Date: July 26th, 2026 **Track:** Del Mar

By Brad Free

BEST BET: Zuzu's Classic Gal (5th race)

First Race

1. Candy Bar	2. Sareeha	3. Shocking Grey

CANDY BAR has been running well in turf sprints, but her three most-recent wins were at the mile distance of this N1X for fillies and mares. She exits tough races, a stakes two back and third-place last out in a starter allowance from which the winner returned to win again. 'BAR adds blinkers, and should get a forwardly placed trip saving ground from the rail while switching riders to Kazushi Kimura. Pace-presser **SAREEHA** is a 10-win veteran who wired a N2X two starts back, then misfired next out at that level. SAREEHA drops to N1X, entered for the $50,000 optional claim tag, and will be prominent throughout. **SHOCKING GREY** stretches out from an okay midpack comeback in a hillside sprint at Santa Anita. Before she began focusing on sprints last year, she won a pair of mile turf races. The stretch-out in distance is okay. CAMERON SLOUGH will be rolling late. IMA JOKER drops in class for her first start in three months. She ran well over the Del Mar turf last year.

Second Race

1. Van Gogh Style	2. De Facto	3. Zakiel

Improving each start, **VAN GOGH STYLE** is the call to win this Cal-bred maiden dirt mile. He set the pace and finished a respectable second last out in a similar state-bred mile, his recent work pattern is solid, and he figures for a front-running/pace-pressing trip in a small field without much speed. Trainer Sean McCarthy is 8-for-12 with maiden special-weight favorites the past five years. **DE FACTO** stretches out from a pair of even-paced fourth-place finishes in turf sprints. He is bred top and bottom to route, and bred for dirt. The gelding is likely to improve at this longer distance. **ZAKIEL** rallied to third in a creditable debut at five and one-half furlongs. He is another who is bred for this longer distance, sired by a route stakes winner and sibling to local route winner King of Dragons.

Third Race

1. Let Her Fly	2. Wildcatter	3. Saudi Runner

Maiden 2yos go a mile on turf. Doug O'Neill-trained filly **LET HER FLY**, with two sprints under her belt in Kentucky including a runner-up finish, can beat the boys. She improved last out when she switched to turf; the three-four finishers behind her won MSWs next out. 'FLY might be the speed of this field. Long gone? Well-regarded **WILDCATTER**, a Tapit colt produced by a route stakes winner, makes his debut with a solid workout pattern. Tough to win a route first out, of course, but the colt is believed to have above-average ability and this mile race has always been his debut target. **SAUDI RUNNER** is a Gun Runner colt produced by European multiple Group 1 winner/Group 1

producer Minding. Workouts by 'RUNNER look modest, but his pedigree commands respect. 'RUNNER is trained by Michael McCarthy, who also entered the debut Girvin colt DREAM SEEKER and debut Mandaloun colt SUPER SPIKE. DEE SNOOK, filly stablemate of the top choice, is likely to improve off her seventh-place sprint debut. Her debut was a prep, it appears two turns is what she wants.

Fourth Race

1. Cipriani	2. Rabeeba	3. Medjugorje

CIPRIANI can make amends for her disappointing fourth last out as the odds-on favorite, if she can defeat debut-winning stablemate **RABEEBA**. Both are trained by Bob Baffert. CIPRIANI was odds-on last out in a similar N1X route, based largely on her runner-up sprint comeback. But in the route, CIPRIANI was unable to establish position early, found herself near the rear of the small field, and merely went through the motions. Now she adds blinkers, switches riders, and is expected to be more forwardly placed. Her main rival is RABEEBA, who wired sprinters in her debut last month at Los Alamitos. Sired by Curlin and a sibling to European G1 winner Air Force Blue, RABEEBA certainly has upside. The stablemates are likely to be positioned one-two early, and may control the race start to finish. **MEDJUGORJE** switched to dirt last out and ran the best race of her career to defeat maidens. Light bulb on, up the ladder?

Fifth Race

1. Zuzu's Classic Gal	2. Come On Om	3. Running Iron

It took a long time for 5yo **ZUZU'S CLASSIC GAL** to make her debut, but if she improves off that runner-up finish, the mare can handle these Cal-bred maiden filly-mare turf sprinters. 'CLASSIC GAL ran super first out. Fifth on the rail, split rivals into the stretch, appeared to race a bit green, but finished willingly for second. That race was five furlongs, same as this. With a race under her belt, she looks tough to beat. **COME ON OM** is a question mark. Her debut two back was a sharp runner-up finish, she bombed next out finishing fourth at odds-on without a visible alibi. Conflicting signals on the Om filly, but her speed makes her the one they have to catch, and the cutback from six furlongs to five probably helps. **RUNNING IRON** showed promise in her fourth-place debut last summer. She has not raced since then. The 3yo is a full sister to Trident Miss, a 2yo who won her debut last week at $82. Both are owned, bred and trained by Paula Capestro. MUSTANG KNICKY, fifth both starts here last summer, returns from a long layoff and adds Lasix. She has speed, but turf creates uncertainty. Progeny of Knicks Go are 1-for-25 on turf according to Formulator.

Sixth Race

1. Cotta Ride	2. How It Is	3. Perfect Smile

Droppers **COTTA RIDE** and **HOW IT IS** are the choices in this $16k maiden-claiming sprint. 'RIDE ran well at DMR last fall, runner-up in a maiden-50; she flashed brief speed and faded in her comeback last month. She adds Lasix, drops in class, and has speed to establish position from the rail. HOW IT IS drops to maiden-claiming after being overmatched twice vs. Cal-bred MSW rivals. **PERFECT SMILE** finished in the money in four straight prior to her stumbled-at-start fourth last

out. CINDYS BEACH HOUSE drops from a pair of maiden-50s on turf and should improve vs. easier company. This is a weak race to begin the Sunday pick six.

