DEL MAR FEATURE RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 9/4/20
Race 6: Cal-bred $20K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 6.5-furlongs on main track.
Post: approx. post 4:45 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

It's the start of closing week for what has been a surreal Del Mar meet. It's really been a bummer not being there, but I hope everyone is safe and healthy…and hopefully by this time next year, we'll be able to have some fun in person. Before we get into today's contest race, a competitive Cal-bred $20K optional-claiming/N1X event contested at 6.5-furlongs on the main track, let's go over some housekeeping: while today's first post is the normal 2 p.m., note that Saturday through Monday will have a special 1 p.m. first post—so set your alarms! Okay…let's look at today's contest race.

#1 PRINCIPE CARLO (5/2) is a horse I have often overlooked (much to my detriment!), but he's a pretty honest sort who is capable of running some big races. In fact, he's already won at this level twice, which is why he's in for the $20K tag after a poor effort against much tougher N2X types. Before that flop, he ran second in the Thor's Echo, which makes you wonder why Hanson is willing to lose him for $20K with plenty of Cal-bred stakes races on the schedule. Maybe he thinks no one will bite off that poor last race, but I'd be shocked if someone didn't take this runner today. As for his chances—he has sharp early speed, so he'll have to use it to gain good position from the rail, and I think that will soften him up late, since there should be a fair amount of speed in here with a few of these who like to push the pace. Plus, 5/2 doesn't excite. GRADE: C.

#2 QUICK FINISH (3/1) was a top pick for me last time going 6-furlongs at this level. He had a good outside post, got a good stalking trip, but was unable to get his nose on the wire first, losing a heartbreaker at 6/1. I liked him that day because I thought he'd get the trip he got on a day when the outside lanes were favorable. Del Mar has been a lot more fair lately, and this guy is now drawn inside, so he doesn't have such favorable circumstances today since he likes to be close to the pace. Plus, there is the fact that he's a little camera-shy, so he'll have to summon the necessary oomph today to get the job done. Like Principe Carlo, he could win, but his price (3/1) is no bargain. GRADE: C.

#3 ABUSIVE GARY (10/1) has early speed, so he should be gunning from the bell along with the two inside horses, and that's going to cause a problem for all three of them late. Plus, there is the fact that this guy has done his best work against weaker company. I do like the fact that he has improved in his two starts since Belvoir claimed him for $12.5K, but the waters get deeper today, and the pace scenario really doesn't suit him. GRADE: X.

#4 ROOKIE MISTAKE (4/1) is very interesting to me today, cutting back from a one-mile race, where he had some trouble but still managed to finish third. He'll be super-fit off that race, and I like the fact that he makes up lengths in the lane in his main-track sprint races. Throw in the fact that he already cleared this condition on turf—and that he's a stakes-placed runner—and you're looking at a solid contender. Do note that he is a 3-year-old facing elders, but he did beat elders earlier in the year, so he should be okay today—and the race shape really flatters his tracking run style. GRADE: A.

#5 HANDSOME CAT (12/1) was 7/1 at this level last time while going a mile, and he just ran evenly around the track while racing wide and finishing behind Rookie Mistake. He's another who will be fit on the cut-back, and do note that this is one of Miyadi's signature moves (despite the fact that he's winless so far this meet). Still, this guy is a bit of a grinder who will run his race, and that race hasn't been good enough against similar types. Maybe you can use him underneath though. GRADE: X.

#6 CLAYTON DELANEY (12/1) is a 3-year-old who broke his maiden two back in wire fashion, but in his next start, he chased the pace in the Real Good Deal and weakened badly going 7-furlongs. Maybe the slight cutback will help his cause, but he will have to reverse form over a few who beat him last time, and it remains to be seen if he can rate and then pass horses. On paper, he looks like part of the early pace— and that's going to cause issues for him late. That said, if you're a Tom T. Hall fan, you're guaranteed to have this guy to win! Me, I'm not partial to country music. GRADE: X.

#7 PAS DE PANIQUE (5/1) didn't *panique* in his second career start when he broke his maiden going 4.5-furlongs at Santa Anita last June. Since then, however, he wasn't able to pass horses against Cal-bred stakes foes to finish out his juvenile campaign. He hasn't been seen since November, so it will be interesting to see how much he has matured—and if he's learned to rate. Glatt is really good off layoffs, and Prat takes the call—two interesting things to consider—but 6.5-furlongs is a tricky distance off the bench, so this sophomore will need to be fit to get the win. That said, he draws outside the other speed horses, so he'll get a good in-the-clear trip. Then we'll see if he's good enough. GRADE: B.

#8 LIGHTNING FAST (8/1) isn't really lightning fast, but he's a solid 3-year-old who should run a good race today tracking the pace and waiting to pounce, cutting back from a 7-furlong third-place effort in the Real Good Deal, where he checked in right behind Rookie Mistake with a wide journey. He's not as flashy as Rookie Mistake, but that just means you'll get a better price, and he should have every chance to show if he's good enough given the likely quick early pace. If the outside lanes are good, he's got an outside chance to get the nod at a square price. GRADE: A.

CONCLUSION
It's not often I'm interested in three 3-year-olds against honest older horses, but such is the case in this race, given the likely race shape. **#4 ROOKIE MISTAKE** is my top pick in the race, but we'll see what price he is. **#8 LIGHTNING FAST** should offer very good value, and he's not too far behind the top choice. I kind of want to watch one from **#7 PAS DE PANIQUE**, but he is the X-factor in the race, and you can't ignore that trainer/jock combo.

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