

By Brad Free

BEST BET: Smooth Like Strait (9th race)**First Race****1. Secret Fix****2. Don't Talk****3. Darling Donna**

SECRET FIX drops from maiden special-weight to maiden-40, she is quick enough to make the lead, and may lead this sprint field gate to wire. **DON'T TALK** stumbled, pressed and tired in her debut for a \$100k claim tag. She drops in class second out, facing modest foes. **DARLING DONNA** has been dusted in recent races, on turf. She may benefit by the surface switch to the main track. Her only dirt starts last fall at Parx produced second and third-place finishes.

Second Race**1. Straight No Chaser****2. Peligroso****3. Honeymoon Suite**

Although maidens from this stable typically race into shape rather than fire first out, **STRAIGHT NO CHASER** might be the exception. He showed speed from the gate working five furlongs at Santa Anita on July 16 (viewed XBTV.com), older progeny of his sire won 14 percent first out, and his dam has produced three debut winners from five starters. With Edwin Maldonado up, 'CHASER gets the call to wire the field. **PELIGROSO**, a filly facing colts, makes her California debut after a creditable runner-up finish against boys in a maiden turf sprint at Pimlico. The race turned out super-live: the 1-3-4-6 finishers all won next out. **PELIGROSO** is one of several front-runners in this field. **HONEYMOON SUITE** makes his comeback after in-the-money finishes last year in Florida. **MASTERMIND** rallied from last to split the field in his debut at Tampa Bay Downs. His style suits the pace scenario. Lots of speed in this field.

Third Race**1. Loud Mouth****2. Mongolian Wind****3. Lord Dragon**

LOUD MOUTH drops from Cal-bred stakes to \$32k claiming, he is the speed of this mile dirt race, and can be long gone. **MONGOLIAN WIND** drops off a claim for \$50k, which is reasonable considering he finished sixth. His pressing style should lead to a cozy trip positioned right behind the top choice. If the leader falters, 'WIND could get first run. He won his only Del Mar start last fall, at this claiming level. Also-eligible **LORD DRAGON** is a 10-time winner claimed for \$25k from a win in Kentucky. He will rally. **BOLD ENDEAVOR** drops for his third start back from a layoff, while **BOTTLE OF SMOKE** fits off his allowance/optional claiming wins at Golden Gate two and three starts back.

Fourth Race**1. Havnameltdown****2. Pure Fire****3. Dillinger**

Debut 2yo **HAVNAMELTDOWN** worked like a rocket from the gate July 15, a half-mile in a bullet 46-flat while blowing away allowance-caliber Velvet Slippers (work viewed on XBTV.com). 'MELTDOWN probably is the one to catch in his five-furlong dash. Otherwise, second-time starter **PURE FIRE** could be along in time. 'FIRE ran well finishing third in a stake while rallying from seventh to miss by only a length and a half. He is technically dropping in class to MSW, but realistically this tough spot might be stronger than the stake in which he ran. His closing style is opposite the top choice, which is a possible benefit. 'FIRE will rally. Also-eligible **DILLINGER**, stablemate to the top choice, has worked well including a July 7 gate drill in which he went better than Halosnheaven, a 2yo filly who was program favorite Saturday in race 4. **HAPPY TEARS** worked fast into his scheduled debut July 8 at Los Alamitos, but was a late scratch. He came back with a sharp half-mile work at Del Mar, and looks live.

Fifth Race**1. Johnny Podres****2. Caerulean****3. In Vronsky Style**

Plenty of speed in this Calbred N1X turf sprint, a scenario that suits the versatility of **JOHNNY PODRES**. He has won on the lead and also run well rallying from behind, and exits a highly rated race in which he finished second behind brilliant Bolden. Five furlongs is fine for 'PODRES; he won at this turf distance at DMR last summer. **CAERULEAN** misfired last out with trouble, all four previous starts this year at this level were solid. He finished in the money all four (no wins). He has a forwardly placed style that should allow him a good trip just off the speed. **IN VRONSKY STYLE** returns from a one-year layoff. He runs well on the lead, and from behind. The uncertainty is the five-furlong trip, which might be a bit short. Third preference, anyway. **ATOMIC DROP**, **FORGIVING SPIRIT** and **LIKE THE WIND** all have speed. The pace should be hot.

Sixth Race**1. Hacking It Up****2. Tapatío Leo****3. Stay in the Game**

Cal-bred maiden 2yos sprint five furlongs, second-time starter **HACKING IT UP** is the tepid choice. He ran okay first out, finishing third by less than

two lengths. The race was not fast, but he is likely to improve with a race under his belt. **TAPATIO LEO** appears to have trained well at San Luis Rey Downs. Sired by Stay Thirsty, he is a sibling to debut winner/Cal-bred stakes winner Cholula Lips. **STAY IN THE GAME** improved in his third career start, runner-up while finishing in front of the top choice. 'GAME seems to be figuring things out. **SHIP AND SCAM** adds blinkers and drops from an open maiden race in Kentucky to face Cal-breds. Upset candidate?

