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Churchill Downs

Nicole's Dream must fire fresh to win third straight Mamzelle

By BYRON KING

LOUISVILLE, Ky. - Relative to the \$100,000 Mamzelle Stakes at Churchill Downs on Thursday, Saturday's Kentucky Derby seems almost short of speed. At least six of the 11 entrants in the Mamzelle are established front-runners, including two of the favorites, Unbridled Sidney and Nicole's Dream.

Predicting which mare will make the lead is nearly as difficult as selecting the winner in a competitive edition of the Mamzelle, a five-furlong turf sprint for fillies and mares. Nicole's Dream has led at the first call in 10 consecutive races, Unbridled Sidney in 10 of her 12 races. Neither figures to take back.

"They'll be wing-dinging," said Ronny Werner, Unbridled Sidney's trainer.

The Mamzelle would figure to play to a stalker or closer such as Tara's Touch or Singit, who won turf stakes last year from off the pace.

The mare to beat is Nicole's Dream, winner of this race the past two years. A top female turf sprinter who races mostly in Kentucky and Illinois, she won 9 of 21 races and more than \$379,000 in 2004-2005.

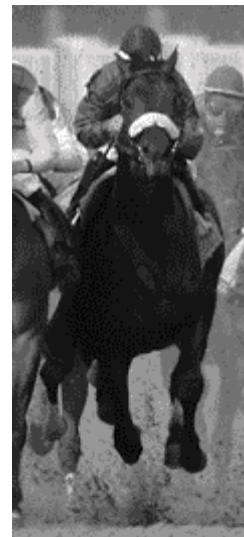
Unlike in her previous starts in this race, she enters the Mamzelle without a prep. A 6-year-old old, Nicole's Dream hasn't raced since bleeding and finishing last in the Group 1 Hong Kong Sprint on Dec. 11.

She has been off the board in her first start of the season in each of the past two years, poor efforts trainer Larry Rivelli hopes were related to adverse circumstances rather than an inability to fire fresh. Nicole's Dream worked four-furlong bullet in 46.40 seconds at Arlington on April 26.

Nicole's Dream isn't alone in coming off a performance less than her best. Of the seven stakes winners in the race, none comes off better than a fifth-place finish. That includes Unbridled Sidney, who faded to sixth after setting the pace in the April 22 Giant's Causeway Stakes at Keeneland, her second off-the-board finish of the year.

With Unbridled Sidney returning to the Churchill Downs turf course and shortening from 5 1/2 to five furlongs, Werner anticipates she will return to form. Last year she won 2 of 3 starts sprinting over the Churchill turf course, including a 6 3/4-length romp in the Zenobia Empress Stakes, a race in which she earned a 108 Beyer Speed Figure for completing five furlongs in a course-record 55.54 seconds. Robby Albarado rides.

Both Rivelli and Werner said their fillies would prefer racing over a firm course, a condition that appears unlikely for the Mamzelle. Heavy rain fell at



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Churchill on Tuesday morning, and there is a threat of scattered thunderstorms on Wednesday and Thursday.

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