Date: September 5th, 2026 **Track:** Del Mar

By Brad Free

BEST BET: Zakiel (6th race)

First Race

1. Cheever	2. Strike a Match	3. Smashing Machine

A strong comeback last month by six-start maiden **CHEEVER** sets him up for a maiden win. He got caught in tight quarters on the turn, angled outside in the lane and finished well to miss by only a length and a half in a fast race that was validated when winner Roscoe's Brother, his stablemate, returned with an allowance romp last weekend. With a clean trip second start back from an extended layoff, CHEEVER can score an overdue maiden victory. He is trained by Mark Glatt, whose first-time starter **STRIKE A MATCH** debuts with a series of strong workouts. Glatt's win rate with older (3yos and up) debut maidens in dirt sprints is outstanding the past five years: nearly 25 percent (15 for 62) according to Formulator. **SMASHING MACHINE** moves to dirt after a solid runner-up debut in a turf sprint. PRACTICAL JACK ran super last out in a maiden-32, runner-up while finishing nearly 10 lengths clear of third. Gelded since, up in class, he figures to influence the pace.

Second Race

1. Path To Power	2. Balnikhov	3. None Above the Law

This allowance/optional claiming turf marathon includes several on the downslope of their career. But not **PATH TO POWER**, a lightly raced 3yo maiden winner who just might post an upset. 'POWER was gelded prior to his maiden win, and returned as an improved horse. He circled the field and won going away like a horse that will relish the additional quarter-mile of this mile and three-eighths race. The only 3yo in the field, 'POWER is less accomplished than most of his rivals, but this is only his fourth start. He has plenty upside, and with another forward move can upset millionaire stablemate **BALNIKHOV**. The latter is proven at this distance, a four-time stakes winner, the "class" of the field, and dropping in for the $50k claim price. His best race would be fast enough, but at age 7 he seems to be tailing off. Second preference, nonetheless. **NONE ABOVE THE LAW** is an 8yo pro in peak form, third by a head last out in a Cal-bred stakes race. BALLADEER could be loose on the lead, but that hardly matters in Del Mar summer-meet turf marathons. Since 2020, there have been 35 races run at this mile and three-eighths turf distance during summer meets. Only one was won by the pacesetter.

Third Race

1. Cherry Cider	2. First Or Last	3. Street Swindler

Maiden filly **CHERRY CIDER** looks like the speed of the field, making her first start in eight months with a series of fast workouts. She ran well over the DMR main track last summer as a 2yo, and can lead gate to wire if she shakes away from **FIRST OR LAST**. The latter finished second in her local debut in a fast maiden turf sprint. The winner Little Opal was scheduled to start as a contender Friday in race 4. A good effort by Little Opal would flatter FIRST OR LAST, who at very least will keep the top choice honest. 'LAST is trained by Doug O'Neill, who entered closing week having started more horses (101) and having won more races (24) than any trainer at the meet. Second-time starter **STREET SWINDLER** looms the upset candidate. She chased and tired in her debut at six and one-half furlongs; she benefits by the shorter distance of this six-furlong race, and is likely to move up second time out even though she drew the rail. CONVO finished a creditable third in her comeback, and is likely to improve second start back.

Fourth Race

1. On the Whim	2. El Rey Rey	3. Lyle The Crocodile

ON THE WHIM, a multiple stakes-winning Cal-bred, is still eligible to the first allowance condition. He won the Cal Dreamin Stakes last month setting the pace, and gets another advantageous pace scenario. Other than the stretch-out sprinter on the rail, this field does not include much speed. 'WHIM is two-for-four over the DMR turf, and the choice to win again setting or pressing the pace. **EL REY REY** ran better than the line looks last out. He rallied to second in a race that was otherwise dominated by front-runners who finished first and third. The challenge for 'REY REY is to hold form in his third start of the summer meet. **LYLE THE CROCODILE** exits the same race; he split the field while making his first start in six months. He is likely to improve second start back. SHAMROCK GLITTER is the aforementioned sprinter expected to set the pace in his first start since June and first since being gelded. Come and catch him.

Fifth Race

1. Another Warrior	2. Character	3. Liberty N Justice

In an apparently wide-open field of 2yo maidens purchased or offered at auction for $150k or less, the call is also-eligible **ANOTHER WARRIOR**. He disappointed in his debut when he chased the fast pace and cracked. But second-start maidens trained by Peter Miller frequently improve, the colt worked well since raced, and meet-leading jockey Joel Rosario rides him back. Miller also entered first-time starter **CHARACTER**, who appears to have trained well and lands second-leading rider Juan Hernandez. Miller and Hernandez typically combine to win at a high percent (24 percent, past five years). But when they team on first-time starters, they are 1-for-25 the past five years. Despite statistical prattle, CHARACTER looks "live" first out. **LIBERTY N JUSTICE**, a filly facing colts, chased and faded in her debut. She can improve. DOUBLE D LITE is a filly making her debut for trainer Mike Puype and jockey Mike Smith. In March 2023, Puype and Smith teamed to win first out with DOUBLE D LITTE's sibling Delitefull Hart.

Sixth Race

1. Zakiel	2. Strike It Solo	3. Mickey

ZAKIEL figures to win this Cal-bred maiden sprint. Third with a wide trip in his sprint debut, he then stretched to a mile and finished second in a relatively strong race. The winner returned to finish third in an allowance; the third-place finisher won a maiden sprint next out. ZAKIEL adds blinkers, shortens back to one turn, and switches riders to Hernandez. **STRIKE IT SOLO** finished a promising second in his debut in a Cal-bred maiden-50. He optimistically moves up slightly to Cal-bred MSW, and benefits by the extra furlong of this six and one-half furlong race. **MICKEY** is a three-start maiden with no early speed, but he does finish. Look for him late.

