HICK'S PICKS

Here are a few of my favorite plays and fades in each price range:

$9K+:

PLAY: Max Homa, $9.7k. It's still strange to see him priced above the likes of JT, Morikawa, Finau, X and Cantlay, but you can't argue his recently play doesn't warrant the 4th highest price tag this week. In his 4 starts so far this year he's racked up a win, a runner-up, a T3, and a even a T39 at the WMPO where he uncharacteristically lost 2.7 strokes ball-striking. He's 2nd in adjusted course fit and is gaining strokes across the board in his last 36 rounds. He's also better in the crucial 200-225 yard proximity than Rory, Scottie, and Rahm which I was surprised to see. He checks the course history box with 3 straight made cuts including finishes of 24th, 10th, and 17th, and he's easily in the best form of his career coming into this year's event. The price savings compared to the top 3 are also massive - $1.8k vs Rahm, $1.2k vs Scottie, and $.9k vs Rory. I'll be starting plenty of lineups with Max and wouldn't be surprised to see him walking away with another W this week.

PLAY: Patrick Cantlay, $9.1k. There are two things that I think are unjustly suppressing his pricing and ownership – his lack of course history and his missed cut at the WMPO 2 starts ago. Prior to the WMPO he racked up finishes of T2, T16, and T26, and his 3rd place finish two weeks ago some him gain 13.65 strokes total in a loaded field. Let's not forget he was also a top-10 machine at the end of the 2022 season last summer. He's also gaining across the board in the last 36 rounds and is the projecting as the 2nd best golfer in my model while carrying the 10th highest price tag. I think he's hungry and have no concerns about his ability to figure out this course. Homa-Cantlay stacks incoming.

FADE: Justin Thomas, $9.6k. JT's in a potential leverage spot at 11-12% projected ownership but I just can't click him this week. He is elite and can contend any given week on any given course, but I'm still a little leery of his approach play which has historically been a huge advantage for him. He showed flashes with 4.1 and 3.2 strokes gained on approach at Farmers and the WMPO, but he's lost on approach in 5 of his last 10 and ball-striking in 2 of his last 4. Oh, and those two he lost ball-striking were among the 10 worst ball-striking performances of his career. I don't like this course as a get-right spot for this facet of his game and will be fully fading JT this week.

$8K+:

PLAY: Jordan Spieth, $8.6k. Unlike JT, I WILL be taking the ownership leverage with Spieth who is projecting to be the lowest-owned player $8 and above range. With a lot of guys clubbing down off the tee his accuracy issue should be mitigated, and I'm a sucker for his magic beans on and around the greens in difficult conditions. He is in the worst putting stretch of his career but he's gaining everywhere else in the last 36 rounds. He popped with a 6th place finish at the WMPO 2 starts ago and he finished 4th in his most recent start here back in 2021. He'll be coming in 12th in the field in weighted strokes gained approach and 2nd in weighted strokes gained around the green. I'll hope for a spike putter week (I'll even take a 0!) and hope he doesn't crush my dreams by lunch-time Thursday yet again.

PLAY: Keith Mitchell, $8k. I love me some Killer Keith this week and feel like he's knocking on the door for his 2nd career PGA Tour W. Maybe the W is a stretch, but I certainly wouldn't be surprised to see another top 10 finish which will pay off in spades at this price tag. He found himself toward the top of the leaderboard here back in 2019 (6th place) and 2020 (5th) and is 14th in adjusted course fit coming in to this year's event. We can check the recent form box too - 4 straight made cuts with finishes of 5th, 42nd, 4th, and 22nd. He's also coming in as the best total driver of the ball and I think his club head speed will be an advantage for him in the rough this week. Keith-Spieth stack has a nice ring to it as well.

FADE: Matthew Fitzpatrick, $8.8k. I usually get Fitz wrong so note this as a sign that he should probably be in your lineups, but here we are. He's earned the reputation as one of the best "difficult conditions" players in the word, and his course history here is outstanding – 9th, 10th, 9th, and runner up in his last 4 starts. All signs point to a return to the top of the leaderboard, but I can't get past his recent ball-striking which has historically been a strength. Since 2018, he's lost strokes ball-striking and on approach in back-to-back starts just ONCE. He's lost strokes ball-striking and on approach in all 4 of his starts in 2023. Maybe there is something to that neck injury after all.

