DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 8/16/2019
Race 2: Cal-bred $20K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 5-furlongs on turf (rail at 30-ft.)
Post: approx. post 4:30 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW
Today's contest race—a Cal-bred $20K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 5-furlongs on the turf with the rails at 30-feet—doesn't look to have a hot pace, but it does figure to have a contentious one (according to **OptixPLOT**) with several early/presser types vying for supremacy in the early stages of the race. Yesterday's 5-furlong turf sprint played very fair, with the pacesetters who dueled getting run down by the strongest finisher in the race, despite the rails being out at 30-feet, so let's see how this particular race shapes up today. Admittedly, I don't have a strong opinion in here.

#1 EXECUTIVE CAT—program scratch.

#2 ZIPPER MISCHIEF (7/2) came off a 285-day layoff last time to contest the pace before drawing off to win easily against eight other Cal-bred Maiden Special Weights. While it was a sharp effort, he now has to step up and face winners for the first time, while hoping he doesn't regress off that performance. Trainer Blake Heap does a fine job with his turf-sprinters, so it wouldn't shock me if this one continued to progress, but it should be noted that he got away with such slow early fractions last time that he's going to have to earn victory today if he's to be part of a faster early pace. If he's not part of the early pace, then he's going to have to prove he can pass horses while being buried down inside. The 7/2 morning-line is too short to take for my liking. GRADE: C.

#3 TIGER DAD (5/2) came off a 203-day layoff last time and ran a creditable second, getting edged late after dueling 3-wide and probably being a little short, since Carla Gaines runners typically do much better second off the bench. He should fire a big shot in here, and this 3-year-old has already proven he can be competitive against older horses, as was the case in his last race. He'll be in the vanguard early with several of the others, so that could soften him up a tad late, but he's an obvious contender in here who will be very tough with any kind of move forward today. GRADE: B.

#4 TRISTRAM SPEAKER (3/1) looked very good breaking his maiden up north going 6-furlongs on the synth and winning by eight-lengths. It was an auspicious debut, but he only had to beat four other horses, so he was in for a rude awakening when he came down south to face eight entry-level allowance Cal-breds going 6-furlongs on dirt, where he dueled between horses and weakened to finish third. I can be a little forgiving of any horse's first try against winners, but now this son of Indian Evening has to try turf for the first time while also being part of a contentious early pace (since he was up on the lead in both of his starts). Prat taking the call is interesting, but 3/1 seems short on a horse who gives mixed signals on his turf breeding (i.e., none on top, but the dam was a versatile producer). GRADE: B.

#5 SIR EDDIE (8/1) is 1-for-17 with six seconds and three thirds—in other words, he's a nice horse to own and use in your exotics, but he's tough to support on the win end. That said, I do think he's sitting on

a big race, getting back on turf after prepping in a 6-furlong dirt race against starter-allowance foes on July 31 (after coming off a 75-day freshening). He's shown he likes this course and trip, so you can expect he'll be running on late, and it wouldn't surprise me at all if he rounded out the exotics—but as mentioned, his inability to get the win has been a little disconcerting. GRADE: C.

#6 RINSE AND REPEAT (4/1) doesn't have much early speed, and that will be an issue for him today in this 5-furlong sprint, since he's been coming off the pace in one-mile turf races. Curiously, however, he did start his career running in abbreviated sprints on dirt—and running respectably, so maybe Knapp is on to something by trying this 5-year-old at this much shorter distance. But I'm inclined to watch one, since this guy has also had his chances at the Cal-bred N1X level and hasn't really been able to get the job done (though he has come close a few times). Expect him on the scene late to round out your exotics, but 4/1 seems a bit short on a 2-for-27 runner with 11 minor placings. GRADE: C.

#7 TRIBAL WAR CHANT (12/1) came off a 209-day layoff to contest the early pace before wilting to finish sixth, losing to Tiger Dad in the process. I can forgive that race, since he probably needed one, but he's a 3-year-old who will need to show significant improvement today while attending the pace from this outside post. On the plus side, Bejarano sees fit to ride, and he's been on a bit of a tear lately, so you can expect a better effort from this NorCal runner who did solid work against open sophomores last year—but will it be good enough? GRADE: C.

#8 J T'S A. T. M. (12/1) has done decent work on dirt, but he's 0-for-4 on turf. He did run a decent second turf-sprinting up north last November while facing N1X types, but it should be noted that only one horse from that race came back to run decently in his next start, so it wasn't that tough of an allowance group. It should also be noted that his best races came when trained by Tamayo, who was perfectly fine losing this one for $25K back in January. He hasn't been seen since, and that's not a good thing—nor is the fact that he'll have to be ready to roll today off just Los Al works for the new barn. I'm inclined to watch one, especially since this one is in for a very wide stalking journey. GRADE: C.

#9 SHORT OF EZ (6/1) was running in claimers until Puype finally decided to try him against these types of runners back in March down the hill—he stalked the pace and weakened badly at 31/1. The distance clearly got to him that day, and he's been freshened since. Puype is very good off the layoff, and it's encouraging to see Van Dyke take the call, making me think this one will be ready to fire his best shot today off the bench—though we are taking a big leap of faith here because this guy's form is nothing special, and the fact that he was such a big price last time at this level makes me think that he's going to need lesser foes to really shine. Still, he faces no world-beaters today and should be longer than his 6/1 morning-line, making him a little intriguing as an alternative to the favorite. GRADE: A.

#10 GUTSY RULER (6/1) has races on his form that would destroy this field—but they came two and three years ago! Last time, he came off a 715-day layoff to chase the pace against $40K claimers before weakening to finish eighth. It was a dull effort, but this 8-year-old warrior surely needed that start. Does he have one more big race in him, second off the bench and dropping into this statebred AOC while running for the $20K optional tag? Probably not, but he won't have to summon much to beat this pretty mediocre field—and if he wins, I'll tip my cap and applaud this old warrior, but I have to think one of the younger foes will be hungrier than this one today. GRADE C.

CONCLUSION

No surprise that **#3 TIGER DAD (5/2)** is the one to beat as the correct morning-line favorite, since any slight improvement off his last race should make him very tough. I'm not crazy about the other logical contenders or their likely short prices, so maybe I'll look to **#9 SHORT OF EZ (6/1)**, who should be a decent number. He looks terrible on form, but Puype brings them back ready to run, and why is Van Dyke bothering to ride?

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