

DEL MAR FEATURE RACE OF THE DAY

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Race 10: \$125K La Jolla (G3) for 3yos only going 8.5-furlongs on turf (rails at 12-ft.)

Post: approx. post 6:30 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

The always interesting 3-year-old turf series continues with today's featured event, the \$125K La Jolla Handicap (G3), an 8.5-furlong turf affair with the rails at 12-feet. It's the second leg of the three-part turf series for sophomores, and it features the second- and third-place finishers of the Oceanside from opening day (as well as a few others from that race). Will one of those be bathed in glory or will a new face upset the apple cart?

#1 I'M LEAVING YOU (15/1) was 79/1 in the Oceanside, and he checked in fifth, which wasn't a terrible effort when you consider the fact that it was his first try versus winners. His come-home times have always been respectable, but it should be noted that he needed \$62.5K maiden-claimers to graduate, so he'll have to show he belongs with graded-stakes company. Yes, he wasn't disgraced in the Oceanside (and he had a slightly troubled trip), but he will need to do a lot better against the foes who just beat him. GRADE: C.

#2 **K P ALL SYSTEMS GO (6/1)** was an "A" for me in the Oceanside (along with the winner, Hit the Road), but he made an early move, took the overland journey, and then failed to make an impact when the real running started. I'm willing to forgive that race and focus on his three prior races, where he showed a very nice turn of foot once Mullins decided to add blinkers. I also think 8.5-furlongs suits this guy really well, so if Cedillo can get him to settle and save ground, he could make amends for that uncharacteristically flat effort. GRADE: A.

#3 AZUL COAST (4/1) has never been on turf, but his two wins came on an off-track and on synth, so there is the possibility that he'll take to the lawn. Two back, he looked good winning the El Camino Real Derby at 9-furlongs at Golden Gate and beating a few of today's foes in the process. You can toss his flop in the Santa Anita Derby (G1) and just focus on his good races prior to that. Still, there are some nice turf animals in here, so unless you think Baffert can make this guy move forward on the switch to the lawn, he's probably looking at a minor award at best. GRADE: C.

#4 AJOURNEYTOFREEDOM (12/1) was 22/1 in the Oceanside, but he outran those odds and finished third—with a troubled trip (wide the whole way and had to wait for room at a critical point in the race). Before that, he showed a nice turn of foot when just missing in the Alcatraz, getting headed by today's foe Kanderel (who also beat him in the Oceanside). The added distance shouldn't be an issue, and I'm sure this guy will run his race—but can he turn the tables on Kanderel today? Why not! GRADE: B.

#5 KANDEREL (10/1) was 17/1 in the Oceanside, and he too outran his odds, finishing a decent second and showing off a nice stretch run—the same stretch run that saw him capture the Alcatraz up north when he headed Ajourneytofreedom. He's always had good come-home times, but it should be noted that K P All Systems Go beat him on the square four starts ago, and Smooth Like Strait whooped him last year in the Cecil B. DeMille (G3). He can certainly turn the tables on those foes today (like he did in the

Oceanside against K P All Systems Go), but he will need a move forward—and it should be noted that he had the best trip in the Oceanside, so the others from that race are not too far off him today. GRADE: B.

#6 SMOOTH LIKE STRAIT (5/2) is coming off a very sharp victory in the War Chant at Churchill, where he attended the pace and won easily. He's always shown good tactical speed, so he'll have the running of the race today unless Storm the Court tries to make things difficult for him. His best races are faster than anyone else's in the field, so he is the horse to beat, but is 8.5-furlongs just a smidge out of his range, since he has a tendency to lose lengths in the lane when racing at a mile? I think we have to take him on for the contest. GRADE: B.

#7 STORM THE COURT (3/1) has very classy dirt form, including a win in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1) last year when he attended the pace and held sway by a head. Turns out that it wasn't the strongest race, and this guy hasn't found the winner's circle since, although he has run respectably against some very nice dirt horses. Eurton will try him on the turf today, so we'll see if he can transfer his dirt form. At 3/1, you can pay to play if you want, but I prefer to watch one, even with Prat sticking around. GRADE: B.

#8 INDIAN PEAK (6/1) looked terrific when winning the Cal-bred Snow Chief at 9-furlongs last time, tracking the pace and finishing nicely to beat six other statebreds. He also has decent form against open-company, and he was only a few lengths off Azul Coast in the El Camino Real Derby back in February (after having some trouble). He typically runs his race, but he will need a step forward to contend for top honors today. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION

This is a good race because the top two choices have some questions surrounding them. I'm going to give **#2 K P ALL SYSTEMS GO** a chance to make amends after his wide journey in the Oceanside—but I also see no reason why **#5 KANDEREL** and **#4 AJOURNEYTOFREEDOM** won't run good races right back. I'll let the board dictate the play, but K P ALL SYSTEMS GO is my top selection on paper.

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