DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
By Frank R. Scatoni
On Twitter @ScatoniSureShot

Date: 11/26/22
Race 7: $250K Seabiscuit Handicap (G2) contested at 8.5-furlongs on turf (rail at 12-feet)
Post: approx. post 3:30 p.m. PST

OVERVIEW

We've got two more contest races on tap for an excellent 9-race Saturday card, which showcases some good turf racing. The first contest race is a really nice renewal of the $250K Seabiscuit Handicap (G2), an 8.5-furlong turf affair with the rails at 12-feet. Three East Coast horses have shown up to try and get the dough—and I think two of them have really good chances.

#1 SANTIN (3/1) is a very good horse who is capable of running some monster races against quality competition, as is evidenced by his form from back East—and it should be noted that he travels well, having run a huge second in the Hollywood Derby (G1) here last year at 17/1. Rispoli rejoins him today, so you know this guy is going to get a good tracking, ground-saving trip. He's a major threat, though I'm not sure how much value he'll offer. GRADE: A.

#2 MASTEROFFOXHOUNDS (12/1), the first D'Amato, has tactical speed, so he should help ensure an honest pace—and I think that will be his role today, since it's unlikely he'll get away with glacial fractions like he did last time when winning the John Henry (G2) in easy wire fashion. Note that win rider Rispoli ends up on the invader to this one's inside. GRADE: X.

#3 HONG KONG HARRY (IRE) (7/2), the second D'Amato, is a very good horse, and I have to think he'll be ready to run a big one off a brief freshening. He's done nothing wrong since coming to America, and his only stateside defeat came at the expense of a tough start against a pretty good horse. GRADE: A.

#4 SMOOTH LIKE STRAIT (4/1) has earned nearly $1.8 million, so hats off to him—and he earned that by facing the best in the world. His tactical speed means he'll always be in contention turning for home, but I'm expecting an honest pace today, and it should be noted that Santin ran him down fairly easily in the Arlington Million (G1) this summer (albeit on a "good" course). His best is clearly good enough, but I can't help but overlook the fact that this guy always seems to get edged out late. GRADE: B.

#5 BEYOND BRILLIANT (4/1) will get a chance to finally earn my respect, because I've been calling him out every start as the luckiest turf horse in training. He's a speed horse whose best races and biggest performances have come loose on the lead in paceless races. Well, guess what: he's not going to get that race shape today, so if he wins, I'll applaud—but I've always thought he wasn't nearly as good as his form has shown. GRADE: X.

#6 LINCOLN HAWK (IRE) (20/1), yet another D'Amato, is an interesting exotics horse, since he has a very strong late kick, and I have to think that his most recent downhill race was just a prep for this—and he ran extremely well down the hill, closing like a freight train to just miss against a pretty decent horse (and coming home in under :28 seconds, which is well above par for that course). That said, he gets a class test today, since he's facing the toughest group he's ever seen. GRADE: C.

#7 IRIDEO (ARG) (10/1) took a few starts to get used to SoCal racing, but once he did, he became really competitive over the summer, winning the Wickerr here and then finishing second in the Del Mar Mile (G2). He likes this course, and Berrios fits him very well—but we'll see how he does going an extra half-furlong, since his best work has come going a flat mile. I'm a little suspect. GRADE: X.

#8 SET PIECE (5/1) looks like the one to beat, since 8.5-furlongs—which isn't a very popular distance on turf—is right in his wheelhouse. He's also better than his last race has shown, since running fourth from the 10-hole at Keeneland in the tough Turf Mile (G1) is no small feat. I know Santin and Smooth Like Strait have beaten him before, but this guy had excuses, and he shouldn't have any excuses today. The only concern is that he's a deep closer, but top jock Hernandez takes the call, so I think he'll be just fine. GRADE: A.

#9 KENTUCKY GHOST (20/1) seems a cut below the other East Coast invaders, but he is trained by Vicky Oliver, who is a certified member of the bomb squad! In other words, she's capable of popping with big prices when she ships out West. Still, this horse hasn't really been competitive in the graded-stakes ranks, so he's going to need a major step forward to beat the best in here. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION
I don't have anything super-clever in here other than the fact that I'm against both Smooth Like Strait and Beyond Brilliant, so maybe the exotics can be okay with those two horses out of the mix. I like—in no particular order—**#1 SANTIN (3/1)**, **#3 HONG KONG HARRY (IRE) (7/2)**, and **#8 SET PIECE (5/1)**, so check the board. Based on the morning-line, the latter is the way to go.

