flavien Prat

The first of Peter Miller's four entrants may be the least likely winner of the quartet. The majority of Poshsky's best performances were against allowance horses on the turf in races shorter than this one, and there isn't anything on his resume that would suggest he'll appreciate Grade 1 dirt racing. If anything, his 30/1 Morning Line price feels light.

4. Motown Men – 6/1

Owners: Gulliver Racing, LLC

Trainer: Ted West

Jockey: Tyler Baze

A shrewd \$40,000 claim here in March, Motown Men most recently won the state-bred Tiznow Stakes on May 23. And while the step-up from state-bred racing to Grade 1 racing is a significant one, you have to appreciate that he was 3rd, beaten just 2-lengths, by Catch a Flight two races ago in the G3 Precisionist Stakes, proving he has the ability to run with that one. Unfortunately, this field is much deeper than he's ever seen and ultimately, we don't see this one being a huge threat going both this distance and against this level of competition.



Get to know the Horses

5. Majestic City – 12/1

Owners: Bloom Racing Stable, LLC

Trainer: Richard Baltas

Jockey: Charles Lopez

Majestic City took advantage of a sloppy track when going wire-to-wire to upset the G3 Lone Star Park Handicap last out, which persuaded his connections to enter here. The step up in class is definitely aggressive, but we can't call it unwise. Majestic City is obviously in good form, and there's no better time than that to take on horses of this caliber. Unfortunately, he's just 1-for-7 at Santa Anita and we don't think he has a favorable pedigree to run this far. So, while we don't fault the connections for taking a shot, we can't get behind him.

6. Hoppertunity – 7/2

Owners: Karl Watson, Michael Pegram and Paul Weigman

Trainer: Bob Baffert

Jockey: Martin Garcia

Just about everything Triple Crown winning trainer, Bob Baffert, sends out these days is dangerous, and that appears to be true for his Gold Cup entrant, Hoppertunity. He has seemingly spent his entire career chasing exceptional horses like Shared Belief, California Chrome and Lea, so he will appreciate not seeing those horses today. Additionally, we thought his race earlier this month in the G1 Stephen Foster Handicap was a lot better than it looked. He was 3rd, beaten 5 3/4-lengths, that day, but that was his first start off a 4-month layoff and we think he'll take a huge step forward with that performance under his belt. If he does, the sky is the limit.

7. Big Cazanova (ARG) – 12/1

Owner: Wachtel Stable, Gary Barber, Brous Stable and Dona Licha

Trainer: Peter Miller

Jockey: Corey Nakatani

If his past performances are any indication, you can expect to see Big Cazanova on or near the lead for as long as possible in the Gold Cup. Three of his four career victories, including the Grade 3 Native Diver in January, were wire-to-wire, so he'll be in big trouble if he's not in front early. Unfortunately, there are a few other speed horses signed on, and if they send, Big Cazanova's chances decrease significantly. So while we're expecting him to run better than he did when he finished 7th in the G2 Californian, we can't help but wonder if his presence in here is also to assist his late-running stablemate, Finnegans Wake.

8. Moreno – 7/2

Owner: Southern Equine Stable, LLC

Trainer: Eric Guillot

Jockey: Cornelio Velasquez

Finally as consistent as he is talented, Moreno appears poised become one of North America's top horses this summer. Unfortunately, handicappers have grown accustomed to him coming up a bit short late in races. Four times in his last nine starts he's had a lead at the top of the stretch and conceded, which isn't a trend we're thrilled about. Plus he's 0-for-6 at this distance with three seconds, so while we definitely expect him to be the one to catch as they turn for home, precedent tells us there's a good chance he'll be passed before he hits the wire.

Get to know the Horses

9. Catch a Flight (ARG) – 5/2

Owner: Haras Santa Maria de Araras

Trainer: Richard Mandella

Jockey: Gary Stevens

History will remember Catch a Flight as the horse that gave Gary Stevens his 5,000th North American victory. Now, it's Stevens' job to return the favor and give Catch a Flight his first Grade 1 win. The tandem combined to win the Grade 2 Californian Stakes by ½-length over Moreno, and he drew so nicely here it's tough to envision Moreno turning the tables. He has the right tactical speed and Gary Stevens will be able to track what the leaders do and pounce when the time is right. He's a major win threat at a fair price.

10. Lideris – 50/1

Owner: Dona Licha

Trainer: Peter Miller

Jockey: Joe Talamo

He has been a non-factor in all four of his starts in the US, including last year's Gold Cup, where he was 5th, beaten 13 ½-lengths. Unfortunately, we haven't seen anything that would make us think he's poised to run better this year. He beat just two horses home in the G2 Californian last month and would need to run better than he ever has in the States just to finish in the top half of this field.

11. Finnegans Wake – 6/1

Owner: Donegal Racing and Rockingham Ranch

Trainer: Peter Miller

Jockey: Mike Smith

Turf racing has been the name of the game for Finnegans Wake for as far back as his past performances take us, but a deeper dive into his resume does show he was beaten just 4-lengths in the 2013 Clark Handicap and 3rd in the 2012 Gotham. So, we can at least acknowledge he can be somewhat effective on the dirt. And to his credit, he's in the best form of his career. He's won three of five starts in 2015, including the G1 Turf Classic at Churchill Downs, and will relish the Gold Cup's 1 ¼-mile distance. To factor here, he'll both need to like the dirt and get a fast early pace. In our eyes, the latter is much more likely.



