DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
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Date: 8/10/2019
Race 5: $62.5K optional-claiming/N2X contested at 8F on turf (rails at 24-ft.)
Post: approx. post 4:07 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

Today's contest race is the fifth race on a nine-race Saturday card. It's an interesting $62.5K optional-claiming/N2X contested at 8-furlongs on the lawn with the rails at 24-feet. There should be an honest pace in here according to the **OptixPLOT** "*SpeedRate*", but the rail setting does the closers no favors.

#1 MR. ROARY (10/1) was claimed back on May 13, 2018, and he hasn't been seen since—not a good thing. But Mullins is a good horseman who probably has a plan for this 6-year-old warrior, who is a Grade 3 winner and battle-tested against some very good turf animals. The fact that he brings him back protected as a waive-claim at the same level he bought him makes me think that this is probably a prep race for something else—but the presence of Delgadillo sure does tip their hand: send hard and hope for the best. Believers will point to the fact that Mullins is having an excellent meet. GRADE: C.

#2 DR. TROUTMAN (4/1) has plenty of speed and cuts back from two 9-furlong races where he ran respectably at both the N1X level and this N2X level. He'll have to go a quicker clip at today's shorter distance, but at least you know he's fit and in good form. I like that he's a Papaprodromou claim-back, and he is lucky that the Del Mar course has been more kind to speed this past week, but I don't think the race-shape favors him, and it should be noted that this runner is 0-for-10 going a flat mile. GRADE: C.

#3 STARTING BLOC (5/1) is a deep closer who has been stuck at this level for a while since he is always at the mercy of pace and trip. Fortunately, he should get an honest pace to close into, and his come-home times are among the best in the field, so if the anticipated hot pace develops, this guy should be flying late. The downside is: the rails are at 24-feet, and that means Espinoza will have to work some magic from way off the pace (and that also means showing infinite patience instead of swinging out too early). That said, I'm hoping he's a smidge higher than 5/1, and that would make him a decent contest play to me, especially with a nice push by **OptixWORKS**. GRADE: A.

#4 MY ITALIAN BABBO (15/1) is coming off a 684-day layoff while making his first start for the Sierra barn. While trained by Baltas, this guy did good work on turf and dirt and at all kinds of distances, so there is quality here—but between the barn change and the long layoff, I'm just going to watch one today and look for him net time. GRADE: X.

#5 ANDESH (IRE) (5/2) ran a few good races last year as a sophomore while racing 9-furlongs, so I wonder if this 8-furlong race is a prep for something down the road, since this guy is coming off a 279-day layoff, and the best race of his life came in his third U.S. start off the boat. Still, the presence of Prat, coupled with normal improvement from a horse who ran well as a 3-year-old and is now making his 4-year-old debut, means this new gelding will have every chance to show his best stuff if he's ready. For the purposes of the contest, however, I want to take him on. GRADE: B.

#6 DREAMS OF VALOR (6/1) has sharp route speed, and Maldonado is no shrinking violet when it comes to putting horses in the race. Expect this guy to blast out and either make the lead or make things difficult for the two inside horses. He does look to be sitting on a peak effort, making the second start of his form cycle after prepping here opening week in a 5-furlong turf sprint. That said, he has had his fair share of chances at this N2X level. He seems better suited for underneath methinks. GRADE: C.

#7 MANHATTAN UP (10/1) was a wise-guy pick for me in the Oceanside at 11/1, but he just ran an even sixth, looking like a horse who would really appreciate getting back around one turn. Well, this 3-year-old is staying around two turns on turf while having to face elders for the first time. I'd love him so much more in a 6.5-furlong or 7-furlong dirt race, but it should be noted that there has always been some quality here (as a graded-stakes placed runner). Still, this seems like a tough ask. GRADE: X.

#8 ACKER (3/1) is going to be tough in here, cutting back after a 9-furlong race where he ran third at this level—and was claimed out of the race by Peter Miller, who could pretty much saddle a donkey to win a race here this meet, as he is positively on fire! This six-time winner has always been honest, and he's tactical enough to get the right trip from this outside post, angling over and tracking in the 2-path just behind the speed horses. I also like that Bejarano—who knows him well—rides through the claim. That's always a positive angle to me. GRADE: A.

CONCLUSION
I think **#8 ACKER (3/1)** is going to be tough and also nowhere near his 3/1 morning-line, so he's not a value play for me. I also think **#5 ANDESH (IRE) (5/2)** is a nice horse with plenty of upside—but still no value. I'll look at **#3 STARTING BLOC (5/1)**, knowing full well that the rail settings create a severe disadvantage for this deep-closer and also knowing there's a chance Espinoza will take him very wide around the turn as he begins to wind up—but maybe I will be compensated with a good price, and that would make him a play.

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