Seventh Race

1. Gold Phoenix

2. Rip City

3. Gregdar

It took a good horse to beat **GOLD PHOENIX** last out. That was G1-placed stablemate Cathkin Peak. 'PHOENIX finished second at even-money, but ran a winning race with a final three-eighths in 34.86 seconds. He has tactical speed, and can finish. That is a powerful combination. **RIP CITY** returns from a one-year layoff, entered for the optional \$80 claim tag. The 5-for-13 veteran has fired off similar layoffs in the past, and is a two-time winner at Del Mar. One-two finish for Little Red Feather? **GREGDAR** drops from graded stakes and will rally late. **NEPTUNE'S STORM** is a back-class graded winner nearing the \$1 million mark in career earnings. He also is entered for the optional claim tag.

Eighth Race

1. Extra Hope

2. Heywoods Beach

3. Tizamagician

EXTRA HOPE, who was gelded in February and is rounding back into form, gets the call to win this G3 dirt marathon. His runner-up last out to improving Parnelli was promising; 'HOPE subsequently worked with G1-placed Royal Ship. Although Royal Ship worked better, it was a creditable drill by 'HOPE, who won a G3 at Del Mar in fall 2020. He is the "now" horse. But it's a close call between him and **HEYWOODS BEACH**. The latter ran super finishing fourth last out in a G1 turf mile that unfolded at a blazing pace. 'BEACH hung tough to deep stretch before tiring. That was his first start since last summer, he might be a better horse this year at age 5. **TIZAMAGICIAN** won this stake race a year ago and enters as undeniably the best horse in the field. However, this is his first start since November. He can win if he is ready, but a mile and a half first start back is a tall order. The consistent veteran finished one-two 14 of 21 starts.

Ninth Race

1. Smooth Like Strait

2. Gregorian Chant

3. Bran

Class standout **SMOOTH LIKE STRAIT** drops from a series of second- and third-place finish in G1-G2 races to run in a restricted stake. G1 winner whose six DMR turf starts produced two wins and four seconds including a Breeders' Cup Mile runner-up last fall, 'STRAIT has speed to establish position from post 12. With a pressing trip, the top-class turf horse should be tough to beat at low odds. **GREGORIAN CHANT** and **BRAN** are graded stakes-winning turf sprinters who fit the conditions of this restricted stake (non-winners \$50k at a mile or more since Sept. 1). The sprinters are tough to separate, they have traded decisions. **GREGORIAN CHANT** has won running long at DMR, and drops from G1-G2 races. **BRAN** is up in class off a G3 win, and stretching to the longest distance of his career. His stable is good with stretch-outs. Cal-bred stakes winner **INDIAN PEAK** has run races fast enough to give him a longshot look. But the truth is, the favorite looks formidable.

Tenth Race

1. Hail Freedom

2. Ajaaweed

3. Holden the Lute

HAIL FREEDOM found his niche: long on dirt. The Cal-bred stretched out for the first time on dirt last out, set a blistering pace, and dominated by seven lengths with a big number. He worked fast since, and if he reproduces his Santa Anita form at DMR, can lead the field gate to wire. But a longshot worth fiddling with is **AJAAWEED**. He broke slowly, raced wide and merely ran around the track last time while making his first start since last summer and first for new connections. He ran like he needed a prep. Blinkers on, his trainer does well second off the layoff, and **AJAAWEED** ran races on the East Coast fast enough for a N1X on the West Coast. He is a legit price play. **HOLDEN THE LUTE** and **TROUBADOUR** finished two-four last out in the race the aforementioned longshot exits. Both have speed, winning connections, and will be positioned within striking range of the pacesetter.

Eleventh Race

1. Rhea Moon

2. Ballet Dancing

3. Annie's Song

Improving **RHEA MOON** faces N1X turf fillies following a convincing maiden win at a mile and one-eighth. Each start by the European import was better than the start before; this slightly shorter trip is ideal. In her runner-up U.S. debut in March at one mile, she ran faster each successive quarter-mile (:24.66, :24.19, :24.03, :22.51. 'MOON can rally for the win moving up in class. **BALLET DANCING** should vie for favoritism off her fast maiden win two back and third last out in the G3 Honeymoon. The runner-up from that race (Island of Love) was scheduled to start as a contender in the G2 San Clemente on Saturday. **ANNIE'S SONG** is a pace play, sprint to route first off the claim by John Sadler. 'SONG gets a seven-pound weight break under apprentice Emily Ellingwood, whose record with Sadler is 8-for-17 since last summer. **ANNIE'S SONG** could steal it.