

Featured Contest Race Analysis

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Race 8

It's Tom Proctor's world, we just live in it. Big day yesterday for Glen Hill Farm and Proctor (two class acts), when they took the undercard stakes, the Jimmy Durante (G3), with a big price, and then followed that up with a huge win in the Hollywood Derby (G1) with Chiropractor at 14/1. I was on my way to play Chiropractor after seeing him in the paddock, but I got waylaid talking to some friends and got shut out for the contest. Good thing I'm hopelessly far behind because he paid \$30.80/\$18.00/\$6.00. Here is what I said about him: *"VERDICT: I've always liked this guy based on the way he kicks home, but he'll have to prove he can show the same oomph against stakes-company. If he's double-digit odds, though, I might be inclined to take a shot."*

Today's closing day contest race is R8, the prestigious \$300K Matriarch (G1), a one-mile turf affair for classy fillies and mares—and this year's running was oversubscribed, with 15 entrants filling the entry box.

#1 HARD NOT TO LIKE (9/2) is a multiple Grade One winner, who has taken her game cross-country to much success. You can toss her last, a flop as the 8/5 chalk in the Rodeo Drive (G1) at Santa Anita, because she wants no part of 1-1/4 miles. On the other hand, perhaps 8-furlongs is too short for a gal who has done her best work at the middle distances. Johnny V makes the trip from the East Coast. *VERDICT: She's a cool and classy lady, but I want to stick with the one-mile specialists in this deep race, but I can't fault anyone for playing her.*

#2 CHATI'S ON TOP (20/1) is a Cal-bred who has a decent late kick, something she'll need to showcase against these extremely tough ladies. She's never been out of the money at this distance in six tries, which certainly helps her case, but she's also never faced this level of competition. Her claim to fame is winning the Solana Beach Handicap over the summer against fellow state-breds. *VERDICT: She's a very honest gal who tries her best, but she's facing some world-class runners today—and even though she's got a decent late kick, I just can't see her outkicking the best in here.*

#3 RECEPTA (8/1) ran two corks before the wheels fell off in the Breeders' Cup Mile (G1)—but in fairness to her, that was an impossible spot against some extremely tough customers, and she was 49/1. She is a Grade Three winner, but her three tries against Grade One foes haven't been pretty. Johnny V sticks with the rail horse, so Elvis Trujillo (welcome back!) takes the mount, and he's won on her before. *VERDICT: She's definitely a tryer, and I've always liked her competitiveness, but this is a very tough spot for a gal who barely raised a gallop in her last race. That said, her best races make her a threat.*

#4 PRIZE EXHIBIT (GB) (15/1) is a 3-year-old who has an excellent record going one-mile on the lawn. In fact, her two best races in the States came at today's distance when she captured a Grade 2 at Del Mar and a Grade 3 at Santa Anita. Granted, those were against her own generation, while today, she has to face elders. But check out her Yellow Ribbon (G2), where she had the lead in the lane before getting edged late by one of today's older foes. That race was at 8.5-furlongs, so a return to her favorite distance makes her interesting at a price here. *VERDICT: She's a slight cut below the top older ladies in here, but she is a 3-year-old who has run some very sharp races and still might have some improving to do. She also loves the distance and has been freshened a bit for this race.*

#5 CURLIN'S FOX (15/1) has good tactical speed, so she'll be forwardly placed, and she is coming off a layoff, which is when she does her best work. That said, she is a 3-year-old facing older stakes-company for the first time. But more important, Mike Smith, who has ridden her every single time, bails. *VERDICT: Her wire-to-wire victory in the Sandy Blue here this summer was very impressive, but she only had to beat four other girls that day. I expect Victor to be aggressive and hope for the best—but she'll have plenty of classy gals taking dead aim at her turning for home.*

#6 CROWLEY'S LAW (GB) (6/1) had a modest UK career before coming to America, where it took her three tries to get a win, which came in an overnight-stakes at Woodbine—going a one-turn mile on good ground. In her first U.S. start, she lost to Recepta but finished very strongly. After that, she ran respectably in the First Lady (G1) at Keeneland. All three of those starts came for Thomas Dascombe, but now she's trained by Peter Miller, who has been known to get the most out of new runners. *VERDICT: She can certainly turn the tables on Recepta today, making her first start for a new barn, but will that be enough? Bejarano rides, if that helps your decision.*

#7 GENDER AGENDA (GB) (15/1) is a one-mile specialist, but she's yet to beat graded-stakes runners, including losses to her arch-nemesis Queen of The Sand (Ire). She has tactical speed, so she'll get a very good trip, but she always seems to get overtaken late when facing better company. *VERDICT: She's another cool, honest lady, but she's going to need the race of her life to fend off some classy ladies late.*

