

By Brad Free

BEST BET: Murray (9th race)**First Race****1. Conundrum****2. Americaredwhiteblu****3. Breakfast Ride**

Del Mar opening day, first post 2 p.m. Close call in the opener between **CONUNDRUM** and **AMERICAREDWHITEBLU**. The former may hold a slight edge. CONUNDRUM has a bit more tactical speed than his main rival. Runner-up twice recently at this N2L starter allowance level, he finished nine lengths clear with a big number his only dirt route two back. He can kick off the meet with a front-running/pace-pressing win. Maybe.

AMERICAREDWHITEBLU adds blinkers after falling short as the favorite in a similar spot. The race did not unfold in his favor. The pace was slow, the winner led gate to wire, and 'BLU did not really have a fair shot. Bigger field with more speed to run at this time. **BREAKFAST RIDE** goes sprint to route and is quick enough to make the lead if he wants. Sprint-to-route on dirt is a high-percent category for trainer John Sadler (23-for-94 past five years, 4-for-5 since March).

Second Race**1. Fast Buck****2. Gregory's Pride****3. Time to Party**

Five furlongs is perfect for speedster **FAST BUCK** in this N1X turf sprint. Six furlongs was slightly out of reach last time, he tired and finished third by less than a length. The speed of the speed can be long gone at this shorter trip. Speed was good last summer with the rails down. Small sample, but 3 of 5 rails-down turf sprints were won by the early pacesetter; the two others were won from second and third. **GREGORY'S PRIDE** will rally late, and is the most likely beneficiary if the top choice falters. 'PRIDE likes this course, runs well fresh and is listed as a first-time gelding. Look for him late. **TIME TO PARTY** pressed the top choice and outfinished that rival last time at six furlongs. 'PARTY should get a great trip right behind the speed. DETROIT CITY adds heat.

Third Race**1. Big Flame****2. Big Scott Daddy****3. Pyeong Chang**

This speed-filled \$20k claiming N3L sprint is a good spot to take a shot at a price. **BIG FLAME** gets the call to upset as he returns to claiming after being overmatched in a series of allowance races. His closing style suits the pace scenario, he has won on this track. If the front-runners hook up like it appears they might, BIG FLAME can sit, wait and blast home for a longshot win. **BIG SCOTT DADDY** has the same closing style, and enters in undeniable sharp form. Last-out winner rallying from last, his win was validated when the runner-up won next out. 'DADDY will fire late for high-percent first-off-the-claim trainer George Papaprodromou. His last 9 f.o.c. starters: 6 wins, 2 seconds, 1 third. **PYEONG CHANG** is sharp sped, but faces two others with the same style. Those are PRIANO and WINHAPPY. The front end could be crowded.

Fourth Race**1. Secret Touch****2. Big Buzz****3. Gray Magician**

Veteran horse-for-course **SECRET TOUCH**, a five-time winner at DMR, drops to \$16k claiming following a useful comeback prep in a N1X. He has speed, and is sufficiently versatile to rally from slightly off the pace if necessary. **BIG BUZZ** will roll from behind in a race that should unfold at an honest tempo. The last time he ran on dirt, \$18-20k claiming in January, he overcame a wide trip to win from last. **GRAY MAGICIAN** merits an upset chance first off the claim after a series of "off-slow" and wide trips. Front-runners EXCLUSIVE SPEAKER and DR. TROUTMAN insure an honest pace.

Fifth Race**1. Danzing Cat****2. Chedda Cash****3. Smokin Cheena**

DANZING CAT and **CHEDDA CASH** are bred to win early, working fast, and from stables that can win with debut 2yos. DANZING CAT, by 5-for-22 juvenile debut sire Danzing Candy, gets the call. Her works for trainer Peter Miller at San Luis Rey Downs are fast. CHEDDA CASH is by 4-for-18 juvenile debut sire Straight Fire, with bullet drills for trainer Luis Mendez at Santa Anita and a sharp gate move this week at Del Mar. **SMOKIN CHEENA**, runner-up both starts in Cal-bred maiden sprints, might be ranked too low. The two fillies she lost to both returned to win stakes races next out. Based on company lines, one could argue 'CHEENA is the one to beat. Also-eligible CHOLLY has worked well and should fire if she draws in.

