

Speed edge makes Fighting Mad formidable in Zenyatta Stakes

By: Brad Free



ARCADIA, Calif. – If she does not blow her cool in the paddock on Sunday at Santa Anita, front-runner Fighting Mad will be tough to catch in the Grade 2 Zenyatta Stakes.

And if she suffers a mental meltdown like last out? Fighting Mad will be tough to catch anyway.

Fighting Mad came unglued at Del Mar before her latest start.

“She was really bad in the paddock, trembling and shaking,” Bob Baffert said.

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She regained composure by the time she reached the gate, and wired the Grade 1 Clement L. Hirsch to emerge as the top older female in California.

A similar result is expected in the Zenyatta, the final West Coast prep for the Breeders’ Cup Distaff on Nov. 7 at Keeneland. Four others have been entered, including the recalcitrant Hard Not to Love, restricted stakes winner Proud Emma, and Hang a Star.

Harvest Moon is “50-50” to start in the Zenyatta, trainer Simon Callaghan said Friday. Harvest Moon is under consideration for the Grade 2 Black-Eyed Susan against 3-year-old fillies next Saturday at Pimlico.

Fighting Mad figures to set the pace Saturday in the mile and a sixteenth Zenyatta, a Win and You’re In for the BC Distaff. Fighting Mad, who is 3 for 3 in routes, already earned a Distaff ticket by winning the Hirsch.

Although the Zenyatta is merely practice, Baffert expects Fighting Mad to maintain form racing at her home track.

“She’s doing really well, she’s been pretty solid,” he said.

Fighting Mad, who was sidelined from summer 2019 until spring 2020 due to a pulled muscle in her hind end, has posted a series of fast works for her first start in nearly two months.

Owned and bred by Maximum Security’s connections, Gary and Mary West, Fighting Mad will be ridden by Luis Saez. Baffert typically does not speculate on races beyond the one in front of him, but he acknowledged uncertainty regarding Fighting Mad in the BC Distaff.

“I don’t know how she’s going to behave at Keeneland,” he said.

Hard Not to Love also has faced mental demons, but she was mellow in the pre-race warmup for her last start, the Clement Hirsch. Perhaps she was too relaxed. Hard Not to Love finished sixth and last, more than 13 lengths behind Fighting Mad. A Grade 1 sprint winner, Hard Not to Love runs best around one turn.

Peter Miller trains Proud Emma, who is drawn directly outside Fighting Mad and probably will be positioned closest to her. Proud Emma dead-heated with Message last out in a restricted stakes race at Del Mar. Message entered the Grade 3 Chillingworth on Friday at Santa Anita.

The Zenyatta is race 4 on Sunday.