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**Date:** 11/22/26
**Race 9:** $25K claimer contested at 8.5-furlongs on turf (rails at zero feet)
**Post:** approx. post 4:33 p.m. PST

## OVERVIEW

This is a competitive group of turf routers, and several of these guys know each other well. I think the pace should be fairly quick, so I'm looking for a horse who can secure a decent tracking position and still finish. Of course, that's easier said than done!

**#1 CALM SEA (5/1)** has been competitive at this level without getting the job done, and his recent fifth at Santa Anita wasn't a terrible effort considering he encountered some trouble. He's been facing similar horses for a while, and he has enough tactical speed to work out a decent trip

from the rail. The problem is that he hasn't won in a long time, and he keeps finding one or two horses who are better. That said, I respect his consistency, and that's something to be said for a claimer. GRADE: A.

**#2 LAHAINA FLAVOR (5/1)** has been running against slightly tougher competition, and his recent fourth at Santa Anita was better than it looks on paper. He finished willingly after racing behind horses through slow splits, and his previous efforts at Del Mar were respectable. Gallagher has him in good form, and I like that he can make a sustained run without needing everything to go perfectly. He's one of the more logical contenders, and I wouldn't be surprised if he finally gets his picture taken for the first time this year. GRADE: A.

#3 NEON LIGHTS (IRE) (12/1) returns to SoCal after a three-race stint in Louisiana, where he used his sharp speed to beat much weaker foes at Louisiana Downs. He does have SoCal form at this level: three tries at this level for Mullins but no wins while unable to carry his speed. He now shows up in Antonio Garcia's barn to try $25K foes again. Know him early; we'll see about late. GRADE: C.

#4 ZALAMO (FR) (7/2) is a cool claimer who tries hard every time regardless of the level. He was claimed for $25K last time out of a fourth-place finish in a 9-furlong affair, and new trainer Pederson gave him a couple of months to freshen up for his return to the level of the claim. His best races are a fit, but he's always at the mercy of pace and trip. He's an obvious contender, but 7/2 doesn't excite me. GRADE: B.

#5 DAIRAGO (FR) (4/1) came to SoCal with okay turf form from Colonial and ran an even fourth going 9-furlongs against $16K starter foes as the 6/5 favorite. He should be fit off that, but it's kind of what you see is what you get from this 5-year-old, and I think he needs to improve here to get the W. GRADE: B.

#6 UNCLE HAPPY—program scratch.

#7 DEALERS SPECIAL (12/1) was 20/1 at this level two back, and he finished mid-pack. He needs to do better today, but he does have races where his closing time would put him in the frame here at a nice price—but a win would require lots of things going right for him. GRADE: C.

#8 KIMMER (10/1) hasn't won in a very long time, but he has always shown a decent late kick, and I just know that one of these days, he's going to get the right race flow to step up and surprise. His recent form isn't pretty, but he was facing some decent starter foes. This is a better spot for him, and the move to Berrios is not insignificant. He might not be fast enough now as a 7-year-old to get a win today, but he should outrun his odds. GRADE: B.

#9 CATHAL (IRE) (15/1) comes off a runner-up effort in a starter allowance at Santa Anita, where he finished willingly after racing behind horses in a 9-furlong affair. That race should have him ready for this, but this 5-year-old has shown the same level of consistency regardless of level, distance, or surface, so he'll need to show improvement today—and that's a tough ask considering the fact that he's winless since being claimed off Papaprodromou way back in January. GRADE: C.

**#10 AMPLITUDE (9/2)** runs for a tag for the first time here in SoCal, and that's a significant class angle for a trainer who spots them where they can be competitive. His starter form is just okay, and the post does him no favors, but if he gets the right trip, he's going to be tough for the lethal Sadler/Rosario combination. GRADE: A.

#11 DOUBLE NEAT—program scratch.

#12 PHOSPHORESCENCE (FR) (30/1) has some respectable back form, including a victory at Santa Anita earlier this year against some tough starter foes, but his recent efforts since changing barns haven't been particularly encouraging. He's shown enough early speed to get involved, and Gonzalez is the right guy to hustle him out to get good early position out of the chute, but that will likely take its toll late. GRADE: X.

## CONCLUSION

With the morning-line favorite a tepid 7/2 (and a "B" for me), you can tell that this is a very competitive race with several evenly matched horses. Let the board be your friend because this is the kind of race where a few will get overbet and a few will get ignored—and there isn't much separating them.

My three choices are in the same price range, but I have a feeling that **#2 LAHAINA FLAVOR (5/1)** will be the best price of the three of them because, as a deep closer, even his good races in defeat don't look so good on paper (because he's a deep closer). Conversely, I think **#10 AMPLITUDE (9/2)** might get overbet because of the Sadler/Rosario connection and the drop in class, but I actually like him the least of my "A" horses.

**#1 CALM SEA (5/1)** is priced up right on the morning-line (he was 5/1 at this level two back), but I think his worth 7/2 with a rail draw against this field, so use that benchmark in your decision.

I don't mean to be wishy-washy, but I don't have a strong opinion here—and if you are a "Matrix" subscriber on MarkGelding.com, you'll see that I'm using all three in my $3 Late P3, as well as playing some tickets with my "B" horses.

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