DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
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Date: 8/7/2019
Race 3: $32K/N2L contested at 8F on the lawn (rails at 24-feet)
Post: approx. post 3:00 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've got a full field of $32K beaten-claimers (N2L) going one mile on the lawn with the rails at 24-feet—that means forwardly placed runners should have an advantage, but **OptixPLOT** has this race pegged as having a hot pace. Unfortunately, I'm not enamored with any of the closers in here, making this a very tough race for me, but let's see if we can sniff out a winner anyway…

#1 HOOTIE (12/1) was running against some decent foes last year, but he was stuck at the N1X level, mostly due to his own antics: he has a hard time settling during the race. Last time, he was offered for a $16K tag at Los Al while racing on the dirt, yet no one took the bait. He ran an okay second, but that was obviously against weaker company. I have always wanted them to just let this guy run and not fight the bit—but unfortunately, if they try that today (which I even doubt they will), he'll have to carve out quick early splits, and that will be a problem late. That said, he's capable of winning this race on his very best day. GRADE: C.

#2 COMBAT ZONE (5/1) should trip out, sitting right behind the pacesetters while saving all of the ground, waiting to pounce heading into the lane. He gets some class-relief today as he drops down from the $40K beaten-claiming level to face these $32K foes. He's obvious in here, but he's likely to be overbet given the Sadler/Hronis connections and the positive works. GRADE: B.

#3 MR. MAGICO (12/1) was up against the course profile at Santa Anita, since he's a bit of a one-paced plodder who just kind of runs along, hoping for the race to fall apart. That style has been good enough to pick up plenty of minor awards, but it should be noted that all of his placings here in SoCal came against $25K types. He faces tougher today, but the race shape should flatter his grinding style, making him an interesting underneath horse at a big price. GRADE: C.

#4 WAR CHEST (6/1) is a better animal than most of these, but the move to Maldonado today makes me think they are just going to send this class-dropper hard and hope for the best. Normally, I would applaud that move, but there figures to be a quick pace in here, so this guy will have to earn the victory today. That said, his come-home times against tougher allowance types mean that if he can conserve some energy for the stretch run, he could prove very tough, since this is the weakest field he's faced since coming to SoCal. GRADE: A.

#5 AUSSIE FOX (6/1) likes to do his running from off the pace, and that will suit him just fine in a race that looks to have a quick early pace. That's the positive. The negative is that this guy took a while to break his maiden, which he finally did against five $50K runners last time, showing off a decent stretch run to win easily at 2/1. The waters get deeper today, and it should be noted that Combat Zone has him

squarely on form. At least you know Mullins is going great-guns right now, and the pace should flatter this guy's performance if he's good enough. GRADE: B.

#6 SOUL BEAM (3/1) is the tepid morning-line favorite at 3/1, and I can see why: he has good races against slightly better foes, and he attracts the services of Prat, who is guaranteed to have this guy in a good spot, no matter what the pace. I can see him getting a good tracking trip while waiting for an opportunity to make his run. I also like that he came off a brief freshening last time to prep in a dirt race (while protected) while seemingly pointing to this logical turf spot. Vallejo and Battle Born have been spotting horses brilliantly for the last few years, so I have no doubt that this guy will be ready to run his race. GRADE: A.

#7 PASSIONATE REWARD (7/2) has sprint speed, so he should be part of a swift early pace while stretching out for the first time for Mandella—a guy who knows how to get them ready for spots like this. He also gets massive class-relief after finding N1X foes too tough, so he'll have every chance to show his best stuff today. He's obvious on traditional handicapping, but I'm going to rely on the fact that I think it will be a quick pace and look to beat this guy for the top spot. GRADE: B.

#8 ELITE MOTION (20/1) just broke his maiden wiring $40K foes while sprinting at Los Al—hardly the path to victory going two turns on turf at Del Mar. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Kathy Walsh—one of my favorite trainers—but this looks like a tough spot for a recent maiden-breaker, since he'll have to go two turns on turf for the first time while dealing with a swift early pace. Maybe this is a conditioning race for a dirt cutback next time against lesser foes (since the breeding doesn't exactly scream "green" to me). GRADE: X.

#9 HE'S LIKE VIOLENCE (12/1) tried to wire $32K foes last year over this course and was overtaken late. It was a good effort, but it came back in August of 2018. He's been gone since and now returns a "waiver-claim," meaning he doesn't have to run for the tag today. Some trainers use that stipulation to give their horse a prep race…other trainers use it to "steal" a race without having to run for the tag. The works aren't anything special, and the pace and post don't help this guy's chances, but Papaprodromou is a pretty shrewd trainer who can pop at a price. Still, I think I have to watch one today. GRADE: C.

#10 ACK (20/1) is another horse who likes to be forwardly placed, so it wouldn't shock me if the aggressive Fuentes tried to put him in the race early. Trainer Reed Saldana does fine work second off the bench, but note that this runner is a 3-year-old who faces elders for the first time since April 14, where he ran third while going a mile on the dirt, setting the pace in a starter-allowance before getting easily overtaken. He seems up against it from a pace and post perspective, but Saldana runners should always be given a close look, and it should be noted that this guy does have a recent race over this course. GRADE: C.

#11 NEVERMISSABEAT (12/1) knows how to pass horses, so it would behoove Bejarano to just angle over early, save ground, and hope to get lucky as the speed horses start to falter. While I like this runner from a pace perspective, since he knows how to pass horses, I am concerned about the layoff, since this guy was last seen back in October running down the hill against Cal-bred N1X types—and Gaines typically gives them a start off the bench. On the plus side, this is the first time for a tag for this guy, so maybe Gaines will have him ready for a top effort off the bench. He's worth a nibble at a big price. GRADE: B.

CONCLUSION

I need to board-watch here, since the logical shorter-priced horses don't do me any favors. I'd be surprised if **#4 WAR CHEST** went off at 6/1, but if he does, he's worth a look (though we'll have to hope that Maldonado doesn't get caught up in a quick pace). Both **#5 AUSSIE FOX** and **#11 NEVERMISSABEAT** look good on **OptixPLOT**, showing the best finishing ability from off the pace, but they aren't without their questions either. This is a tough race!

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