

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 7/24/22

Race 10: \$40K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 8-furlongs on the dirt

Post: approx. post 6:33 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've got another terrific contest race today, this one being a \$40K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 8-furlongs on the main track. Before we dig in, first some housecleaning business! Reminder: it's Seminar Sunday, as I'll be hosting both the "Best Bets" livestream with Leo Vukmanovich at 11:00 a.m. on the Del Mar social-media platforms...and the on-track "Sunday Handicapping Seminar" at 1:00 p.m. with Ciaran Thornton at the Seaside Terrace. These are two seminars you won't want to miss. Now let's get to it!

#1 STREET RUCKUS (10/1), the first Cerin entrant, is a decided cut below the top ones in here, but he'll get a ground-saving trip while carrying a feathery 116-pounds thanks to the 7-pound bug in the irons. He might be able to stay on for a small piece while lucking into a good tracking trip with plenty of speed in the race, but he'll need to show more for the win. GRADE: C.

#2 STORMY PATTERN (8/1) will try tougher allowance runners after just beating starter foes back East at Gulfstream Park. He has tactical speed and should get a good forwardly placed trip—but I think there will be a quick pace in here, and this guy will have to show he can be competitive in tough SoCal company. GRADE: X.

#3 **TROUBADOUR (6/1)** looks like decent value in here if Hernandez can get him to settle and just stalk the early pace, unlike last time when he tried to wire them going 8.5-furlongs. He made the running and then weakened. I'm going to forgive that race for two reasons: one, it was his first try versus winners; two, that was a surprisingly closer-friendly surface that day (according to Racing Flow). I love that Hernandez sticks around, and I believe there is more here than meets the eye with this lightly raced 4-year-old. GRADE: A.

#4 HOLDEN THE LUTE—program scratch.

#5 **AJAAWEED (6/1)**, the second Cerin runner, looks sneaky in here, making the second start of his form cycle after just running around the track in what looked to be a prep race for this. He likes to come from off the pace, and he should get something to run at today with plenty of early/presser types creating the right race shape for him. Cerin adds blinkers, which is a good move for him. GRADE: A.

#6 NO HANG CHARLIE (15/1), the first Papaprodromou charge, has plenty of early zip, so he should help ensure a quick pace. Will he stick around late? Well, he does get a 7-pound weight-break to help his cause, but he is facing much tougher company than he's used to. I can also see him regressing a bit after that really sharp effort last time against starter foes. GRADE: X.

#7 ECHOSMITH (IRE) (15/1) has hinted at ability, but he hasn't been able to get the W since immigrating to these shores after breaking his maiden on the all-weather at Kempton back in 2021. He ran a corker last

time in his first dirt try, but he was edged out late and finished second. A repeat of that race would put him in the frame, but he looks like he'll be part of a quick early pace—and it should be noted that he's a 3-year-old against some hard-knocking older horses. GRADE: C.

#8 DIVINE ARMOR (4/1), the second Papaprodromou entrant, should get the right set-up in here as a tracking horse in a race that should have a quick and contentious early pace. Is he good enough to win? Well, he's had plenty of chances at this N1X level, to no avail. Last time, he needed optional \$50K starter foes to get the W, but he looked good doing it and was claimed out of the race. He's a contender, but I prefer others just a smidge more. GRADE: B.

#9 HAIL FREEDOM (5/2) looked sensational beating Cal-bred N1X runners last time in wire fashion. That was his first dirt try, and I'm sure his connections were thrilled that this versatile sort took to the dirt so willingly. That said, the waters get deeper today against open-company—and there is other speed in here, so we'll see how this guy does if he's not able to make as easy a lead as he did last time. He could certainly win, but as the 5/2 favorite in a big field, I'm going to take him on. GRADE: C.

#10 SUPER CURIOSO (ARG) (15/1) adds blinkers after a third-place finish at Gulfstream Park back in May against tougher allowance runners. He showed speed in that race but weakened. Maybe he needed the race since coming here from Argentina, but I'm going to watch one today, since it looks like he's going to be part of a hot early pace. GRADE: X.

#11 DARK VADER (6/1) is a cool old boy who has lost a step but should be competitive at this level, since he's in for the \$40K tag—and this is a horse who was competitive against stakes foes back in the day. He just missed at a similar level last time, so he's a fit right back, even though he was a voided-claim out of that race. The big knock to me is that he's probably looking at a wide journey. GRADE: B.

#12 IT'S MY HOUSE (15/1) (AE) will stretch out after running second in a 6-furlong dirt sprint at Los Al last time. He does have a win around two turns, so the stretch-out move makes sense—but where does he fit against these today? He seems a cut below the best, and I'm having a hard time envisioning a winning trip out here from a horse who is likely to be pushing a quick pace. Note that he also loses his 5-pound weight-break from last time. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

I do like the lightly raced 4-year-old, **#3 TROUBADOUR**, since I expect him to take a big step forward today, but I am a little worried about the pace set-up. Because of that, I'll also look at **#5 AJAAWEED** to get the right off-the-pace set-up to flatter his stretch run. You can let the board decide who you land on for the contest, but that sure looks like a juicy exacta-box to me!

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