

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Race 5: \$50K claimer for 3YOs going 8-furlongs on the turf (rails at 24-feet)

Post: approx. post 5:52 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

A big field of 10 sophomores are lined up in this very competitive \$50K claimer contested at 8-furlongs on the lawn with the rails at 24-feet. I thought there was a fair amount of speed in here.

#1 PLAY CHICKEN (12/1) returns gelded off a June layoff after three blah races for Knapp, who claimed him for \$50K four back. Granted, those races were against some decent animals, but this one will have to show more punch in the lane. Note that he was necked by Sensemaker way back in March, so he'll have to beat that foe today. On the plus side, he should get a good ground-saving trip while racing in the vanguard. On the negative side, there is other speed in here! GRADE: C.

#2 GATES OF HEAVEN—program scratch.

#3 VANTAGE POINT (6/1) was 4/1 at the \$40K level last time, and he stalked the pace and was outfinished while being trained by Sise. Four claims were put in for him that day, and McCanna—who is very good off the claim—got him. He now bumps him up slightly and brings him back a new gelding. I think this one is capable of better, but he likes to be forwardly placed in a race filled with early/presser types. GRADE: C.

#4 INGEST (12/1), the first O'Neill entrant, gets some class relief after facing better animals all year long, including a nice fourth-place finish in the Snow Chief going 9-furlongs. The class-relief will help, but O'Neill is risking this guy for \$50K after thinking he was once good enough to run against stakes foes. Also, he's yet another early/presser type in a race filled with them. GRADE: C.

#5 BACK RING LUCK (20/1), the first Sadler charge, is a little interesting in here only because his form is dirty, and this seems like a good spot for him to get his first SoCal win after coming here off a really nice allowance win at Oaklawn Park. Here are his excuses of late: last time was a Grade 3; two back was against older runners; three back, he had some trouble against decent NIX foes; four back was the Santa Anita Derby (G1). While one could say that the connections must be disappointed in him, since they obviously thought he had ability, one could also say that they were wrong and this is where this one belonged all along. GRADE: B.

#6 MAN FRIDAY (3/1) was 8/5 against \$40K foes last time, and he came on with a late run to finish second despite some traffic. A repeat of that race—especially in a race like today's that is filled with speed—will be good enough to win, so this guy gets top honors from me. I also like that Maker claimed him and raises him slightly in class—and though this runner loses Prat because of the claim, he gets Rispoli instead. I also like that he's versatile, so Rispoli will have options in this heat. GRADE: A.

#7 ROOKIE YEAR (4/1) looked good beating \$20K foes on dirt, so we'll see if he can transfer that form to turf, something he couldn't do two back when he was well-beaten at the \$25K starter level. Prat strings

along, which is nice, but this guy is yet another early/presser type, so he'll have to show he can stalk and pass horses on turf. GRADE: C.

#8 SENSEMAKER (20/1) did very good work in the spring, reeling off three wins all in forwardly placed fashion, but as I said, this race is filled with these types of runners, so the race shape just doesn't favor him. Note that Ortiz also must think that this guy needs some help, since he legs up seldom-used 7-pound bug-boy Herrera, who I'm sure is going to gun hard and hope for the best. That doesn't seem like the winning strategy in this race. GRADE: C.

#9 MUAY THAI (IRE) (6/1), the second Sadler trainee, was 7/2 in his U.S. debut, and he ran an okay fifth, making a wide move before flattening out. Sadler took him for \$40K that day and now bumps him up slightly—and Bravo rides through the claim—so I have to think this one is going to run a decent one today. There is a slight negative, however: typically, when Sadler claims, it's because he thinks he can really move up a horse. The fact that this guy is right back in a claimer isn't the biggest vote of confidence. That said, he should trip out from off the pace, making him a major threat in the lane. GRADE: A.

#10 KENNEBEC (12/1) is another one who should get the right race shape, since he at least knows how to pass horses—but Hernandez isn't the greatest at saving ground, and this guy will have to show he can hang with \$50K types since he was unable to beat \$25K/N2L conditional-claimers last time for DeLeon (albeit, they were older runners). Wong—who took this one out of that race—is having a tough meet, but his horses have been firing, so it wouldn't shock me if this one moved up off the claim. He'll need to do better, but I do think the race shape flatters him. GRADE: B.

#11 MUCHO DEL ORO (6/1) was a great claim three back when Hess took him for \$30K and got two really nice wins out of him while racing against tougher starter foes. Last time, he found N1X types too much, so Hess drops him to this level and runs him where he can win. You have to admire that will to win, and the fact that this guy is among the fastest runners in the race—but what kind of trip is he looking at from out here? Well, he does have speed and an aggressive jock—but there is plenty of other speed in here. His best race is good enough, but the post and the race shape are seriously working against a horse who should take some money. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION

As you can see, I'm against all the early/presser types in here. One of them can certainly win with a change in tactics today, but I'm going to side with horses who I know can pass other horses, and that's **#6 MAN FRIDAY** and **#9 MUAY THAI (IRE)**. Also, you could do a lot worse at 20/1 than **#5 BACK RING LUCK**.

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