

Featured Contest Race Analysis

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Race 9

I was all about trying to beat the favorite in yesterday's contest race, a turf-sprint that I thought was pretty wide-open. Instead, Oil, the 2/1 post-time favorite who was trying turf for the very first time, made the early lead, set ridiculously slow fractions, and continued to wire the field without so much as a minor threat. Here was my "verdict" on him: *"Sure, he can definitely win because he's fast and fast early, but at the price he's likely to be, I'll take my chances elsewhere."* And so I did. Even though I really liked both Signature Cat (5/1) and Law Dog (7/1), I used my wiseguy pick, Avanti Bello (11/1), as my contest play. He ran like a short horse who was prepping for a race down the road.

Today's contest race—a one-mile turf affair for \$62K/N2X fillies and mares—looks to be wide-open, with the morning-line favorite, an Also Eligible (AE), listed at 3/1.

#1 ROYAL TEMPTRESS (IRE) (9/2) is just one of those horses who always seems to find trouble for herself, and the reason for that is: she's a deep closer. After winning an entry-level allowance race in just her second U.S. start, she's now been toiling at this second condition for seven tries. The good news is: she rarely runs a bad race and fires every time. The bad news is: she's at the mercy of pace and trip. That being said, she's making her second start off a brief freshening, and I love Puype runners second-off. *VERDICT: She'll come running late, like she always does—and she's certainly good enough to win; is today the day she gets some racing luck?*

#2 MANGITA (6/1) is a hard-tryer—you don't finish in-the-money 10 out of 14 times unless you're in there scrapping, but her races at this level haven't been her best. She's tried this condition three times, and she's finished fifth (on dirt), seventh (on turf), and fourth (on turf), losing to several of these in the process. *VERDICT: She's got some tactical speed, and Aaron Gryder knows her very well, so she should get a good trip, but she'll have to turn the tables on many of today's foes.*

#3 ARETHUSA (12/1) is a bit of a one-paced sort who will just try to grind out a victory, just like she did when clearing the N1X hurdle going 1-1/8 miles at Santa Anita in March. Since then, she's had three poor races in a row, including a sixth-place finish on the turf at this level. But optimists can make excuses for each of those races (stakes-company, trouble, and dirt). Even still, she's a deep closer who will have to outkick the rail horse, who has already beaten her. *VERDICT: I don't think she's as good as some in here, but if the race completely falls apart, you know she'll be grinding away in the lane.*

#4 BUTTERCUP GOLD (10/1) has acted on all surfaces, but the best race of her life came when running one-mile on the turf up at Golden Gate to dead-heat for the victory against entry-level allowance runners. She followed that up with a fifth-place finish in an overnight-stakes at Santa Rosa, where she had an eventful trip. I think several folks might gravitate to her because right now Hollendorfer is going

great-guns, but keep in mind that she's a 3-year-old who has only faced elders once before, and that resulted in a third-place finish. I also don't like that she coughed up the lead to the very mediocre Backstreet Lisa three back in an off-the-turf \$40K claimer. The presence of Tyler Baze makes me think they'll try to be aggressive with her tactical speed with the rails out 18-feet—but I'm not sure that's such a good plan with more quality speed entered here. *VERDICT: It's tough to ignore King Jerry at a price, and I do like the fact that this girl's last race is better than it looks, but I'm concerned about her facing elders.*

#5 SHYSHEISNOT (12/1) has been pretty soundly beaten in her two starts since joining the Sise barn from Sadler. Sise is an excellent trainer, but he's not exactly known as a turf guru. I do like the fact that she's making the third start of her form cycle, and I like the way Sise brought her back—he gave her a tune-up in a 5-furlong turf sprint before trying Cal-bred stakes runners, where she had significant traffic issues in the lane. Because of that, I'm expecting her to fire her best effort today. *VERDICT: Her best might not be good enough, but I like the way she is coming into this race—and at the price, she might be worth a contest gamble for me.*

#6 FULL RANSOM (6/1) has gotten no respect at the windows of late, which is a little odd considering she was a Grade 3 winner as a 2-year-old. Sure, she hasn't quite trained on, but remember the adage: form is temporary; class is permanent. She's had five tries at this level, to no avail, but she did just miss by a half-length last time, so a step forward today could certainly put her in the frame—though I am concerned about the fact that she's winless since November 2013. *VERDICT: She has back-class and a good recent race in her favor, but I'm seeing her more as an exotics horse than a win-candidate at this point.*

