DEL MAR FEATURE RACE OF THE DAY
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Date: 8/14/20
Race 9: $20K Cal-bred optional/claiming/N1X contested at 8.5F on turf (rails at 24-feet)
Post: approx. post 6:09 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've had such good turf racing here at Del Mar this summer, and today's contest race is no different: a solid Cal-bred $20K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 8.5-furlongs on the lawn with the rails at 24-feet. Because of that far-out setting, you don't want to be too far back, but **OptixPLOT** does have a fast SpeedRate of "78," which means there should be a quick early pace, which might perhaps mitigate any disadvantage the off-the-pace runners would have. Let's see what we can come up with…

#1 MAKE IT A TRIPLE (20/1) is a cool old-boy who has been plying his trade—and doing it well—for a very long time while facing off against some decent open-allowance types, so today's class-level isn't an issue for him. What is an issue, however, is that he's spent most of his life as a dirt sprinter, so he'll have to take his show to the lawn—and if past-performance is any indication of his turf ability, he seems like he's in tough, sporting an 0-for-4 turf record. The other issue is his ability to stay two turns, since his last win came going 1,000 yards at Los Al. I expect Maldonado to be aggressive early and hope for the best. I'd look for him next time cutting back to 6.5- or 7-furlongs. GRADE: X.

#2 CALI CALIENTE (12/1) is a lightly raced 4-year-old who makes his first start against winners after just breaking his maiden on opening day at 9/1. I liked him that day, and I was handsomely rewarded, so I have a soft spot for him—plus, I do like to see lightly raced 4-year-olds who have improved in every start, like this guy. It's never easy to face winners for the first time, but I don't mind it so much on turf if a horse has shown an ability to finish strongly—and this guy's sub-23 seconds come-home time in the maiden-breaker was pretty darn good. He will need a step forward to beat the top few in here, but if you're looking for a double-digit contender, you could do a lot worse than him. GRADE: B.

#3 OFFSHORE AFFAIR (7/2) goes two sprints to a route, and that's usually a good angle, but it should be noted that this guy's two previous route races weren't anything special. Back on November 3, 2018, he had the lead late going a mile on turf and got beat, despite getting a 5-pound weight-break that day. He did follow that up with a one-mile win on a wet-fast/sealed dirt track, but he was getting late. It remains to be seen if he'll appreciate today's 8.5-furlong distance while being up on the early pace. He could win, but 7/2 doesn't excite me. GRADE: C.

#4 SEA OF LIBERTY (3/1), the first Sadler entrant, looks pretty solid in here, making the third start of his form cycle and getting a positive jock change after an eventful journey last time while going a mile at this level. He's always posted respectable come-home times, and it looks like today's 8.5-furlongs should be to his liking, since he's always making up ground in the lane. GRADE: A.

#5 MR RIGHT NOW (30/1) was 32/1 when breaking his maiden at first asking at Turf Paradise in a 7.5-furlong turf race. That was a good enough effort for his trainer to ship to California to try him against winners. I admire the sportsmanship, but this guy is a 3-year-old facing elders for the first time while

coming off a February layoff. Plus, the Turf Paradise to Del Mar route is rarely a winning one. GRADE: X.

#6 WHOOPING JAY (5/2) is going to take the lion's share of the action after a very good second in the California Dreamin' last time when going two turns on turf for the first time. As a stretch-out sprinter with speed, it was a surprise when he showed he could relax and produce a strong late run while losing to the heavy favorite that day. A repeat of that performance makes him an easy winner (especially since he's already cleared this condition on dirt), but can he repeat that career-best performance? We shall see—but one thing we know for sure: his price won't do us any favors. GRADE: A.

#7 JETOVATOR (6/1) gets the services of Prat, who has done good work on him before, but this guy's one win came sprinting—and his few two-turn efforts haven't been as good as his sprints. Plus, he likes to settle for the minor awards, sporting an 11: 1-4-4 record. You have to admire his consistency, and he's certainly usable in your exotics, but he'll need to show the eye of the tiger today for the win. That said, it's tough to ignore anything Prat rides, and trainer Eurton came loaded for bear this meet! GRADE: C.

#8 GOLDEN DOUGHNUT (6/1) was 9/2 at this level last time, and he had the lead after an early move but then flattened out to finish fourth. It was an eventful journey as well, so he's capable of doing better today with a better ride/trip. He's also making the third start of his form cycle after coming off a 2017 layoff, so he should be sitting on a peak effort—and the fact that Smith takes the call should not be overlooked. This guy seems like a contender at a fair price. GRADE: B.

#9 BENCH JUDGE (12/1), the second Sadler runner, hasn't been able to string together races, and he's making his first start around two turns, so I have to think this stretch-out sprinter is just going to go from out here and hope for the best. In his two turf sprints, he did show a nice stretch run, but oftentimes, closing sprinters just don't have the same punch while going two turns. It's tough to ignore any Sadler trainee at the moment, but this one will have to show he can fire his best shot while doing something new for the very first time. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION
I think the top-two choices of **#6 WHOOPING JAY** and **#4 SEA OF LIBERTY** are legit, but I would lean toward the latter since he'll be a better price, and I expect him to be finishing strongly with Rispoli. That said, I'm not sure either one will help you that much in the contest, so if you're looking for a price, I'd consider **#2 CALI CALIENTE**, since most folks will just discount him while facing winners for the first time, or **#8 GOLDEN DOUGHNUT**, who should be sitting on a peak effort.

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