DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
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Date: 11/18/2017
Race 8: $80K optional-claiming/N1X for 3-year-olds only contested at 8-furlongs on turf.
Post: 4:00 pm PST

OVERVIEW
We've got a nice $80K optional-claimer/N1X for 3-year-olds *only* going 8-furlongs on the lawn. The rails are at 18-feet, but there should be a decent enough clip to make this a fairly run race.

#1 THORPE D'ORO (20/1), the first O'Neill entrant, hopped on turf for the first time and responded with a maiden-breaking victory while going 6.5-furlongs down the hill. Before that, he had run hot and cold on the main track—but one thing he always showed was sharp early speed, so expect Maldonado to gun hard and hope for the best. The rail setting will help this full brother to Plum Pretty, but others should push the pace, meaning he'll need to show he can be competitive late. GRADE: X.

#2 FARLEY (20/1), the second O'Neill runner, should get a good tracking trip behind his speedy stablemate—though he hasn't been seen since May, so he'll need to show the requisite stamina to win off the bench. And since his only victory came going down the hill, that might be tricky for him. That said, he does have some decent route races on his form, and O'Neill thought enough of him to try him in stakes races at one point. I'm okay watching one, however. GRADE: X.

#3 FLY TO MARS (6/1) has sprint speed, so that should ensure a quick pace, especially with Maldonado having to go with the rail horse. The 5-pound weight-break with Roman should help carry this guy's speed longer than expected, but he's never been around two turns, and he's likely to be overbet due to the gaudy 40% strike-rate that trainer Peter Miller brings to the table. Also note that this Cal-bred faces a stern class test today as well. I see him more for underneath. GRADE: C.

#4 RADIO SILENCE (5/2) was 15/10 in his U.S. debut, but he ran into some traffic trouble in the lane and was unable to kick on while facing older foes. He now gets to race against his fellow sophomores while making the second start of his form cycle—and Baltas is solid second off the bench. Prat ends up elsewhere, but you get C-Nak instead, so that's not an issue. I like the two turf works over this course, and I have to think this guy will be ready to fire a big shot today (so long as he doesn't Euro-bounce). GRADE: A.

#5 SOUTH AMERICAIN (15/1) won two races in a row against much weaker company before switching to the Sadler barn, which promptly protected him and tried him against older allowance foes. That didn't work out so well—so he now runs for the $80K tag while facing fellow sophomores. Others are more appealing. GRADE: X.

#6 MIDNIGHT PLEASURE (6/1) has only routed on turf once, and that was an even effort back in June while going today's distance. His best work has come sprinting on dirt, where he's shown a decent kick, so I almost wonder if this is a set up for a cutback move at some point, since his one turf try was really

nothing to write home about. Also note that he's had plenty of chances to clear this N1X hurdle after trying to compete with stakes company. I think this guy has some ability, but he really hasn't been able to put it all together. GRADE: C.

#7 BUCKYS PICK (15/1) has been on or near the lead in all of his turf routes, and that strategy hasn't worked, so we'll see if new rider Talamo (who takes over for Roman) can get this guy to settle with the removal of blinkers (though he has raced without them before). He's been working well according to **OptixWORKS**, but the pace should be quick, so even if Talamo can get this guy to stalk instead of getting caught up in a duel, he'll still need to show the requisite stamina to get the job done today. GRADE: C.

#8 HOOTIE (7/2) looks to be sitting on a big effort, finally able to string two races together after a spotty campaign. Most importantly, he gets a massive jock upgrade to Prat, who takes over for Espinoza, who really hasn't been able to give this guy a good ride (last time, he couldn't get him to settle, while two back, he had him parked ridiculously wide when losing to Buckys Pick). He seems like a very good alternative to the top-two logical choices. GRADE: A.

#9 HARBOUR MASTER (GB) (3/1) is definitely the horse to beat by dint of his good work against tougher company (including a second-place finish in the restricted Let It Ride and a nice fourth against older foes). Four back, he just missed at a similar level here over the summer, getting edged by a next-out winner. The form is too sharp to ignore, but I'd be shocked if you got 3/1 on this guy. GRADE: A.

CONCLUSION
I can't imagine that #9 HARBOUR MASTER (GB) will be anywhere near 3/1, so that means **#8 HOOTIE** could sneak away at an even better price than his morning-line of 7/2—and that makes him a decent contest play to me.