DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 8/18/2019
Race 7: $200K Del Mar Mile Handicap (G2) contested at 8F on turf (rail at 0-ft.)
Post: approx. post 5:00 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We close out this stellar weekend with Leo Vukmanovich (@Vukman) as my Sunday Handicapping Seminar guest (12:45 at Seaside Terrace or live on Twitter **@ScatoniSureShot**). Leo is a good friend and one of the sharpest handicappers and bettors I know—in addition to being one of the nicest guys on the planet—so be sure to come say hi or tune in!

As for the contest race, we've got an excellent renewal of the $200K Del Mar Mile Handicap (G2), an 8-furlong affair contested on the lawn—and trainer Phil D'Amato has three entered. Does he hold all of the cards?

#1 PRINCE EARL (12/1), the first D'Amato trainee, gets in at a feathery 116-pounds, making his first start as a 4-year-old and facing older stakes foes for the first time. Last year, this Cal-bred looked poised for some big things, but after a defeat at 4/5 in the Let It Ride last fall, his backers jumped ship and sent him off at 29/1 in the Hollywood Derby (G1). He actually ran a creditable fourth, having to break from the outside 13-post while trying to beat the likes of Raging Bull and River Boyne (Ire). He's been away since December 1, so he'll have to show maturity and progression in his first start of the year, but D'Amato is a guy who can have them ready for big efforts off the bench. Still, I'm inclined to watch one. GRADE: C.

#2 EL PICARO (CHI) (15/1) finished third in the Arlington Handicap (G3), which is a prep for the vaunted Arlington Million (G1). This guy chose today's shorter distance instead after setting the pace and weakening in that 9.5-furlong race. In Chile, he won at all manner of distances, so if shrewd trainer Correas thinks this guy is better suited at a mile, who am I to argue? One thing you might want to check out before the race: where did The Great Day (Arg) finish in the Del Mar Handicap (G2) on Saturday, since he was second in the same Arlington prep race this guy exits? You've heard me say plenty of times that East Coast horses with mediocre form often do well in SoCal when making their first starts here, and the presence of Van Dyke should not be ignored. At 15/1, I'll pay to find out if this one is any good. GRADE: A.

#3 MAJESTIC EAGLE (12/1) looked good when winning the American (G3) at Santa Anita back in June, defeating Sharp Samurai in the process, so he must be considered right back in here off that race—but part of me thinks that last time was the time you wanted this runner. He caught a six-horse field and a turf course that actually favored his tracking style despite having favored inside speed all meet long—so I'm not as impressed with that race as it looks on paper. Still, you can never count out a Drysdale turf runner, and this guy has never finished out of the money at today's mile distance. GRADE: C.

#4 BOMBARD (6/1) opened up to an easy lead last time and was able to hold sway in the Wickerr, a race that he ran second in last year, so running well in that race seems to be his M.O. Last year, he hit the shelf

after the Wickerr, while this year, he gets to test his mettle in the Del Mar Mile (G2) against some better animals. He only faced graded foes once before, and he was easily handled by a few of these—though in his defense, he was coming off a 336-day layoff and most likely needed that race. His tactical speed means he's ensured a good trip, but it should be noted that win-rider Prat (and Mandella's main-man) rightfully sticks with Bowies Hero. As I always say, "In Mandella, we trust," but it will take a big leap of faith to back this guy on the win end. GRADE: C.

#5 BOWIES HERO (5/2), the second D'Amato entrant, is a near-millionaire, having earned more than $870K in his five-year career. Last time, he powered home to win the Eddie Read (G2) in fine fashion, perhaps marking a return to form for a Grade 1 winner who is capable of running some big races. Can he move forward off that seasonal best? I don't see why not, though it should be noted that he did run a dud in this race last year, where something clearly went wrong because he disappeared for 251-days after this race last summer. If he fires his best, he's going to be tough. GRADE: A.

#6 DOUBLE TOUCH (GB) (30/1) has one really good race over this course, having won the Wickerr last year despite breaking from the 11-hole. Unfortunately, he hasn't been able to replicate that form, losing soundly against graded-stakes animals and then failing to frank his last summer's form by finishing sixth in this year's Wickerr. Dan Blacker does an excellent job with his runners, so he'll try adding blinkers today to see if he can get this 5-year-old to run a career-best today—and a career-best is what he's going to need to win this graded event. GRADE: X.

