

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Race 8: Cal-bred \$20K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 6-furlongs on the main track

Post: approx. post 7:23 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've got a very competitive contest race today for Cal-bred \$20K optional-claiming/N1X foes going 6-furlongs on the main track. There should be an honest pace, and you all know my familiar refrain so far this meet: look for the horse on the outside who is going to get the perfect stalking/tracking trip.

#1 NEXT FLIGHT (12/1) has speed but he also showed he could pass horses last time when prepping in a turf sprint. That said, what is Smith going to do? If he hustles from the rail, he's going to get buried because there is other speed to his outside. If he sucks back and tries to make one run, he's going to be on the worst part of the track inside. I'd like him a little if he had a different post. GRADE: X.

#2 QUICK FINISH (5/1) has been a steady check-earner throughout his career, but he's had a tendency to settle for the minor awards, and his best work has come against weaker foes. I do think it's interesting that the cagey Victor Garcia claimed him for \$20K last time at Los Al and now protects him today—but I can see him chasing the pace and just running evenly late. GRADE: X.

#3 SUZIE QZZ BROTHER—program scratch.

#4 CREATIVE PEAK (12/1) looked good breaking his maiden last time at 10/1. He attended the pace and was game to the wire in that 5.5-furlong sprint. He has plenty of early gas, but so do some of the others, and I think that will compromise his chances in his first try versus winners. He's also a 3-year-old against some proven winning veterans. GRADE: X.

#5 FORGIVING SPIRIT (6/1) is another 3-year-old who has speed and will likely be part of a quick early pace. He's also moving to the dirt after a recent steady diet of turf sprints, a few of which came at this level and weren't good enough to win. I'm reluctant to toss anything by Peter Miller, but this sophomore will need to show more today. GRADE: C.

#6 THE LITTLE H MAN (9/2) just dominated starter foes at Pleasanton for a trainer who has come loaded for bear this meet. This horse also knows how to settle, track, and pass horses—something that will come in handy in a race filled with speed. I wish he was drawn farther outside in this big full field, but he should get the right type of trip. That said, he faces a class test today, so we'll see how he handles much tougher foes than he's been facing. GRADE: B.

#7 CATEMACO (8/1) comes off a year layoff and returns as a new gelding, but this lightly raced 5-year-old is tough as nails (he almost died from an allergic reaction when he was younger), and there's no way that Mulhall would bring him back if he wasn't ready to run. He won his debut, so he can fire fresh, and he has good early speed to be in the vanguard outside other speed early. I'm intrigued. GRADE: A.

#8 SEATTLE BREAKOUT (8/1) won here last year with a good stalking trip, but something went wrong in his next start and he disappeared for a while. He now comes back for a trainer who can have them ready. He should also get a good stalking trip in here, so he's not impossible—but he'll need to show he's really matured, since his sophomore races were all pretty slow. GRADE: C.

#9 GOLD RUSH CANDY (5/1) won here last year for Baffert, and I'm sure this guy will be ready to run today coming off a June freshening. He has tactical speed, is drawn favorably, and attracts the leading rider, so I'm kind of surprised he's as high as 5/1 on the morning-line in here, especially with that Baffert bullet in the holster coming into this race. I think he'll go off shorter, and thus, I'll look elsewhere. GRADE: B.

#10 NICE GUY CLAY (10/1) won his debut in professional fashion, stalking the pace and surging late to get up by a nose. That track-and-pounce style will come in handy today, but this 3-year-old is facing winners on the big-boy circuit, so we'll see if he can move forward off that Los Al win. I'm tempted to watch one. GRADE: X.

#11 LIL RICHARDS BELLO (12/1) will get wise-guy consideration in here even though he doesn't look like much on paper. It took him forever to break his maiden, and when he did, it came on turf! But I like the way he won that race, tracking from off the pace and powering home for the W. That same trip will get the job done today, and his dirt races from back in the day aren't half bad, so I'm not worried about the surface switch. Win-rider Maldonado ends up on another, which isn't great, but you get Rispoli in the exchange, so there's that! GRADE: A.

#12 SUNRISE JOURNEY (8/1) has early gas, so he's going to be pushed hard from the bell to get good forward position in a race that is likely to have a quick early pace. I think that will take its toll late, but at least you know he'll be outside all of the other speed, so that does give him a slight advantage. Also note that Knapp is very good off the claim, and even though this guy has lost a few times already at this level, his races weren't too bad. He's not impossible, but I think he weakens very late. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION

What a great contest race with plenty of value to be had, especially if the Baffert takes more money than his chilly 5/1 morning-line. Regardless, I'm pretty sure my two top picks, #7 CATEMACO (8/1) and #11 LIL RICHARDS BELLO (12/1), are going to be worthy of contest plays. So which one do you choose? That's entirely up to you!

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