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DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 11/26/22
Race 9: $40K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 8.5-furlongs on turf (rail at 12-feet)
Post: approx. post 4:30 p.m. PST

OVERVIEW

We stay on the turf for today's second contest race: a $40K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 8.5-furlongs on the turf with the rails at 12-feet. I thought this was a pretty competitive race.

#1 FLY THE SKY (12/1) has a decent late kick, but he has come up short at this level twice recently, with his best work coming against weaker $25K starter-allowance foes. He needs to do better today, but note that leading rider Hernandez sticks around, so you can certainly use this guy in your exotics. GRADE: C.

#2 PERCOLATE (IRE) (8/1) is a 3-year-old who ran too good to lose last time, getting edged out late in a race where the winner's jock was actually fined for interference, so the outcome could have been different. Now McCarthy adds blinkers to try and get this guy to show a little more oomph late, which I think will help this young horse. That said, he was facing starter foes last time, while today he has to face tougher allowance company. GRADE: C.

#3 AGATINO (IRE) (5/1), the first D'Amato entrant, is a 3-year-old who should take a big step forward today, making the second start of his form cycle after a seeming prep race last time when he was anchored early by his jock after a slow start yet still ran some sneaky fast internal fractions. He gets a major jock upgrade today, and we all know that D'Amato does a great job with these Irish imports. GRADE: A.

#4 GOLDENEYE (20/1) was facing stakes foes back East on the synthetic, to no avail—and he now makes his first SoCal start while coming back a new gelding and getting Lasix. This is his first turf try, so I'm tempted to watch one as he comes off an April layoff. GRADE: X.

#5 ALIGATO (7/2) looks poised for a big race, making the second start of his form cycle after a solid comeback race down the hill to finish fourth in the California Flag after a slow beginning. He came rolling home in under :28 seconds, and that's really fast for the level, so he should be ready to roll today. That said, he is a Cal-bred who faces open foes for the first time. GRADE: A.

#6 DOMINANT SOUL (30/1) has sharp early speed, so he'll look to take them gate to wire, but he tried that last time against a few of these, and he was easily overtaken. Granted, that was at a mile, and he won't have to go as fast today at 8.5-furlongs, but his best work has come against weaker starter foes, so he'll need to show some class today. GRADE: X.

#7 HAWK OF WAR (4/1) ran some decent races back East at the allowance level, so he's a fit in here—but it does concern me that he was a voided-claim two back (when he just missed at a similar level) and then just ran evenly last time against open $50K claimers, so perhaps this 5-year-old is going the wrong way after leaving the Maker barn. He could run better, but 4/1 seems awfully short to me. GRADE: X.

#8 BANG FOR YOUR BUCK (4/1) is a pretty honest Cal-bred who has run well twice at the open level, so he's a contender right back, especially since he has tactical speed and should get a very good forwardly placed trip. I do think he'll get edged out late, but he'll have every chance to get the W if he's good enough. GRADE: B.

#9 TIO MAGICO (15/1), the second D'Amato runner, hasn't really panned out as a Canadian export, but he did run a much improved race last time when he just missed in a 6-furlong turf sprint, coming home strongly, so perhaps that race is a signal that this guy is ready for a move forward. That said, his Canadian form, especially around two turns, isn't anything to write home about. If he were trained by anyone else, I'd be skeptical, but D'Amato wins a lot of turf races. GRADE: B.

#10 SEVEN WONDERS (8/1) is a 3-year-old who exits a fairly weak renewal of the Twilight Derby (G2), when he failed to menace after some trouble against his own age group. He now has to face elders for the first time while breaking from a really tough post. I do like that he has a win at today's distance and over this course, but he's going to need some help up front while navigating a trip from all the way out here. GRADE: C.

#11 HOCKEY DAD (8/1) has plenty of early speed, so Smith should have no trouble getting this one out and angling over to attend the pace—but that means he's probably looking at a 2- or 3-wide stalking trip, and that's not the winning journey over this course. And if he makes the lead, he'll have to earn it over Dominant Soul, and that will probably take the starch out of him. That said, I've always liked this guy, and he's run some good races against quality horses. Still, he's going to need a lot of luck today from out here. Maybe you can key him underneath. GRADE: B.

CONCLUSION
At 5/1, **#5 AGATINO (IRE)** is the bet. The jock upgrade is so significant, and this guy showed some nice run despite early trouble in his prep race.

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