

DEL MAR FEATURE RACE OF THE DAY

By Frank R. Scatoni

On Twitter @ScatoniSureShot

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Race 7: \$150K Golden State Juvenile for Cal-bred 2yos going 7-furlongs on the main track

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OVERVIEW

What a nice assortment of young runners entered in today's \$150K Golden State Juvenile, a 7-furlong main-track affair for Cal-bred/Cal-sired 2-year-olds. A few of these knocked heads over the summer at shorter distances, so it will be interesting to see who has matured enough to navigate today's tricky elongated-sprint journey.

Also, remember to tune in on Sunday mornings at 11:00 a.m. PST for my "Best Bet" seminar, where I go over certain sequences and wagering strategies with a special guest. Last week, Leo Vukmanovich gave out some great price horses who fired big. This week, I've got another value-player scheduled: Ciaran Thornton (@CaliforniaPick4), who contributes to the *San Diego Union-Tribune* handicapping page and the *Los Angeles Times* horseracing newsletter. Be sure to mark your calendars!

#1 ME LIKEY (15/1), the first O'Neill entrant, was 5/2 in his debut, and he didn't disappoint his backers, showing sharp early speed and taking them all the way in a 5.5-furlong turf-sprint at Santa Anita. It was a good effort, but the waters get deeper today for a few reasons: first off, he now has to face winners for the first time; secondly, he has to break from the tricky rail, so he's going to have use up all his speed to gain forward position; thirdly, as a son of Square Eddie, it's no surprise he handled the turf first out, but can he replicate that effort on dirt? We shall see. GRADE: C.

#2 TOUCHDOWN BROWN (7/2) is interesting to me. He was the 15/10 favorite in his debut while being trained by an old-school trainer who hasn't had many precocious horses the last few years, so this guy must have really impressed folks in the mornings. He won like a good thing and was promptly thrown to the wolves in his next start, where he was sent off as the 11/10 favorite in the Graduation. An eventful beginning thwarted his chances and he was nowhere to be found at the wire. He rebounded nicely in the I'm Smokin to run second, but he lost to today's foe Good With People while wearing blinkers for the first time (though he was coming on strong at the wire). Toss his two-turn run in the American Pharoah (G1)—which was probably just a fitness race for this cutback move—and you're looking at a serious contender at 7-furlongs. Becerra re-adds blinkers today after removing them last race. GRADE: A.

#3 FINDING SILVER (20/1) is still a maiden after three tries, and that's a rare thing for a Mendez runner, since that trainer usually has them ready to go right out of the gate. I do like the way he grinded to the wire last time while going 5.5-furlongs despite a very wide journey, so he could certainly improve while getting some added ground today, but he's going to really need to step it up to beat more accomplished foes as a maiden. GRADE: C.

#4 GOOD WITH PEOPLE (5/2) dominated his maiden-breaker, ran a good second in the Graduation (but lost to Positivity), and then wired three other horses in the I'm Smokin as the 4/5 favorite. In other words, his SoCal form is rock solid, so you can forget his flop in the Indian Summer going 5.5-furlongs on turf at

Keeneland against tougher company. He's back where he belongs here in SoCal, and you can expect him to be winging it on the front end today given his sharp natural speed (though he will face some pressure by Ascot Storm). That said, I'm not sure he's going to move forward while going 7-furlongs today, and he's not likely to offer any value. GRADE: B.

#5 TACOFLAVORED KISSES (8/1) was easily handled by two of today's foes two back in the I'm Smokin, so it's no surprise that Callaghan took this guy up north to clear his N1X hurdle going a mile on the synth. That was a good effort, and you have to like the fact that he should be fit off that race while cutting back a furlong today. That said, he seems to run the same race every time, so he's really going to need to show improvement today. GRADE: C.

#6 POSITIVITY (4/1) looked good breaking his maiden and following that up with a solid win in the Graduation at Del Mar, going 5.5-furlongs. He stalked the pace and pounced, beating a few of today's foes. He's since moved from the Mendez barn to the Gallagher barn, so I'm guessing "Winner, Winner, or Winner" paid a steep price for this guy. As much as I like Gallagher as a trainer, however, this really isn't his thing, right? A Cal-bred juvenile sprinter? I also have to wonder just how much Mendez squeezed out of this horse to have him ready for those big efforts, especially since this guy needed time between his races and is now entering this off an August 2 layoff. Look, there is definitely ability here, but don't we want to take this one on? GRADE: B.

#7 PLAY CHICKEN (15/1), the second O'Neill runner, is a son of Square Eddie who broke his maiden at first asking while going a mile on the lawn—not an easy thing to do. Clearly, there is some talent here, but can this guy move to the main track, cut back a furlong, and beat winners for the first time? He should be able to handle the first two tasks, but there are some proven dirt runners in here. GRADE: C.

#8 ASCOT STORM (4/1) was terrific in his debut, breaking from the rail, making the lead, and never looking back against nine other maidens going 5.5-furlongs at Santa Anita. It was a sharp effort, one that prompted a private purchase and barn change from Palma to Sadler, since I'm sure the new connections wanted to see if Sadler could turn this guy into a stakes winner. However, there is one thing to note about that sharp debut: he did make an easy lead on a very speed-favoring track, so we'll see if he can back it up on a fairer surface today. That said, he's in good hands, and Sadler typically does really well with new acquisitions. Plus, he's drawn outside other speed types, so Cedillo will have options. I'd be shocked if this guy were 4/1 in here. GRADE: A.

#9 DOC ADAMS (8/1) has looked good in two races up north on synth, but this is a different ballgame moving to the dirt. I do like that he can track the pace and finish, something that will come in handy going 7-furlongs today, but others have done good enough work on the dirt to make things tough for this grinder. Also note: he added front wraps last time while running second in an N1X after breaking his maiden without them, so check his front feet in the paddock. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION

I'm very curious to see if Sadler can really move up **#8 ASCOT STORM**, but I doubt he'll offer much value, since I highly doubt we'll get anywhere near 4/1 in here. I think **#2 TOUCHDOWN BROWN** should offer decent value despite his 7/2 morning-line. He has ability and could be the forgotten horse based on that terrible (but easily forgivable) running line in the American Pharoah (G1).

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