#7 GRECIAN FIRE (6/1) loves Del Mar, having run two huge races here, including a super-impressive victory a few weeks ago in the California Dreamin', where he encountered all sorts of trouble and still exploded home to beat ten other Cal-breds—and therein lies the rub: this guy's best turf work in California has been against state-breds. Still, he does have a Grade 3 win on synth against open-company, so he's not far off class-wise, but he will be facing the toughest field he's ever faced. I also don't like that win-rider Smith defects to Papa Mandella's horse, which makes me think that last time was really go-time, and that this guy is due for some regression today in this much harder spot. That said, I liked him last time, and as I mentioned before each of his California Dreamin' runs: get a good look at him in the paddock because when he looks good, he runs good. GRADE: C.

#8 WHAT A VIEW (6/1), the third D'Amato runner, makes his second start for that trainer after a solid career under Kenny Black's tutelage, where he was a super-fast miler who ran some big races. In his first start for D'Amato, he customarily set a quick pace but found the 8.5-furlong distance of the California Dreamin' too far. The cutback should do him wonders today, and the aggressive Garcia will likely send hard and hope this guy runs them off their feet, which has always been his strategy. Unfortunately, the presence of the also speedy Bolo to his outside is going to make things tricky for a wire job. There's no denying the back-class here—and there's no denying he's in good hands with D'Amato—but I can't help but think he's going to be a pace factor only in here. Though maybe he can hang around for a slice? GRADE: C.

#9 BOLO (5/1) has always been one of the best looking horses on the grounds—just a big, beautiful statue of a horse. I loved him the first time I set eyes on him when he was a 2-year-old. Since then, he's gone on to have a pretty good career, running some really big races, including last time when he captured the Shoemaker Mile (G1) at Santa Anita while making his second start off a 694-day layoff. It was a remarkable training job by Carla Gaines, but I have to say that the wire win was flattered by the speed-favoring course profile. He's been freshened since, and I'm sure he'll be on the muscle and ready to run

today—but What a View's presence just inside of him really makes things difficult for this speedy runner. That said, unlike What a View, this guy doesn't necessarily need the lead to win, so if Geroux can have him sit right off that foe's rump, he could easily have a say in the outcome—but I'm expecting a quick pace, and that will likely soften him up late for the win. GRADE: C.

#10 SHARP SAMURAI (6/1) is still trying to recapture the form that saw him dominate as a 3-year-old and then run some big races as a 4-year-old. His 5-year-old campaign has been a little lacking, unable to exhibit the eye of the tiger, losing to a few of these in the process. His very best is easily good enough—but has this warrior lost a step…or has this been the goal for Glatt all along? I'd be willing to give him another chance if he snuck away at a number, but the 10-post is going to do him no favors because he's a tactical type, and that means he's probably looking at a 3-wide stalking journey, and that trip rarely wins on the turf. GRADE: C.

#11 OHIO (BRZ) (15/1) is shockingly a Grade 1 winner—and I say shockingly because Paulo Lobo sold this guy for $50K back in June 2018, and then new trainer Michael McCarthy ran him for a $32K tag in his first start for his barn. Since that claiming win, however, this guy re-blossomed and started to run very competitively against some quality animals, culminating in a game victory in the Frank E. Kilroe (G1) back in March of this year. He did get a perfect on-the-pace trip through glacial splits, so he was a bit lucky, and he hasn't been able to show the same stick late in the lane in his two subsequent starts. The post is no picnic, and he's likely going to be hooked 3-wide trying to stalk off What a View and Bolo. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION
No surprise, **#5 BOWIES HERO (5/2)** is the deserving morning-line favorite and the one to beat, but he does us no favors in the contest. The rest of our SoCal runners are decent horses, but I'm not really crazy about any of them, which, of course, wants to make me land on the new face in the crowd: **#2 EL PICARO (CHI) (15/1)**. The U.S. form isn't anything to write home about, but he is a multiple Grade 1 winner in his native Chile, and that might be good enough to get the job done in here at a big number.

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