DEL MAR FEATURE RACE OF THE DAY
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Date: 11/8/20
Race 8: $100K optional-claiming/classified-allowance contested at 6.5-furlongs on dirt
Post: approx. post 4:00 p.m. PST

OVERVIEW

Quick reminder: tune in this Sunday morning 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! It streams on the Del Mar Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube pages, but for more information, click here: https://www.dmtc.com/calendar/detail/bestbet

Now let's get to business! Today's contest race is a very challenging $100K optional-claiming/classified-allowance contested at 6.5-furlongs on the main track. Note that this is basically an N3X, but there is an interesting stipulation that really opens the condition up to a bunch of horses who wouldn't normally be eligible. It reads: "…or for horses who have not won $40,000 since September 1." Several horses get in under that clause. Oh, and I'm also not crazy about the top two choices, so this looks like a wide-open affair!

#1 HE'S THE REASON (15/1) has six wins to his name, but his best work has come up at Hastings, so we'll see how he handles a transition to this circuit. He's versatile, with wins both sprinting and routing, and he has tactical speed, which he'll need to use while breaking from the rail. What I don't like is that he hit the bench in September 2019, came back on July 13, 2020, to run second in an AOC, but then had to hit the bench again. He was entered but scratched from the Longacres Mile (G3), and now he shows up here today. In other words, he clearly has some issues at this point in his career. I'm fine watching one. GRADE: X.

#2 ANYPORTINASTORM (4/1) has eight wins to his name while running mostly in overnight-stakes races up north. He's another one who has shown versatility, acting on all surfaces while being effective at various sprint distances—and part of his success is his sharp early speed. Well, he now adds blinkers while making his first start for Peter Miller, who took over training duties from the very capable Blaine Wright. As good as Wright is, we all know Miller can move up a horse, so this one must be considered a threat in here, especially with Prat taking the call. That said, he has speed, and there is speed to his inside and his outside, so he's going to really have to earn it today. GRADE: A.

#3 P R RADIO STAR (8/1) projects a very good tracking trip, and if he can power home and finish like he did over the summer, he'll have every say in the outcome today. Toss his last race in the Pat O'Brien (G1), where he was completely overmatched, and focus on his two previous Del Mar races, where he was impressive against AOC company (including N2X types). He clearly loves Del Mar with two victories over this surface, and the race shape should flatter his run style. The question is: can this former claimer step up and win an allowance race of this caliber, since he wasn't really beating much over the summer? We shall find out! GRADE: A.

#4 MICRORITHMS (5/2) has 5.5-furlong speed, so you know he'll be pushing Anyportinastorm every step of the way—and that's going to take the starch out of both of them, I would think. Also note that he was offered for the optional tag in his last two allowance-races, so Baffert was willing to lose him. He's protected today, which is a good thing, and you have to like his perfect 2-for-2 record over this track—but can he duel with the deuce and still have something left to fend off some solid stretch runners? And, more importantly, can he carry his speed 6.5-furlongs? At his 5/2 morning-line, he can beat me. GRADE: X.

#5 GRIT AND CURIOSITY (6/1), the second Miller entrant, ran two monster races at Oaklawn Park on the dirt, so it was odd that Miller moved him to the turf when he returned to Southern California. His two turf sprints against decent foes weren't bad at all, but he could only manage third. Will a move to the main track help his cause today? If he runs back to those Oaklawn races, he could easily have a say in the outcome, but he is facing a salty group today, and it should be noted that J. J. Hernandez sides with P R Radio Star. He seems a cut below the best in here while still eligible for the N3X condition, but with Miller, all things are possible—and the pace should help his cause. GRADE: B.

#6 MANHATTAN UP (15/1) has done good work as an elongated sprinter on the main track, so he should be considered, especially since he's going to get a pace to close into. I don't like that he came off a layoff in August but then hit the bench again after a poor run in the Pat O'Brien (G2). Was it the competition that day? Did something go wrong? Is he no longer the same horse that saw him win an N2X at Santa Anita in impressive fashion back in February? Well, the works are solid, and he has fired fresh before, so it wouldn't shock me if he leveled out into the lane and came on with a big run—but he will need to fire his best shot today. GRADE: B.

#7 INDEPENDENCE HALL (7/2) is your second choice, but he has some question marks surrounding him. Don't get me wrong, he has ability and plenty of upside, but he's a 3-year-old who hasn't been seen since March, so we'll see if he can recapture his early season form that saw him run well against his own age group back East. He makes his first start for McCarthy, who is a patient sort, so it wouldn't shock me if this were just a prep today for the Malibu (G1) at the end of December. Let's take him on. GRADE: X.

#8 SPARKY VILLE (12/1) is a grinder who adds blinkers today after failing to get the job done in two turf sprints against graded-stakes company. That said, before those two races, he actually won at this $100K level while racing 5-furlongs on turf. He also has decent dirt form from back in the day, so he's another versatile sort in a race filled with them. I do like that he has two elongated-sprint wins on his form, but there must be a reason why Bonde has been racing him really short on turf, right? GRADE: C.

#9 PYRON (6/1) was claimed for $40K back in July at Keeneland after showing mediocre form, but he really came into his own here for Glatt, winning two in a row, including a starter allowance over this track and then a sharp N2X victory at Santa Anita. He's a grinder who draws outside, so you can expect him to just keep plugging away while getting a good in-the-clear trip. Will he be good enough? Well, win-rider Prat opts for the deuce, so that a red flag to me. And he looks a cut below the best in here. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION
I would give myself options with a pace horse and an off-the-pace horse: **#2 ANYPORTINASTORM** can either wire them or suck back and just wait to inhale Microrithms. If he falters, **#3 P R RADIO STORM**—and a few others—can come running on late.

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