#7 COLONEL JOAN (8/1) is another deep-closer who will have to outkick the rail horse, but I do like the fact that she brings a 2: 1-1-0 Del Mar turf record to the proceedings, so maybe she will be ready to fire her best shot at the seaside oval. It's also interesting to note that Eoin Harty added blinkers last time and is now taking them back off today. This gal has also raced against some tough customers, so she's battle-tested as well. *VERDICT: She's another one who can certainly be in the frame after uncorking a late run.*

#8 NATIVE HEART (GB) (8/1) hasn't been seen since July 2014, where she was well-beaten at Penn National. Before that, she ran two excellent races in the UK, but both came at lesser tracks and on courses with cut in the ground—something she won't get here. She's making her first SoCal start for Gary Mandella, and Mike Smith is enticed to take the mount. By all accounts, she's been working very well in the mornings, so time will tell just where she belongs on this circuit. *VERDICT: I can't fault anyone for taking the new face-in-the-crowd with two smashing UK wins, but clearly this gal is an unknown, and a bet on her is more of a bet-against everyone else.*

#9 LONG HOT SUMMER (7/2) is a 3-year-old facing elders for the very first time, and she brings some sharp early zip to the proceedings. It's tough to knock a horse that has finished out-of-the-money only once in six starts, especially when a few of those races were stakes races (albeit age-restricted ones), but

she has given up position late in a few of her races. *VERDICT: No doubt, there's talent here, and it's quite possible that she can scoot away from the field leaving the backstretch, challenging all closers to come and catch her if they can—but at the price she's likely to be, I think I'll go price-shopping instead. If she wins, then I'll tip my cap to a promising young filly.*

#10 GUSTO DOLCE (URU) (5/1) has won races on two continents, and will now look to make North America her third land conquered. She was a very nice dirt horse in Brazil, winning a Grade 2 before relocating to France, where she won at 1-1/4 miles on the turf. Since she came to SoCal, trainer Richard Mandella has tried her twice in dirt miles, where she offered up mixed results. She also hasn't been able to string races together, so who knows if getting her on turf was the plan all along or if they're just trying to shake things up. Andy Harrington seems to think she'll love the turf from her morning workouts, so that's good enough for me—but my biggest concern is the distance: one-mile might be too short for her, since her best races came at 1-1/4 miles. *VERDICT: Richard Mandella is one of my favorite trainers of all-time, so I have to respect this gal's chances, but the tough post and short distance are major concerns for me.*

#11 BEAT OF THE DRUM (IRE) (5/1), the first Also Eligible (AE), surprised me with how well she ran here when she checked in second against tougher company. She was 25/1 that day, and I thought she should have been even higher, since her prior claims to fame were winning a cheap race at Kempton on the synth and taking a stakes race in China on dirt. Yes, you read that right: China. I didn't even know they raced horses in China! If she gets in, I suspect a lot of people will use her off that very solid last race, but she ran so good that day, I'd be worried about a bounce, especially since she doesn't seem to be the soundest of horses, considering all of her layoff lines. *VERDICT: Even though she ran a very fast last race, I'm happy letting her beat me in this classic wedding/funeral scenario, since the time you wanted to bet her was when she was 25/1.*

#12 MAJESTIC HEAT (3/1), the second AE, is the morning-line favorite, based on this 3-year-old's solid Del Mar performances—and therein lies the rub. This will be her fifth start this meet. That's a pretty tough campaign for a 3-year-old filly, especially coming off two pretty quick races, including a respectable fifth-place finish in the Del Mar Oaks (G1). *VERDICT: I like the way she finishes races with a nice closing kick, but I can't support a 3-year-old turf filly with that many races since July 17, especially at a short number.*

#13 DOODETTA (10/1) has never gone two turns on the turf—a strange thing considering she's trained by Neil Drysdale. That right there is concern number-one (though she did finish fourth in a one-mile synth race last summer). The second concern is that she's gotten slower speed figs in every subsequent race since posting a very sharp downhill win on June 28. She's not my kind of play, but then again, I have a very hard time knowing when Drysdale runners are going to fire, so use your own judgment on this one. *VERDICT: I'd have to think if Drysdale thought she could be a good turf router then he would have tried this move a lot sooner.*