DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 7/11/20
Race 8: $65K Wickerr Stakes contested at 8-furlongs on the turf (rails at 12-feet)
Post: approx. post 5:37 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

Yesterday we had a fine one-mile turf stakes race for 3-year-olds; today, we've got a fine one-mile turf stakes race for older horses in the $65K Wickerr (which is restricted to non-winners of a sweepstakes of $50K other than state-bred at one mile or over since September 1, 2019). The rails are at 12-feet, and there should be a fair amount of early pace on, so I'll be looking for the stretch runners to make some noise.

#1 KIWI'S DREAM (AUS) (3/1) has been on the lead in his three most recent route races, so I have to think that Hernandez is going to gun hard to keep good inside position for the first part of the race. The problem is: there is other speed in here, so I'm having a hard time seeing this guy wire the field. On the plus side, he is just a head away from being a Grade 3 winner after losing a heartbreaker in the San Francisco (G3) up north at Golden Gate in his last start. He's in terrific form, but the race shape doesn't favor him, and I'm not crazy about him at this morning-line. GRADE: C.

#2 NEW YEAR (20/1) invades from Florida, where he showed decent form against much weaker claiming company. This seems like an ambitious spot for this guy, though it wouldn't be the first time we saw a mediocre-looking East Coast turf horse step up and run big out West. Still, I have to watch one here. GRADE: X.

#3 JASIKAN (IRE) (8/1) scratched out of the American (G3) to run in this softer spot—and that's not a bad thing, since he is coming off a near-year layoff. Before he had to hit the shelf, this guy was very impressive when winning the Oceanside here last year, showing a powerful stretch run. As a lightly raced 4-year-old, he has plenty of room for improvement, and I can see him being a force the rest of the year—but will he be ready to fire his best shot off such a long layoff? If he does, look out. (Note: trainer John Sadler is currently serving a suspension, so his horses are running under assistant Juan Leyva's name). GRADE: A.

#4 VOODOO SONG (4/1) should make things difficult for the rail horse, since his best work has always come from rolling along on the front end. He has East Coast races from back in the day that would make him very tough today, but his SoCal form is less desirable with two blah races, including a speed-and-fade job in the Shoemaker (G1). That said, this isn't a Grade 1, and he finally gets to string races together for the first time in a long time. It wouldn't shock me if he showed up with a solid race, but he'll have to earn a victory with the anticipated quick early pace. GRADE: C.

#5 BOB AND JACKIE (8/1) has ability, but he's also a bit fragile, making just his sixth career start as he kicks off his 4-year-old campaign. He was last seen running half a race (albeit from a very tough post) in the Mathis Brothers Mile (G2) at Santa Anita way back in December. That said, he can fire fresh, and Baltas is terrific with bringing them back ready to run. He should also trip out, since he has tactical speed

but doesn't really need the lead. My concern is that he's going to be too close to a hot pace, even if he is just stalking the frontrunners. GRADE: C.

#6 BOLO (5/1) is one of the grandest looking horses on the grounds, but this old boy hasn't really been able to put things together recently, failing in his subsequent three races after winning the Shoemaker Mile (G1) way back in May 2019. When he's in form, he has sharp early speed but can also stalk the pace while sustaining his run—but he's an 8-year-old who is in the twilight of his career right now, so who knows what's left in the tank. Believers will point to the class-relief he gets today, but Van Dyke doesn't bother to stick around, and that's telling since this is a former Grade 1 winner who has had a really solid career (with close to a million bucks in the bank!). His best races are good enough, but can he run his best race today? GRADE: X.

#7 SOUTER (GB) (12/1) is a little sneaky in here, since he's always shown a decent late run—and with an anticipated quick early pace, he should get something to close into. I also like that he outran his 72/1 odds last time when finishing third in the American (G3) despite having to eat into the lead of a lone-frontrunner (in a race that was supposed to have more early speed). Note that he ran an okay fourth in this race last year, and it seems to me that Glatt might have had this race as a target for this guy second off the bench. He's not flashy, but he'll put in a decent effort. Will it be good enough? We shall see—but the price is too good to pass up in a race where the flashier types look headed the wrong way or are pointing to the Del Mar Mile (G2) in a few weeks. GRADE: A.

#8 MURAD KHAN (FR) (12/1) is a pretty honest racehorse who has won sprinting and routing, on synth and on turf. His recent graded-stakes form isn't anything special, but he's versatile and should get a very good tracking trip in here if Espinoza can angle over and find the two-path into that first turn. That said, there is a chance this one gets hooked wide while stalking the pace (if Espinoza doesn't want to be behind horses), and if that's the case, the stretch run will prove tricky for him. He's not impossible here, since he likes this course and loves this distance, but I prefer others a lot more. GRADE: C.

#9 BIG SCORE (7/2) is the strongest finisher in the field, so he must be considered if that anticipated hot pace develops—but he's coming off an October layoff, and I have to think he has bigger fish to fry, since he's been competitive in graded-stakes races before. Also, the post is no picnic, so Cedillo will just have to angle over unhurried, anchor out the back, and then look to produce this guy's strong stretch run. He has ability and can certainly win on back-class alone, but what if this is just a prep for the Del Mar Mile (G2)? At his likely short price, let's try to beat him for the money. GRADE: B.

CONCLUSION
I think the top two choices are a bit vulnerable in here, so I'm perfectly happy using **#3 JASIKAN (IRE)** and **#7 SOUTER (GB)**. The former certainly has more ability, but the latter looks primed for a peak effort. I might double win-bet if the morning-lines hold; if not, I'll win-bet the bigger price and also play some exactas with both of these and the logical runners.

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