

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 12/2/2018

Race 7: \$300K Matriarch (G1), a one-mile turf affair for fillies and mares

Post: 3:30 PT

OVERVIEW

We close out the meeting with a phenomenal renewal of the \$300K Matriarch (G1), a one-mile turf affair for fillies and mares. An astonishing 14 ladies have shown up for this event, including several out-of-towners, highlighted by Chad Brown's triumvirate, all of whom could win this race. Let's dig in and see what we can suss out—but here's a quick reminder: there's also another contest race today, Race 5, a competitive one mile starter-allowance for older horses (I like #5 East Rand for what it's worth).\

#1 EXCELLENT SUNSET (IRE) (30/1) crossed the wire first in the Kathryn Crosby going a mile here at Del Mar, but she was questionably disqualified when Gutierrez couldn't keep a straight path, thereby interfering with the runner-up. Not surprisingly, Gutierrez gets booted for Bejarano, so we'll see if he can do better with a gal who is a neck and a DQ away from being undefeated in North America. She's a lightly raced 4-year-old with plenty of upside, but this is by far the toughest field she's had to face, so a big move forward is needed. GRADE: X.

#2 VALADORNA (15/1) has been dominant on dirt, but she's winless in two turf tries, including defeats to a few of these. Her tactical speed means she'll get a forwardly placed trip, and seeing Mike Smith take the call in a big race is always something to notice, but this race is filled with proven turf milers, so this one will need to summon a career best to get the nod today. GRADE: X.

#3 FAHAN MURA (12/1) has sharp early speed, so she'll ensure a quick clip, throwing down the gauntlet and challenging them all to come and catch her—just like she did in the previous graded-stakes she's run in. The problem is: someone has come and caught her, particularly, Vasilika, whom she has to face again today, not to mention a bunch of other talented ladies. She'll look good around the turn but expect a cavalry charge to run her down. GRADE: X.

#4 MOPOTISM (20/1), the first O'Neill trainee, has one race on the turf, and it was a poor effort in the Gamely (G1), where she stalked and weakened. Her dirt form is solid, but this isn't a dirt race, so she seems in very deep today. GRADE: X.

#5 QUIDURA (GB) (8/1), the first of three Chad Brown runners, should help ensure an honest pace, since she likes to do her running in the vanguard. Two back, she was very sharp when wiring the field in the Ballston Spa (G2), but last time, she stalked the pace and failed to kick on in the First Lady (G1), losing to a few of today's foes. Maybe she didn't like the "good" Keeneland course, however, so it's quite possible she can bounce back today with a good effort. At least you know she'll be in the vanguard early if you think she can finish strongly enough to fend off her late-charging stablemates. GRADE: B.

#6 MS BAD BEHAVIOR (20/1), the first Baltas trainee, is another one who likes to be forwardly placed, so she should get a clean trip, but there is other speed in here, and her stretch runs haven't been good enough against graded-stakes company. She's a cool horse who tries every time, but someone better always seems to get the measure of her. GRADE: X.

#7 DADDY IS A LEGEND (20/1) won the Jimmy Durante (G3) here last year, so you know she can handle the course even though she's been racing back East all of this year. Her East Coast form is pretty solid, and you can draw a line through her last race, where she was in a tight spot and hit the rail in what was surely a prep race for this. I expect her to run well today, but she is a 3-year-old facing elders for the first time, so she'll need a career best to beat some more seasoned ladies. GRADE: B.

#8 INSTA ERMA (12/1), the second Baltas runner, is capable of a big race every now and again, like she proved at Kentucky Downs when she won the Ladies Turf (G3) two back. Last time, she ran evenly in the First Lady (G1), never really being able to recover from a horrible start. I can be forgiving of that race, and I do like that she should get a good tracking trip, but she just feels like more of an underneath horse to me. GRADE: B.

#9 VASILIKA (7/2) is such a cool lady, reeling off eight wins in a row since Hollendorfer claimed her for \$40K back in February. He's handled her deftly, moving her through the ranks with an expert's touch—but three back, he finally tested stakes foes, and she responded in kind, winning the Mabee (G2) before then going on to win two more graded-stakes races, including a Grade 1. I can't knock a filly who has a remarkable will to win, but she's been beating up on SoCal turf horses, while today, she faces the toughest test of her life. I have no doubt she'll try her heart out, but I wonder if she's in quite the same class as some of the invaders. GRADE: B.

#10 MISSION IMPASSIBLE (IRE) (5/1) came off the boat and ran a creditable second in the QE II (G1) at Keeneland. She made a late bid but couldn't quite get to a very nice Chad Brown runner named Rushing Fall. Unfortunately, she has to face three Chad Brown runners today, all while having to worry about the dreaded Euro bounce—but she definitely fits with these, and she should be fit cutting back from that 9-furlong Keeneland race. If you look at her Euro form, you'll see that she likes this mile distance, so she's worth a punt at a square price, even though she is a 3-year-old facing elders today. GRADE: B.

#11 LUMINOSO (30/1), the second O'Neill charge, has done honest work in the allowance ranks here in SoCal, but the waters get much deeper for a 3-year-old who just cleared her N1X hurdle. GRADE: X.

#12 DONA BRUJA (ARG) (8/1) is a beast of a gal, reeling off 11 wins and four seconds in 18 career starts. In other words, she's a machine. She just missed by a head in the First Lady (G1), and I can make excuses for her two poor races before that (last time, she had a tough trip, while before that, she uncharacteristically weakened after setting the pace). She should get a good tracking trip in here, and her jock knows her well enough to give her a good ride despite the tough post. GRADE: B.

#13 UNI (GB) (9/2), the second Chad Brown, is tactical, so Rosario should have some options from this very difficult post. She's won three in a row against lesser foes, so she gets a class test today, but she's a lightly raced 4-year-old who still has plenty of upside. Unfortunately, because of her tactical style, she's going to be wide at some point throughout the race, and that will certainly compromise her chances—but no doubt there is talent on display here. GRADE: B.

#14 RYMSKA (FR) (5/1) is my top pick, but I'd like her so much more if she had a better post. She does face a class test today after facing lesser foes throughout her career, but it really looks like Brown has been pointing to this race with a very nice prep in the Athenia (G3), where she won easily in hand. Irad Ortiz will have to work his magic from this awful post, but it really does look like this talented gal is sitting on a peak effort, and she certainly looks like she's ready to tackle Grade 1 foes today. GRADE: A.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned, **#14 RYMSKA (FR)** is my top pick, but the post is terrible, so I want to make sure I'm getting compensated with a good price. If she's less than 5/1, I'll look elsewhere, and believe me, there are plenty of other places to land in this super-competitive race. Good luck to all, and thanks for reading and following along. See you in the summer!

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