Ellis Park - Meet Preview / Betting Trends

By Noel Michaels

Major Race Dates and Betting Options

To begin its summer meet, Ellis will conduct live racing for four consecutive days starting on Thursday, July 3, and ending Sunday, July 6, including the July 4 holiday on Friday. After that, Ellis will hold live racing on a Saturday-Monday three-day schedule each week until the closing weekend, which will run from Friday, Aug. 22 to Sunday, Aug. 24. Ellis shifted to a Saturday-Monday weekly schedule for most of the meet last summer and, after reporting a 20 percent increase in handle for 2024, will continue that schedule this year. Post time for the first race each day of the meet is 12:50 PM (Eastern) . Races from Ellis will be broadcast daily on FanDuel TV.

Major race dates are Saturday/Sunday, Aug. 2-3, when seven stakes races including the Grade 3 Pucker Up Stakes will be held as preps for Kentucky Downs' elite turf meet in late August and September; and on Sunday, Aug. 10, when six stakes are offered, including the Groupie Doll Stakes for fillies and mares, which was formerly the Gardenia Stakes and is now named after the two-time champion female sprinter who won the race in 2011. The one-mile Ellis Park Derby for 3-year-olds also will be held on Aug. 10.

Horseplayers have plenty of gambling opportunities on each racecard at Ellis throughout the meet, with at least two daily Pick 5s offered (50-cent minimum), a $3 all-turf Pick 3, and a 20-cent Dade Park Pick 6 offered, each with a 15% takeout.

Track Trends on Dirt and Turf

Let's look at the winning track trends from the 2024 Ellis Park meet to try to formulate a strategy for the best types of horses to bet in 2025.

Starting with dirt sprints, we see that Ellis Park ran 84 dirt sprint races in 2024 and they were very fair for the most part in terms of running styles and post positions. Early speed horses, as defined as leading or racing within a length of the pace, won 37 of the 84 sprints (44% of the races), and stalkers, as defined as racing between one and four lengths off the pace, won 36 of the sprints for 43%. The running style at a disadvantage was closers coming from four or more lengths off the pace, who won only 11 of 84 dirt sprints in 2024 to account for 13% of the races. Speed horses tended to have their best success coming from the three inside posts, while stalkers had a much better win rate when starting from middle posts 4-6.

The majority of Ellis dirt routes are run at one mile (there were only eight longer routes run in 2024). Ellis Park dirt miles are run from a mile chute featuring a half-turn on the clubhouse side. Ellis mile races were remarkably fair in 2024 with the 49 dirt miles being won by 17 speed horses, 16 stalkers, and 16 closers. The slight advantage in post positions went to horses breaking from middle posts 4-6 who combined to win 23 times (47% of the races).

The Ellis Park turf course is a one-mile oval. Ellis ran a total of 57 turf routes at last year's meet and the course played very fairly. All running styles and post positions enjoyed nearly identical success. The only surprise in 2024 was that outside posts in turf routes actually did the best. Handicappers betting the 2025 meet should take note of this trend because outside horses in turf routes often get overlooked and pay overlaid odds. In 2024, outside horses from posts 7+ in Ellis turf routes won 23 of the 57 races (40%).

Ellis Park turf sprints are all run at 5 ½ furlongs and they ran 30 of them at the 2024 meet. The stats revealed some shocking results. First, there were exactly zero inside speed turf sprint winners at the 2024 meet (0-for-30 speedsters from the three inside posts). Speed horses excelled in turf sprints only when they started from middle posts 4-6 with eight wins in the 30 races (won 27% of the turf sprints). Middle posts as a whole (14 wins) did much better than inside posts (eight wins) and outside posts 7+ (eight wins). The main turf sprint disadvantage was against closers, who won only five of the 30 turf dashes to account for 17% of the winners

Leading Jockeys and Trainers

The Ellis Park meet will boast a strong jockey colony despite some of the regular Kentucky riders heading off to Saratoga for the summer. The 2024 Ellis Park season featured a battle for the jockey title between Jaime Torres and Luan Machado with Torres eventually prevailing, tallying 21 wins to 20 for Machado. Cristian Torres was not far back in third with 17 wins, and Edgar Morales was fourth with 14 wins. Brian Hernandez Jr. and Florent Geroux won a good percentage of their races with far fewer mounts due to more days riding out of town. Gerardo Corrales, Vincent Cheminaud, Martin Garcia, Rafael Bejarano, and James Graham will also see their fair share of winning action. And Tyler Gaffalione, who has resided atop the jockey rankings at various Kentucky tracks in recent years, is set to make his return from an ankle injury on Ellis Park's opening-day card.

The Ellis Park trainer's standings will showcase some top barns if last year's 2024 leaderboard was any indication. Brendan Walsh and Steve Asmussen shared the 2024 Ellis Park training title with 14 wins apiece. Walsh won the same amount of races as Asmussen with roughly half the amount of starters. Walsh had only 70 starters and won at a 20% clip while Asmussen won at a much lower percentage with 14 wins from 140 starters for a 10% strike rate. That kind of win percentage won't make bettors any money. Some of the other trainers handicappers can profit from at Ellis Park's 2025 meet should include Brad Cox (9-for-46, 20% in 2024), Chris Hartman (9-for-39, 23%), Brian Lynch (8-for-41, 20%), Mike Maker (8-for-42, 19%), Dale Romans (6-for-25, 24%), Eoin Harty (6-for-10, 60%), Paulo Lobo (5-for-21, 24%), Mark Casse (4-for-18, 22%), Bill Mott (4-for-11, 36%), Paul McGee (4-for-8, 50%), and Brittany Vanden Berg (4-for-7, 57%), who all won at impressive percentages last year.