$7K+:

PLAY: Tommy Fleetwood, $7.5k. I'll take another run at Tommy Lad again this week. They say Europeans play this course well and that proves out mostly true for Tommy – he's made 4 of his last 5 cuts here with finishes of 20th, 10th, 3rd and 26th. He's been flashing with top finishes in the last few months – T4 at CJ Cup, W at Nedbank, 5th at DP WT Championship, 2nd at the Hero Cup - and pulled a top 20 at the Genesis 2 weeks ago. He's gained strokes ball-striking in 11 of his last 12 measured events and is coming in as the 14th best approach player, 12th best ARG, and #1 T2G. The Bay Hill Wind will be no match for Tommy Lad's flowing locks, so let it ride.

PLAY: Chris Kirk, $7.7k. I'm ok eating the Kirk chalk in the $7k range – it looks like he and Sahith will both be coming in around 13-14% ownership. On paper it makes too much sense – he checks the course history box (5th, 8th, 15th, 13th in his last 4 starts here) and he's coming in off of 4 top 3s in his last 4 starts with the obvious W at Honda last week. Over the last 36 rounds he's 11th on approach, 3rd ARG, 8th T2G and 11th with the putter, and he's also pretty solid on bogey avoidance (30th). We've seen a recent trend of golfers contending in the weeks following a victory, and I can't think of any reason why Kirk can't make a run at back-to-back Ws this week.

FADE: Taylor Montgomery, $7.4k. Talk about a fall from grace. We aren't too far removed from seeing Taylor rattling off top 25 finishes and being priced in the upper $8k to lower $9k ranges, but it's been

ugly recently and there's no course history to fall back on here. His last two starts saw him drop 3 and 4.4 strokes from tee to green, and I don't think is course is prime for a get-right spot in that category. The math just isn't adding up for me – the 36th highest price golfer ranking 101st on approach and 68th around the green. I'm bullish on him long-term and will look to get him back in the rotation in some weaker fields and better course fits (read: putting contests).

$6K+:

PLAY: Robby Shelton, $6.6k. I love the way Robby's been playing lately and think he's a great course fit here. The course history is ugly – 56th in 2020 and a missed cut in 2021 – but he's arguably in the best form of his young career coming in this week. Since joining the Tour last Fall, he's made 10 of 12 cuts with 6 top-25 finishes, and in those 12 starts he's only lost twice on approach and once around the green. If you look at the last 36 rounds he's coming in ranked 13th in weighted approach, 23rd in weighted ARG, 29th T2G, 44th in scrambling, 4th from 150-175 yards and 37th from 200-225 yards (both crucial buckets this wee). I think he's a solid bet for a top-25 finish which would pay off nicely at this price tag.

PLAY: Eric Cole, $6.9k. I'm happy to go back to Eric Cole after his runner-up finish at Honda last week as long as his ownership stays under 5%. His game is trending in the right direction after missing the cut in his first 4 PGA starts – since then, he's made the cut in 7 of 8 while earning 6 top-40 finishes. It just so happens his best finishes in that span of events came in his last two starts - a T15 at Pebble Beach and solo 2nd last week. In 2023 he's gained on approach AND around the green in 4 of 5 starts, and he's coming into this week ranking 42nd in weighted approach, 34th in weighted ARG, and 8th in scrambling which will be crucial this week. He doesn't have course history here but I really like the moxie we saw from him on Sunday last week. And if he makes another run this Sunday, that just means more Laura Braugh screen time for all of us.

FADE: Davis Riley, $6.6k. Riley is a budding star and looks to be highest owned player in the $6k range, perhaps rightfully so coming off of a T29 at the Honda Classic last week where he gained 6.16 strokes from tee to green. I'm bullish on him long-term but need to see more consistency before plugging him in these elevated events on difficult courses. He's missed 3 of 4 cuts so far in 2023 and he hasn't gained any strokes with his short game over his last 8 starts. Over the last 36 rounds he ranks 114th in the field ARG, and although his overall approach play ranks 28th, he's 82nd in the 150-175 yard bucket and 85th from 200-225 yards where a lot of his 2nd shots will come from. He also missed the cut in his only start at this event last year, losing 3.8 strokes on approach and 4.17 ball-striking. The talent is there but you'll find Davis Riley riding my DFS pine this week.