#8 STELLAR PATH (FR) (8/1) was very sharp when capturing the Athenia (G3) at Belmont more than a month ago, and I'm sure that effort made the connections want to try this spot today. Since immigrating to the U.S. from Europe, she's never run a bad race, so what you see is what you get, but that also means she's going to need a new best to get the money today. But considering the fact that she closed strongly into a paceless race last time, perhaps she's really starting to come into her own. *VERDICT: She's always in the hunt late, and if she can somehow improve off her last race, she could definitely be in the frame. But do note that Rosario bails.*

#9 FILIMBI (7/2) is one classy lady who already showed she can ship west and win a tough race, which she did last November at Santa Anita, capturing the Goldikova (G2) at today's distance. And speaking of distance, this gal is a one-mile specialist who gave Breeders' Cup Mile (G1) winner Tepin all she could handle two back in the Just A Game (G1). After that, she prepped in an allowance at Belmont, setting her up for a big race today. When Bill Mott has a target, look out. *VERDICT: Don't get me wrong, this is a competitive group, but I think this gal is just better than these and the one to beat today.*

#10 STORMY LUCY (20/1) is such a cool gal—she's a 6-year-old mare who has won almost \$600K while butting heads with some of the toughest girls in racing. That said, at this point in her career, she's more of a minor check earner than a lady who is likely to win. She's been handled by a few of these recently, and her 0-for-5 record over this course doesn't inspire confidence, especially since C-Nak rides a lesser contender. *VERDICT: She tries hard and always puts forth a good effort, but at this point in her career, she's a better exotics play than a win candidate.*

#11 OLORDA (GER) (8/1) had decent European form (wearing blinkers) before she came to the States, eventually joining the Chad Brown barn. In her first start for Brown, he removed the hood, and she got off to a slow start before running on late to finish fourth in the prestigious age-restricted QEII (G1) at Keeneland. The blinks go back on today, and she cuts back in distance. *VERDICT: This 3-year-old will have to prove she can hang with elders today, but Rosario ends up here instead of on Stellar Path (Fr), who he just won with, so that's got to count for something, right?*

#12 QUEEN OF THE SAND (IRE) (15/1) has never been off-the-board going 8-furlongs on the turf—that's pretty impressive considering the company she keeps. She's also done good work here at Del Mar. Her recent second in the Goldikova (G2) was actually a really good race, since she closed resolutely despite a glacial pace set by the loose-on-the-lead winner. *VERDICT: Mike Smith sticks with another logical contender, which is kind of annoying, because I always consider this classy lady a contender since she knows how to finish races.*

#13 BARUTA (BRZ) (20/1) is trained by Mandella, so you have to look at her, but she also looks a bit outclassed against this bunch, considering her best work has come sprinting. Her recent victory in a Grade Three over the downhill course was very sharp, but she's going to have to use her early speed to get a good position—which means she's going to have a very hard time fending off the cavalry charge late. *VERDICT: She's a cool gal who has acted on all surfaces and at all distances, but it's a long way from winning a Grade 3 downhill race to winning a Grade One going two-turns.*

#14 SHE'S NOT HERE (15/1) is a perfect 2-for-2 at Del Mar, with Mike Smith winning both of those races, including a victory in the Yellow Ribbon (G2) against a few of today's foes. You can toss her flop in the First Lady (G1) when Smith never gave her a fighting chance, as she was way out the back off a glacial pace, and then she was hooked 7-wide. She's better than that effort. The problem is, she's got a brutal post here, so Smith will have to drop her out the back again and hope for the best. *VERDICT: She's definitely a contender based on her Del Mar form and the fact that Smith sticks around, but she's going to need a lot of racing luck for her to get it done today. But at the right price, she's definitely intriguing.*

#15 ALEXIS TANGIER (15/1) (AE), the second Mandella runner, just won a restricted-stakes in preparation for this—and she'll need to move way forward to have a say today. She tried Grade Two foes back in June, and she ran a creditable fourth, but she was handled by a few others. She's also at the mercy of a bad post if she gets in, since she has tactical speed and is likely to either waste some of her energy early or get forced wide. *VERDICT: She's a decent runner, but she's going to need the race of her life to beat some legitimate graded-stakes foes today.*

CONCLUSION

On closing day of the contest, it's not who you *like* but who you *need*! Based on the morning-lines, I'll be looking at #4 PRIZE EXHIBIT (GB) and #12 QUEEN OF THE SAND (IRE).