Date: August 14th, 2020   **Track:** Del Mar

By Brad Free

BEST BET: First Empress (8th race)

First Race

1. Magic At Midnight	2. Rakassah	3. Sold It

MAGIC AT MIDNIGHT won both starts last year by landslide margins with high speed figures, the comeback filly returns from a layoff of nearly a year as the fastest in the field. Her challenges are an abbreviated workout pattern for her first start in nearly a year, and first-time turf. Nonetheless, the fastest in the field is the one to beat. **RAKASSAH** has something the top choice lacks. That is, current form. Her runner-up finish last month in a similar N1X turf sprint was super. She broke awkwardly, lost ground through the turn, made the lead and got worn down by the favorite. Solid effort first try against winners. **SOLD IT** drops from a bad-trip last-place finish in a N2X to N1X while entered for the optional claiming price. She won a maiden race in fall 2018 sprinting on this course.

Second Race

1. Mucha Woman	2. Miss Glorious	3. Stars of Bluegrass

MUCHA WOMAN was compromised by a slow start last out, finishing a distant fourth in a similar maiden-50 for Cal-bred 2yo fillies. She hopped, was away last, uncorked an early rush to press/chase the pace, loomed outside into the lane and then lost her punch. With a rider switch to Flavien Prat, she can win with a clean takeoff. The speedy **MISS GLORIOUS** returns from a freshening while dropping from Cal-bred MSW to maiden-claiming. She is fast, and will take them as far as she can. She is trained by Andrew Lerner, who also entered off-the-pace filly **STARS OF BLUEGRASS**. The latter improved last out, distant runner-up while earning the top figure in this field. 'BLUEGRASS is the best threat from off the pace. BIG MAMA SUE looms an upset candidate, second time out after a spin-around-the-trip debut prep.

Third Race

1. Hot Rod Charlie	2. Run Snappy	3. Commander Khai

Wide open turf sprint for maiden 2yos; the tepid choice is the only entrant with racing experience. **HOT ROD CHARLIE** trained better than he ran in his fourth-place debut as the favorite. But he posted three works since, and can improve with a race under his belt. The winner of the race he exits returned to finish second in the (low-rated) G2 Best Pal. 'CHARLIE is a sibling to champion sprinter Mitole, who lost his debut, improved a ton second out and won a maiden race third time out. Not sure about turf for 'CHARLIE, he is not exactly bred for it. First-time starter **RUN SNAPPY** appears to have worked well for his debut. Progeny of first-crop sire Runhappy are 1-for-11 first time out; 'SNAPPY is a sibling to three stakes winners including G3 winner Heavenhasmynikki. Trainer John Sadler is 3-for-7 with debut 2yos in turf sprints the past three Del Mar summers. First-timer **COMMANDER KHAI**, by Twirling Candy, should like turf, his works look decent and trainer Richard Baltas won a turf sprint two weeks ago with a 3yo debut filly by Twirling Candy (Dolce). Baltas is 3-for-7 this year with first-time starters in turf sprints.

Fourth Race

1. Operatic	2. Mongolian Window	3. Avalon Ride

Midwest shipper **OPERATIC** arrives in solid form, she was claimed for $16k from a runner-up finish in a race from which the third- and fourth-place finishers returned to win. OPERATIC runs for the same claim tag, with a top rider for her local debut. The veteran mare can kickstart summer for a stable that is uncharacteristically quiet. **MONGOLIAN WINDOW** was overmatched in a N1X last out, she returns to the claiming ranks and will be positioned in front of the top choice early. Speed has been good in mile dirt races, three of the last four won by the pacesetter (all three wins were favorites). **AVALON RIDE** returns to dirt and gets a new rider after splitting the field in a claiming mile on turf. 'RIDE won a maiden-claiming race on this track last summer. PERFECT ICE STORM misfired as the favorite last out at Los Al, which is a track she does not care for. She is a bit of a tough read, because both wins were on wet tracks.

Fifth Race

1. Raymundos Secret	2. Zee Drop	3. Strike At Dawn

Trainer Phil D'Amato entered Friday with five wins from his last 15 starters; both his starters in this N2X turf mile are "live." They are

comebacker **RAYMUNDOS SECRET** and second-start back **ZEE DROP**. Although RAYMUNDOS SECRET has not raced since fall, she runs well fresh. She won career debut in a turf route, and her California debut on this course last summer returning from a six-month layoff. The front-runner/presser is making her first start for D'Amato, her works are solid and she should run a big race first start back. ZEE DROP has the benefit of a comeback prep. She was a short filly into her June 14 comeback, but has returned to work exceptionally well and also is proven on the Del Mar turf. 'DROP was a vet scratch July 10, but worked well since. **STRIKE AT DAWN** misfired without a visible alibi as the favorite last out, she is a better filly than that race indicates. ELLIE ARROWAY finished fourth last out, running better than the finish position. The race was dominated by closers, 'ARROW set the pace to deep stretch. She might be the one to catch, though 28 turf miles this meet (multiple rail settings) produced just four wire-to-wire winners. The turf rails move to 24 feet for this card.