Seventh Race

1. Sir Rocket	2. Legal Heir	3. Poseidon's Law

SIR ROCKET, runner-up on dirt behind a repeat winner last out, can win this N1X turf sprint. Turf seems his preferred surface; he beat Cal-breds on this course last year. Trainer Neil Drysdale and jockey Joel Rosario entered the week having teamed to win with 4 of their last 9 together. 'ROCKET can win from off the pace. **LEGAL HEIR** is speed. He has taken his game to a new level since shortening to one turn, runner-up two back and decisive maiden win last out. 'HEIR might be the quickest in the field, though **POSEIDON'S LAW** will apply pressure. The latter makes his first start since December, when he missed by a neck to a rival who was winning his eighth straight race. 'LAW appears to have trained well in Florida; he runs well fresh. PRIVATE GEM ran better than the line looks last out, finishing fourth as the favorite. He was shuffled early, in heavy traffic into the turn, lost ground wide into the lane, and missed by less than three lengths. It was actually a good effort by a 4-for-7 pro who is making just his third start of the season. He might be ranked too low.

Eighth Race

1. Danzing Flyer	2. Spotted Haze	3. Donttellourwives

DANZING FLYER was in too tough last out in a Cal-bred N1X, she drops to $16k claiming N3L and is reunited with jockey Mike Smith, who rode her to a debut victory last year for trainer Cliff Sise. Smith and Sise won with 5 of their last 11 starters together. With a pressing trip vs. softer company, 'FLYER is the choice to win on the drop. **SPOTTED HAZE** also drops, from Cal-bred N1X, while shortening to her preferred one-turn trip. She finished last in a route her most recent start, she is 2-for-2 sprinting on dirt and will contest the pace with the filly on the rail.
DONTTELLOURWIVES had the race shape against her last out; she rallied from last to third in a race dominated by two speeds. 'WIVES facts slightly tougher first off the claim, and will be rolling late. HOW LOVELY is the aforementioned rail-drawn front-runner who will keep the pace honest.

Ninth Race

1. Formidable Man	2. Gold Phoenix	3. Cabo Spirit

FORMIDABLE MAN and **GOLD PHOENIX**, two of the top turf horses in California, meet for the first time. The edge in the G2 Eddie Read goes to 2025 Read winner FORMIDABLE MAN, who is virtually unbeatable at Del Mar: six wins and a runner-up finish in the BC Mile last fall from seven DMR starts. 'MAN returned from a layoff to win the G1 Shoemaker two months ago at SA; this race has been his target since. He has natural speed to be forwardly placed in a race likely to unfold at a soft tempo, and should get first run over his main rival. That is 8yo veteran GOLD PHOENIX, winner of the 2023 Read and five-time stakes winner over DMR turf. 'PHOENIX trounced an easy field last out in the G3 San Juan Capistrano; he can string together top efforts and will be rolling late. The challenge is that a mile and one-eighth is slightly shorter than he prefers, and his closing style puts him at the mercy of the pace scenario. There is only one true front-runner in this field. That is comebacker **CABO SPIRIT**, runner-up in this race last year and potentially loose on the lead this

year. Could he steal it? MI HERMANO RAMON was compromised by a curious ride last out. He made a premature move into a hot pace, and flattened out. New rider Juan Hernandez is not likely to make that mistake; 'RAMON is two-for-three on DMR turf.

Tenth Race

1. Mongolian Max	2. Royal 'n Rando	3. Big Juanito

MONGOLIAN MAX drops for the money in this $10k claiming dirt mile, following a troubled fifth as the favorite in a $16k claiming dirt mile. 'MAX did not have a fair shot. He got bounced around and lost position, dropped to the rear of the field, and sputtered. That was his first start in two months; his springtime races at SA are fast enough for this. He can be more forwardly placed, and can win despite the outside post (10 of 10). Late-runner **ROYAL 'N RANDO** had no shot last out in a race dominated by the slow-pace front-runner. 'RANDO rallied to fourth. Like the top choice, 'RANDO drops from $16k to $10k, and will be running late. **BIG JUANITO** returns to his favorite track; the gelding is 2-for-3 at DMR. He misfired last out, but his creditable third two back at this level puts him in the hunt. MICI'S EXPRESS and SUNSET STORM are pacesetter candidates.

Eleventh Race

1. Fibonaccis Ride	2. Goje	3. It's a Fairlife

Back-to-back runner-up finishes by **FIBONACCIS RIDE** at SA give her the edge in this Cal-bred N1X turf mile, though stretch-out **GOJE** also merits a look. 'RIDE missed by only a neck last out at SA in a race won by her full sister Quantum Innergy. That race would be fast enough to handle this modest field. GOJE stretches back to two turns as a contender on the front end. She ran well to finish second her only previous route race in February, she stretches out off a pair of sharp recent turf sprints (maiden win, allowance third by a neck). Her trainer won with 5 of his last 9 sprint-to-route starters on turf (non-maidens). **IT'S A FAIRLIFE** won her only start here last summer as a 2yo, rallying from the back to win a turf mile going away. Good debut, but she has not raced since. A full sister to Cal-bred stakes winners Ruby Bradley and Rose Dawson, IT'S A FAIRLIFE runs well fresh, and appears to have worked well for her comeback. RYAN'S GIRL stretches back out to two turns and will keep GOJE honest on the lead.