History Denied

Last year, Majestic Harbor thwarted Game On Dude's attempt to 'Three Peat' in the Gold Cup, leaving Native Diver (1965 – 1967) and Lava Man (2005 – 2007) as the only horses to accomplish that feat.



Wagering Strategies & Recommended Picks

Analysis:

Let the jockeying for position begin! MORENO's trainer, Eric Guillot, was critical of longshot speedster, BIG CAZANOVA's presence in last month's Californian Stakes, vowing that MORENO would try to separate from the field more in the Gold Cup. Well, BIG CAZANOVA is back again, so how hard will MORENO have to work to make the lead? CATCH A FLIGHT may inherit the perfect stalking trip – again – but we're most fearful of HOPPERTUNITY and Martin Garcia, who will be sitting back, watching things unfold in front of them. If he brings his A-game, the rest are going to have their hands full.

Recommended Picks

1. #9 Catch a Flight (ARG)
2. #6 Hoppertunity
3. #2 Hard Aces
4. #8 Moreno

Main Contenders:

CATCH A FLIGHT and MORENO were the 1-2 finishers, separated by just ½-length, in the Grade 2 Californian Stakes, Santa Anita's top Gold Cup prep race. Both drew nice, outside posts and we don't expect either will be too far from the front as the field enters the turn. Bob Baffert's HOPPERTUNITY chased some fast horses in the Stephen Foster and should improve with that effort under his belt.

Value Plays:

If the field goes too fast early, as they did last year, things could set up for a deep closer. The best of those are FINNEGANS WAKE and HARD ACES, neither of whom would be a shock at fair odds. Note that Triple Crown winning jock, Victor Espinoza, has ridden both horses in recent starts and opts to stick with HARD ACES this time around.

\$100 Wagering Strategy:

- **\$20 Exacta Box** #6 Hoppertunity, #9 Catch a Flight (\$40)
- **\$5 Trifecta Key** #9 Catch a Flight / #2 Hard Aces, #6 Hoppertunity, #8 Moreno (\$30)
- **\$2 Trifecta Key** #6 Hoppertunity / #2 Hard Aces, #8 Moreno, #9 Catch a Flight (\$12)
- **\$8 Win** #9 Catch a Flight (\$8)
- **\$10 Show** #2 Hard Aces (\$10)

\$500,000 Guaranteed Late Pick 4 Strategy:

- **Race 7** – Jerry Hollendorfer may hold the cards here with SAHARA SKY, who will get a pace to run at and is a G2 winner at this distance. MASOCHISTIC is the speed of the speed, and is the other one you must use.
- **Race 8** – This is an awesome betting race and while there are no real standouts, there are no throw outs, either. If you can afford the ALL button, hit it. If not, lean on FANTICOLA, QUEEN OF THE SAND, BLINGISMYTHING, BIRDLOVER and FAMOUS ALICE.
- **Race 9** – We've covered the Gold Cup already, but to reiterate, HOPPERTUNITY and CATCH A FLIGHT are the two likeliest winners, with MORENO and HARD ACES in the mix.
- **Race 10** – We round out the card with CA-bred maidens and CONQUEST DREAMIN looks to be the one to beat, with FRITZ JOHANSEN and STORMIN TRICK in the mix.



Gold Cup at Santa Anita Facts & Figures



Trainer Bob Baffert has a career record of 12-5-3-2 (\$1.98 Win ROI) in the Gold Cup. His five wins came with:

- › Game On Dude (2012, 2013)
- › First Dude (2011)
- › Congaree (2003)
- › Real Quiet (1998)

Gary Stevens, who rides Catch a Flight in this year's Gold Cup, is tied with David Flores among active jockeys with the most career Gold Cup wins, with three. Stevens' three wins came aboard:

- › Gentlemen (1997)
- › Slew of Damascus (1994)
- › Cutlass Reality (1988)

Since 2002, the official win margin of the Gold Cup has been a nose four times. The four editions of the race that were decided by a flared nostril are:

- › 2011 – First Dude over Game On Dude
- › 2007 – Lava Man over A.P. Xcellent
- › 2006 – Lava Man over Ace Blue
- › 2002 – Sky Jack over Momentum

Since 1993, six horses have won the Gold Cup in wire-to-wire fashion, while 10 early frontrunners finished in the Exacta (47.6%). The six front-running winners are:

- › Game On Dude (2013)
- › Mast Track (2008)
- › Sky Jack (2002)
- › Skip Away (1998)
- › Siphon [Brz] (1996)
- › Slew of Damascus (1994)

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DID YOU KNOW



New Digs, Same Great Race

Inaugurated in 1938, the Gold Cup was an annual tradition at Hollywood Park until the track's closure in 2013. The race moved to Santa Anita Park last year, where Majestic Harbor became the first Gold Cup at Santa Anita winner.

An Important Prep

Since the Californian Stakes was created in 1954, 10 horses have completed a Californian Stakes/ Gold Cup Double, the most recent being Game On Dude in 2012.

Man 'O Man, Mandella

Hall of Fame trainer, Richard Mandella, saddles Catch a Flight in this year's Gold Cup. Mandella has won this race twice (1996, 1997) and saddled the 1-2-3 finishers in the 1997 edition.

Hall of Fame Precursor?

16 Gold Cup winners would go on to be inducted into racing's Hall of Fame, including Native Diver, Cigar, Seabiscuit, Affirmed, Swaps, Citation, Exceller, Skip Away and Round Table.

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