

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Race 8: \$300K Del Mar Oaks (G1) for 3yo fillies going 9-furlongs on turf (rails at 0-feet)

Post: approx. post 5:34 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've got a 10-race Saturday card with an excellent feature, which also happens to be today's contest race: the prestigious \$300K Del Mar Oaks (G1), a 9-furlong turf affair for 3-year-old fillies with the rails set at zero-feet. D'Amato has four in here...but not the favorite. Can his four-headed monster upset the apple cart? We've also got several who exit the trouble-filled San Clemente (G2), so there's lots of ground to cover!

#1 RHEA MOON (IRE) (30/1), the first D'Amato, loses Hernandez to one of her stablemates, so that gives me pause—but this gal showed a decent late run last time going 8.5-furlongs, so seemingly today's added ground should help her cause. So will a good rail trip after having to break from the 10-hole last time against N1X types, a few of whom just beat her. She could turn the tables on those gals, but is she good enough to beat classier foes? GRADE: C.

#2 **BELLABEL (IRE) (5/1)**, the second D'Amato, got a perfect trip victory in a trouble-filled race last time in the San Clemente (G2), but that was a function of her handiness and her jock's ability to anticipate the nonsense that was unfolding in front of him. She should be tough right back, since that was her first race back since January, but even though she won by two lengths, a few of her stablemates were rallying late, so perhaps they can one up this gal this time. That said, it's hard to knock a runner who has won three in a row, including her two stateside races. GRADE: A.

#3 **ISLAND OF LOVE (IRE) (12/1)**, the third D'Amato, came on with a nice late run in the San Clemente (G2) to finish third, closing the gap on her two stablemates. She had made a wide move, and she had to alter course in the lane with bumper cars going on around her. Yet she still persevered. I think that experience will help her cause today. She will, however, have to show she can beat Cairo Memories, who got the measure of her two back. That said, Hernandez stays here, and that's a big endorsement. GRADE: A.

#4 LUCKY GIRL (IRE) (30/1) attended the pace in the San Clemente (G2) and weakened. She was forced to go from that outside post, but she is better when she can rate, which she should be able to do today. That said, is she good enough to beat a bunch of gals who have already handled her in similar spots? Well, Papaprodromou is going great guns, but I'd like to see more from this one. GRADE: X.

#5 CAIRO MEMORIES (3/1) is a very cool horse who is a half-length from being a Grade 1 winner...on dirt! And that's not even her best surface! She's an excellent turf horse who has multiple graded-stakes wins, and she has a versatile run style, so Smith—who knows her well—can put her wherever he wants early on in the race. She's a major contender, but she won't offer much value in a big full field, but if she snuck away at 5/1 or so, she'd be a good contest play. GRADE: B.

#6 TEZZARAY (GB) (20/1) attended the pace in the San Clemente (G2) and was starting to weaken when a demolition derby broke out. She got roughed up a bit, but she wasn't doing enough to win at the time—but that's okay, because she was likely a short horse anyway, coming off a November layoff and with this Grade 1 probably as the target all along. Last year, she showed a lot of class, so there is plenty to build on—and her jock has been riding terrifically on the turf this meet, so it wouldn't shock me if this gal outran her odds. GRADE: B.

#7 SIXTEEN ARCHES (IRE) (12/1), the fourth D'Amato, had to wait for room before running on nicely last time to close the gap against her stablemate in the San Clemente (G2). It was a pretty solid effort to finish second, and her come-home times suggest that she can do even better with more distance, especially since that was her first try in blinkers. I'm not crazy about this jock—since he hasn't been good to me all meet!—but I think there is more here than meets the eye, and I can see her putting in a strong effort today. GRADE: B.

#8 GRACELUND GRAY (15/1) just beat a few of these in an N1X with a perfect stalking trip. She'll be forwardly placed again today, but these are much classier foes, and I think she's in deep—though it is interesting to see win-rider Bravo stay put instead of ending up on the outside horse (whom he also won with). I'm happy to see old-school trainer Zucker with a good horse, but this spot seems a bridge too far. GRADE: X.

#9 TXOPE (FR) (5/1) makes her U.S. debut after plenty of starts overseas, where she ran some big races all over the continent, including a recent Group 2 victory in Germany. That said, she just raced in June overseas, and it's not like Sadler is known for his imports. I'm a little surprised she's as short as 5/1 on the line, and for that reason, I'm going to look for others. But you don't need me to tell you that all Euro invaders must be considered! GRADE: C.

#10 GOLD DRAGON QUEEN (50/1) was 65/1 in the San Clemente (G2) against several of these, and she was well-beaten with some trouble. She has run a few decent races against stakes foes, but she seems a decided cut below the best in here, with her only win coming in an MSW that was washed off the turf. GRADE: X.

#11 SPENDARELLA (8/5) is a very cool gal who has been dominant back East and who just finished second in a Group 2 at Royal Ascot, no small accomplishment for a U.S. based runner. That said, she's 8/5 in a full field; she just got back from a UK excursion after she was probably fully cranked for that effort; and she'll be probably stalking 2- or 3-wide with her tactical style—so can we beat her? Why not? GRADE: B.

#12 BALLET DANCING (20/1) is a very nice horse, so don't let those recent defeats fool you. I like the way she finished up last time in defeat going 8.5-furlongs in a paceless race, and before that, when she lost to a few of these going 9-panels, she had a rough start. She can contend, but she's drawn all the way outside and ridden by a jock who doesn't often save ground and is a fairly weak finisher. I wouldn't let that sway you too much though, since this gal does have quality to her. That said, I prefer her more for underneath. GRADE: C.

#13 LADY T (20/1) got one of the worst rides of the meet. Espinoza had no idea what to do while racing down at the rail. As a consequence, he cost this gal all chance and almost took out half the field in the stretch. Yet this gal still tried all the way to the wire. She's a nice horse who still has plenty of upside.

The problem today is that she's now drawn all the way outside, so Espinoza is either going to gun hard to make the lead or end up stalking 4-wide, and neither trip is a winning one. GRADE: C.

#14 LADY CLEMENTINE (GB) (30/1), the second Papaprodromou runner, looked good breaking her maiden in her first U.S. start, coming home nicely in that mile race. So why does win-rider Bravo—who does good work with Georgie—side with another? That concerns me. So does the trip this one is going to get from out here. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

I think the top-two choices are legit racehorses, but this is a big, full field, and there are some decent gals in here, so I am going to look for a price with one of the D'Amato runners. That means **#3 ISLAND OF LOVE (IRE) (12/1)** gets my contest selection, since she's the right price and I like the way she finished up last time despite a wide trip and some trouble—though I do like **#2 BELLABEL (IRE) (5/1)** quite a bit, and I won't rule out **#7 SIXTEEN ARCHES (IRE) (12/1)** as well! If you really need a bomb, perhaps **#6 TEZZARAY (GB) (20/1)** can get a W and get you back in the contest hunt. Tough race!!!

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