

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

By Frank R. Scatoni

On Twitter @ScatoniSureShot

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Race 8: \$20K optional-claiming/N1X for Cal-breds going 5-furlongs on turf (rails at 18 ft.).

Post: approx. post 5:30 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We close out the race week with a very competitive 5-furlong turf sprint for entry-level allowance Cal-breds who may also run for the optional \$20K tag. There looks to be a lot of heat in here, so we'll try to find someone to come from off the pace—but it's pretty slim pickings!

#1 RIDING WITH DINO (8/1) has sharp early speed and returns a new gelding off a November layoff. Inside speed is lethal in sprints on this turf course, so you have to seriously consider this guy. The problem is there is plenty of other speed in here, so he will truly have to earn his victory. There's also the fact that this one has never been on turf before—but he has already cleared this condition on dirt. There's also the small matter of his trainer being ice-cold. GRADE C.

#2 FLY THE SKY (6/1) is better at two turns, but at least he knows how to pass horses, and you can forgive his blah sprint races since he had trouble the few times he tried. The blinkers go back on, so he should be in a good spot tracking all the speed horses, and you can expect him to have punch late since he is exiting a route race. He's interesting to me, but one thing I don't like is that he hasn't really run his best at this level. Still, he should trip out in here. GRADE: A.

#3 STAR RACER (6/1) is an off-the-pace type who knows how to come on with his stretch run, so I give him a shot to get the W at a decent price, even though he's coming off a February layoff. If you go back to his debut, he finished nicely in a 5-furlong race at the Gate, showing he can pass horses when the real running starts. He might be better suited for underneath, since he'll have a lot to do, but in a race filled with speed, a win wouldn't be out of the question either. GRADE: A.

#4 BAM BAM AGAIN (30/1) has done good work on the dirt at Los Al going 1,000-yards, but that isn't the typical path to victory at Del Mar, even in these abbreviated sprint races. Also note that this 4-year-old is 1-for-21, so he's had his chances—plus, he's 0-for-2 on turf. GRADE: X.

#5 IN VRONSKY STYLE (3/1) wired six other maidens to graduate back in May, but he hasn't been seen since. He now returns in a race filled with speed while having to face winners for the first time. I don't usually like that, but D'Amato is good off a layoff, and I do believe that this horse doesn't need the lead to win, so he should get a good stalking trip. That said, it's tough to take 3/1 in a field this size filled with equally matched animals. GRADE: B.

#6 CATEMACO (4/1) was 14/1 in his debut, but he made the lead and then just poured it on, winning easily in that 6-furlong affair. It was an emotional win for Mulhall, since she saved this horse's life when he was younger, which is why it took him so long to get to the races. But he made his 4-year-old debut a winning one. Can he now move to turf and beat winners in a race that has other speed? He's in good hands, so I think he'll run just fine, but I prefer others just a wee bit more. GRADE: B.

#7 EL DIABLO ROJO (4/1) is a solid finisher who just won at this level on dirt. And therein lies the rub: this guy is 0-for-4 on turf with races that aren't that good, so he'll need to transfer that dirt form to turf. On the plus side, win-rider Prat stays put, and you know he'll give this guy a perfectly timed ride. Expect him to be rolling late. GRADE: B.

#8 THISMUSTBETHEPLACE (15/1) just wired maidens up at Golden Gate on the synth. It was a sharp effort as the lukewarm 3/1 favorite, but the waters get much deeper today, moving to turf and facing winners for the first time. I like Andy Mathis a lot, but I'm tempted to watch one today, even though he is getting a 5-pound weight-break with a bug-girl who is very good out of the gate and with speed horses. GRADE: C.

#9 TETON VALLEY (8/1) just cleared this level on dirt in wire fashion going 6-furlongs at Los Al. It was a decent effort, but it's unlikely he'll wire this field, especially since turf does not seem to be his preferred surface. I can't fault the connections for taking a shot here, since his dirt form isn't bad at all, but turf is a different ballgame. That said, Rispoli takes the call, so you have to at least consider this one as an exotics candidate. GRADE: C.

#10 STIR THE POT (20/1) needed 14 tries to break his maiden, which he did last time in wire fashion at Los Al. His turf races aren't anything to write home about, and he's another one who is looking at the wrong trip in here, since he's going to have to use a lot of energy early, and he's going to be parked wide. GRADE: X.

#11 ASCOT STORM (12/1) (AE) is coming off a December layoff and is probably going to need a race, but he is getting a 7-pound weight-break if you think that will help. He's also trying turf for the first time after two failed attempts on dirt for Sadler, who took over training duties after his debut win and promptly ran him against stakes foes. I think I'll watch one. GRADE: X.

#12 NICHIREN (8/1) (AE) was 8/1 against starter foes last time going 6-furlongs on turf at Santa Anita. He made the lead and weakened. I can forgive that, since he was coming off a September layoff and should be much tighter today, but what kind of trip is he going to get if he gets in? GRADE: C.

#13 TOO LATE (4/1) would be tough if he got in, simply because his running style is best suited to this race, which should have a contentious pace. Two back, he just missed by a nose after stalking the pace in a 6-furlong affair. He'll probably be a little farther back this time, but that's okay given the likely pace scenario. GRADE: A.

#14 TIZ A SPEED BOMB (20/1) has done decent work at Los Al, but I'm not seeing his dirt form transferring to the lawn, even though he is really bred for it. He too has a lot of early speed, so he's going to have to work really hard from out here. Note: he gets a 7-pound weight-break if you're a believer. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

Both **#2 FLY THE SKY** and **#3 STAR RACER** both draw inside and both should trip out, tracking a quick pace. I'll look for the better priced of those two to get me home!

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