

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

By Frank R. Scatoni

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Date: 9/1/25

Race 9: \$50K starter-allowance/N3L contested at one mile on the lawn (rails at 12-feet)

Post: approx. post 5:35 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've got bonus Monday racing in honor of Labor Day, so let's make the most of it! Today's contest race is a competitive \$50K starter-allowance/N3L contested at one mile on the turf with the rails at 12-feet. There should be an honest pace in here, and the turf course has been way more forgiving to late runners than it was earlier in the meet, so I'm hoping for a truly run race. May the best horse win!

#1 GROGU (20/1) is not the worst 20/1 shot I've ever seen; in fact, I think he has a chance in here, moving into the Powell barn and being freshened up for this after hitting the shelf back in February. There should be a quick pace in here, and this guy is capable of posting up some decent final times, so all Herrera has to do is hug the rail, wait for an opening, and hope the speed starts to slow down. Upset special? GRADE: A.

#2 SMOOTH SALUTE (12/1) would have made me look like a genius last time when I gave him out at 24/1, but he came on with his late run a bit too late and ended up third, losing by a neck in a race where four others also come out of. He did have an outside post that day, while today he should be able to save a lot of ground. The big concern is that Franco will need to time things just right at this mile distance because he's shortening up after needing every bit of that extra half-furlong to get a slice. Still, you know he'll be running on late. GRADE: B.

#3 MR. LEASURE (8/1) was 6/1 in that aforementioned common race at 8.5-furlongs, and he just kind of ran evenly to finish fourth, but part of that trip was the result of a few moments of trouble, so he never really had a chance to make more of an impact. Before that, he stalked the pace and was game to win by a neck against N2L types going a mile, so I expect him to run a decent one today. That said, he might be too close to a quick pace, and that might take something out of him late. GRADE: B.

#4 RUSSELLS HUSTLE (6/1) was 5/1 in that common race last time, and he ran too good to lose, running on late to just miss by a nose while finishing second. He was coming off a long layoff, so he figures to improve a lot today, and he should be super-fit now cutting back after that 8.5-furlong race. J.J. sticks around, so that tells me this runner has more to give. GRADE: A.

#5 HAWKER (6/1) ran his eyeballs out last time, setting a wicked early pace and holding sway while easily beating \$25K/N2L conditional-claimers. It was an impressive effort, but I have to think he's going to regress off that incredible effort. I guess the tote will tell because he was bet off the board last time, going off at 9/5 after being 5/1 on the morning-line, so look for some wagering action. GRADE: X.

#6 UNBREAKABLE TRUST (30/1) is exiting sprint races, so he should be prominent early, but I'm not sure that's a good thing for a horse whose only one-mile turf attempt saw him chase the early pace before weakening to finish ninth. Baker took him out of a \$20K/N2L win at Los Al, so I like that he protects him today while trying something different, but I'm not sure this will be this 3-year-old's calling. GRADE: X.

#7 THE OLD NINE (IRE) (20/1) was claimed for \$25K back in May out of a nice turf-sprint win at Santa Anita as the 3/5 favorite. New trainer Periban freshened him up and brought him back in a really tough spot, where he never got involved at 52/1. I'm sure that was just a prep for this spot, but this spot isn't exactly easy. This horse has a versatile run style, and he does have route experience (though he is winless in three tries going a mile). He's a little interesting, but he will need a career-best to beat the top few in here, and I'm not sure this is the kind of race that will showcase what he can do. GRADE: C.

#8 DEALERS SPECIAL (5/1) was the 2/1 favorite in that common race, and he never really had a chance to show his best stuff thanks to a troubled trip. I like that Ayuso rides back to try and make amends, but it should be noted that this guy had two previous tries at this level before his last race, and the best he could do was fourth, so perhaps favoritism wasn't warranted last time. GRADE: B.

#9 ONE OF THESE DAYS (IRE) (6/1) is in good form since coming off an October layoff back in May, and he must be looking well because he's been claimed in two of his last three starts. Last time, no one was interested in him for \$50K, but he ran a really good race at 26/1, finishing third with some trouble. That big race prompted Victor Garcia to protect him today, and that's a positive sign after he just ran a career-best. I don't like that Fresu, who has ridden him all three times this year, sides with another, but you get Rispoli instead, and that's just fine. GRADE: A.

#10 PACIFIC QUEST—program scratch.

#11 SMART CODE (7/2) was 3/1 against One of These Days (Ire) last time, and he made that look like a gift when he made the lead, opened up, and then held sway, posting a big figure in that \$50K claimer. That said, he was coming off a long layoff, so there is a chance he backs up a bit today, and he should have others in the vanguard with him, so he won't have things as easy as he did last time. Of course a repeat of his last race will make him very tough, but I'm going to try and beat him. GRADE: B.

#12 SKETCHY (12/1) failed two and three back at this level, so he'll need to do better today. Last time, he came off a June freshening and ran a decent third at 13/1, prompting Antonio Garcia to dip in and take him. I like that he's protecting him today, but as mentioned, his previous form at this level wasn't anything special. I can see Silvera putting him in the race from the bell and hoping for the best—but I'm expecting him to just be part of the early pace. GRADE: X.

#13 DAKOTA COUNTRY (12/1) is a strange entry! He just ran at Saratoga on August 16, and now here he is in Doug O'Neill's barn trying starter foes in California after failing to beat \$35K/N2L conditional-claimers under Danny Gargan back East. This New York-bred is racing above condition, and that's always a tough thing to do. I'm fine watching one. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

You have some choices in this race, but most of you probably need a big bomb in here as we get toward the end of the meet, and if that's the case, then **#1 GROGU (20/1)** fits the bill. That said, **#4 RUSSELLS HUSTLE (6/1)** and **#9 ONE OF THESE DAYS (IRE) (6/1)** are more logical contenders.

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