Seventh Race

1. Shadow Nation	2. Hoaxer	3. Golden Sentry

SHADOW NATION, runaway debut turf-sprint winner in May, is ready to stretch to a mile on turf for his second career start in the G3 Del Mar Juvenile Turf. A well-bred colt who looks and acts like an older horse, 'NATION is bred for two turns, and trains as if he will relish the mile trip. This race has been his target since his debut romp by six+ lengths. Although he missed two works last month after being cast in his stall, he resumed his pattern in mid-August and has three sharp recent drills. He is ready to fire. **HOAXER** wheels back nine days after an impressive third-place debut racing five furlongs on turf. He broke slowly and was far back, weaved through traffic on the turn, finished fast and galloped out super past the wire. Sharp debut, bred to run long, and his late kick suggests this mile trip will be better yet. **GOLDEN SENTRY** dusted Cal-bred turf-sprint maidens first out, and should handle a mile. Midwest shipper OBSERVED has something the top three lack. That is, experience around two turns. OBSERVED won his debut racing two turns at Indiana Grand; the race was flattered when the runner-up returned to win his next start by more than six. OFF IN THE CORNER also stretches out from a sharp debut sprint win. All in all, this looks like a deep field. FWIW, favorites are 4-for-14 in this stakes race since its inaugural running in 2012.

Eighth Race

1. Magnificat	2. Howin	3. Our Moonlight

MAGNIFICAT, a stakes-winning sprinter and G2 sprint runner-up last out, stretches to two turns for the first time in the Tranquility Lake Stakes. The filly's pedigree is fine for a route; she is by Omaha Beach and produced by a mare won multiple graded routes. The most recent start for MAGNIFCAT was a runner-up finish behind subsequent graded stakes winner Sweet Azteca; third-place finisher Nooni won an allowance at Ellis Park next out. **HOWIN** is a multiple graded stakes-placed comebacker making her first start since last fall. Sired by Gun Runner, she has every right to return as an improved filly late in her 4yo season. She should be dead fit based on her workout pattern that began in early June. She has not skipped a beat. Proven fresh, HOWIN is likely to fire first start back. **OUR MOONLIGHT** moves up in class after a confidence-building N1X win in late June. MI CONFESION looms a live longshot, switching to dirt for the first time in the U.S. She was a G1 winner on dirt in Argentina. FWIW, favorites are 5-for-17 in this stakes race since 2010.

Ninth Race

1. Dash	2. Vendetta	3. Graduation Day

DASH is ready to stretch out and win, though this is already her third start this meet. Her fourth-place debut was outstanding (broke slow, finished well). Her next start was not great: distant fourth in the G3 Sorrento. DASH drops back into a maiden race, and based on her pedigree, this mile distance and switch to turf helps. She is a sibling to 2025 Del Mar Oaks (turf) winner Velocity. Also-eligible **VENDETTA** was not disgraced in her debut, fourth with traffic issues. A Curlin filly produced by G1 turf winner Avenge, VENDETTA figures as a contender second time out despite her outside post. **GRADUATION DAY** is a Curlin first-time starter who appears to have worked well.

Tenth Race

1. Miss Monica	2. Holmby	3. Dear Diary

MISS MONICA, the fastest 2yo filly in California based on her 87-Beyer debut, is the choice in the G1 Del Mar Debutante. She won first out by more than five lengths, trained well since, and is drawn outside (post 9 of 10) where she has the option of pressing/stalking, or going on with it. Her trainer Bob Baffert has won this race 12 times; he also starts G3 winner **HOLMBY**. The latter is making her third start of the meet after a facile maiden win and game victory in the Sorrento Stakes over talented Midwest-based Ruiva. HOLMBY and her stablemate MISS MONICA both posted strong solo workouts here last weekend. Baffert one-two? **DEAR DIARY** is a maiden whose runner-up debut was a lot better than the finish position or low figure. She brushed the side of the gate to be away slowly, rallied inside though the turn, finished well and galloped out in front. Promising debut, and she reportedly has done well physically since that race two weeks ago. In a sprint that looks to have plenty of speed, DEAR DIARY has an upset chance. Second-start maidens won this stakes in 2016 (Union Strike) and 2019 (Bast). FREE CLOSER, runaway winner of the CTBA Stakes vs. Cal-bred fillies, will roll from behind. Debut runner-up WELL VERSED ran well in her debut, runner-up to top choice MISS MONICA.

Eleventh Race

1. Jaguar Jon	**2. King's Ride**	**3. Owl**

In an apparently wide-open turf sprint for Cal-breds, last-out runner-up **JAGUAR JON** is the tepid choice to win from slightly off the pace. The consistent gelding finished one-two his last five starts; his ability to rally from behind should serve him well in a race s likely to unfold at a fast tempo. **KING'S RIDE** had a compromising trip when unplaced in a dirt sprint stakes for Cal-bred 3yos. 'RIDE was blocked on the turn, lost position, then lost interest. His dirt races in spring put him in the hunt, and as a Clubhouse Ride full sibling to multi-surface stakes winner Brickyard Ride, KING'S RIDE should handle turf. Lightly raced **OWL** has improved each subsequent start including a closing fourth last out in his first start over the DMR turf sprint course. OWL gets a rider switch to Rosario; the race could unfold in favor of his off-the-pace style. COURTSIDE ACTION had no shot after breaking from the rail in the Real Good Deal; his runaway maiden dirt win two back gives him a look. The truth is, this race is wide open.