Sixth Race

1. Warren's Empress	2. Sweet Regards	3. Arya's Dagger

WARREN'S EMPRESS drops from maiden-50 to maiden-20 and catches a softer pace scenario than she chased in her seventh-place comeback. She also was compromised by her trip; she raced inside on a surface that favored the outside lanes. Now she moves to the middle of the field, faces easier and switches riders to Prat. **SWEET REGARDS** tumbles from Cal-bred special-weight to rock-bottom maiden-20, and also adds blinkers. She has speed, is drawn in the outside post, and figures among the early pacesetters. Nine of the 17 races this summer at six furlongs were won from one of the two outside posts, irrespective of field size. **ARYA'S DAGGER** made the lead in the stretch last time, then got run over by a rival that wheeled right back to win a starter allowance turf route. RUN LIKE KONA drops from Cal-bred special-weight and will rally late.

Seventh Race

1. Brittle and Yoo	2. Jewel Thief	3. Sugar Pickel

Neither **BRITTLE AND YOO**, nor **JEWEL THIEF**, have raced on grass. Nonetheless, recent main-track form makes them to the top choices in this claiming turf sprint for 3yo fillies. BRITTLE AND YOO was claimed from a runaway win for maiden-75 two back, then was overmatched in an allowance. Previously based in the Midwest, she makes her California debut for trainer John Sadler, who has won with seven of his last 17 second-off-the-claim runners. Progeny of Include have won 10 percent of starts on turf; a sibling to 'YOO is a turf-sprint winner. If she runs back to her maiden dirt win, 'YOO can win her local debut rallying from off the pace. But she will have to catch JEWEL THIEF, runner-up in her local debut after setting a fast pace. She drops in class into an age-restricted claiming sprint. 'THIEF is not exactly bred for turf, but she is fast. **SUGAR PICKEL** drops in class and has run okay on turf. Her closing style suits the likely pace scenario. Look for her late.

Eighth Race

1. First Empress	2. Awesome Amanda	3. Midnight Garden

Based on her runner-up finish last out on this track at this claiming level, **FIRST EMPRESS** should be tough to beat at a short price. She finished more than six lengths clear of the field, including five rivals she meets again here. 'EMPRESS was claimed from the runner-up finish by Dean Pederson, and figures as one of the most heavily favored runners on the card. Single in the multi-race exotics? **AWESOME AMANDA** stretches from a sprint to a route, third start back from a long layoff. Lightly raced **MIDNIGHT GARDEN** also stretches to a route of ground. This is only the third start of her career. Sired by an A.P. Indy stallion, produced by a sibling to multiple G1 turf route winner Harmonious, 'GARDEN should be fine around two turns. The other five entrants finished a long way behind FIRST EMPRESS last out.

Ninth Race

1. Offshore Affair	2. Golden Doughnut	3. Sea of Liberty

OFFSHORE AFFAIR improved significantly after he was gelded in spring 2019. Both comeback starts were solid sprint efforts including a better-than-looked fourth last out. He got banged around at the break, shuffled and away last, then rallied to miss by less than a length. With a clean trip, he could have won. Good effort nonetheless, and aimed to this Cal-bred N1X turf mile ever since. He proved early in his career he can run long, and with two sprints under his belt is ready to stretch out again. **GOLDEN DOUGHNUT** ran better than the line looks finishing fourth last out in a race dominated by closers. He made an early move to the lead going into the far turn despite a fast pace, led to deep stretch, then was swallowed by the closers. He is likely to get patient handling this time, switching riders to Mike Smith. **SEA OF LIBERTY** disappointed last time in the same race as 'DOUGHNUT, but the effort by 'LIBERTY also was better than it looks. He ran into severe traffic at the head of the lane, steadied, and finished willingly. He benefits from a key jockey change. Umberto Rispoli entered Friday as the runaway turf jockey. His first 58 turf mounts produced 18 wins, 9 seconds. Second-leading turf rider Prat has 8 wins on turf.