Sixth Race**1. Macadamia****2. Freedom Lass****3. Eddie's New Dream**

MACADAMIA finished a better-than-looked fourth in her U.S. debut, and worked well since. A Group 1 winner in Brazil at this nine-furlong distance,

she gets the call in this N2X. In her comeback, she steadied at the quarter pole, then finished evenly. In her most recent work, she broke off behind stakes winner Connie Swingle and finished virtually heads-up. The point is, **MACADAMIA** has room to improve second start back. **FREEDOM LASS** finished third in a stake last out, a length behind multiple stakes winner Neige Blanche. 'LASS is vastly improved since stretching to longer distances after being claimed for \$25k last fall. A good effort in this N2X would give her a rematch with Neige Blanche next month in the mile and three-eighths CTT & TOC. **EDDIE'S NEW DREAM** drops from a series of stakes including a runner-up two back in a G2. She has won at this distance. **FREEDOM FLYER** finished third last out, in front of the top choice.

Seventh Race

1. Infinite Empire**2. Keychain Girl****3. Too Bossy**

Plenty reasons to like comebacker **INFINITE EMPIRE** in this filly-mare maiden sprint. Debut runner-up on this track last summer behind a next-out G2 winner and in front of a next-out maiden winner, 'EMPIRE was sidelined following an autumn workout at Santa Anita. Based on recent works, she is ready to fire. She looked good from the gate July 10 (work viewed on XBTV.com), outbreaking three rivals and working a full six furlongs. Solid drill, on the heels of a bullet five-eighths. All systems go. Comebacker **KEYCHAIN GIRL** also tipped ability last summer. She broke slowly from the rail in her debut and actually ran well, then regressed her next two starts when wheeled back on short notice and then trying turf. That was the end of her 2yo campaign. She appears to have trained well for her comeback, and was very quick a year ago. **TOO BOSSY** also is fast, and unlike the top pair, has recent races under her belt. Runner-up last out, she will ding-dong early. **BELLE CHERIE** looms an off-the-pace upset candidate going turf to dirt.

Eighth Race

1. Mackinnon**2. Balnikhov****3. Castle Leoch**

The best horse in the Oceanside Stakes has not started in five months, but **MACKINNON** has trained like he will fire first start back. He established his turf class last year winning two stakes and finishing third in the productive Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (six subsequent stakes winners). **MACKINNON** was turned out in February to aim for a summer campaign, his final team work July 17 looked terrific (on XBTV.com). **BALNIKHOV** would not be eligible to this restricted race if he had any luck May 7 in a G2 in Kentucky. He broke last and trailed the field, uncorked an extended move to hit the front in the stretch, then got collared and finished second. He was best. His alibi next out was that he "bounced" from the huge effort in Kentucky. Blinkers off, he reportedly has worked well since, and if he reproduces either runner-up finish his first two U.S. starts, will give the top choice all he can handle. Midwest shipper **CASTLE LEOCH** is lightly raced this year, his last-out allowance win was validated when runner-up; Credit Event returned to win at Saratoga. 'LEOCH will be rolling late, while **ANMER HALL** stretches out from a respectable third-place sprint comeback and looms a price play setting or pressing the pace in his first route race.

Ninth Race

1. Murray**2. Exaulted****3. Clem Labine**

Comebacker **MURRAY** gets the call in this N1X sprint, based on his debut romp on this track last summer as a 2yo and his "winning workout" last week in company at Santa Anita. He broke from the gate, made the lead while hounded by a stablemate, and refused to let that one pass. Solid drill to culminate a work pattern than began three months ago. Proven fresh, drawn outside, ready to fire. **EXAULTED**, a massive horse (estimated 1,250 lbs.), drops from an okay comeback in a Grade 2. He figures to improve with a race under his belt, and pace to run at. **CLEM LABINE** is a Northern California shipper entered for the \$40k claim tag. An 11-time winner, he won a N2X/optional claiming sprint last out at Pleasanton, the horse he beat returned to win a \$75k stakes race. Debut winner **RECALL AND RELOAD** is the aforementioned workmate for the top choice. It looked like 'RELOAD was second-best in the work.

Tenth Race

1. Pray for Me Ray**2. Admiralty Place****3. Clutch Hitter**

With a pair of creditable third-place sprints under his belt, **PRAY FOR ME RAY** is ready to stretch to a mile on turf. His debut on turf was merely a prep in which he finished well. In his second start, on dirt, he broke slowly and passed most of the field again. Two turns should be ideal, chasing slower fractions. **ADMIRALTY PLACE** makes his U.S. debut after he was purchased for a reported \$147k at a European auction in June. He hit the board every recent start in Ireland in big fields. He finished in front of 66 rivals in four starts this year. Fresh off the plane, expect him to fire. **CLUTCH HITTER** ran better than the line looks finishing fifth in the same race the top choice exits. 'HITTER broke slowly, raced greenly, finished willingly and galloped out in front. Sired by Uncle Mo and produced by a sibling to Twirling Candy, he can improve second time out moving to grass, adding blinkers and stretching to a mile.