

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 8/31/2019

Race 5: \$80K optional-claiming/N1X for 3-year-olds going 8.5F on turf (rails at 0-ft.)

Post: approx. post 4:15 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've got a really nice 10-race card on this last Saturday of the meet, and today's contest race is a competitive \$80K optional-claiming/N1X for 3-year-olds only contested at 8.5-furlongs on the lawn (with the rails at 0-ft.). There won't be a super-fast pace in here, but with an **OptixPLOT "SpeedRate"** of "37", there should at least be an honest pace, making this a fairly run race with the rail settings at zero.

#1 GUM TREE LANE (7/2), the first D'Amato entrant, was 5/2 in his maiden-breaker, a one-mile dirt race at Los Al back in December. He's been off since then and now returns for his 3-year-old campaign, facing winners and trying turf for the first time. Prat sticks around, so I'm sure the works are very solid for a trainer who can have them ready—but 7/2 seems awfully short for a horse doing something for the very first time (especially since it's not like the breeding screams "turf," and the dam's progeny are currently 0-for-6 on the lawn). GRADE: C.

#2 BLAME IT ON KITTY (15/1) broke his maiden against \$50K foes back in February, saving ground and getting up on the inside to win by a length at 6/1. Since then, however, he hasn't had the same fortune against winners. Three back, he couldn't beat \$50K starter-foes going a mile on turf, just kind of running around the course. Last time, he ran an even fifth going a mile on dirt. Maybe he'll perk up second off the bench and getting back on turf, but he'll need a major step forward in this class test today. GRADE: C.

#3 FEDERAL CASE (9/2) has to be considered even though it's his first try ever on turf after a steady diet of dirt races back East while racing for Pletcher (and Brisset before that) and facing some really tough customers in graded-stakes races. Still, I'm not crazy about the breeding for turf (the dam has yet to throw a turf runner and she herself was 0-for-4 on the lawn), and there is a chance that McCarthy—who has had an uncharacteristically quiet meet—is using this as a prep race for a dirt race at Santa Anita. The class-relief means you should think about him, but there are plenty of questions that need to be answered—like, why risk him for the \$80K optional tag instead of trying him against N2X foes out here first? GRADE: B.

#4 RED ISLAND (IRE) (8/1), the second D'Amato runner, got a stalking trip at this level and distance last time and failed to kick on, despite being forwardly placed in a race that unfolded at a glacial pace. Maybe the stalking-wide trip was a problem, but he still should have shown more starch in the lane. Well, D'Amato looks to shake things up today by adding blinkers and putting up Espinoza, who will likely have this one in the vanguard early. I think that means he'll get soft late. GRADE: C.

#5 MO FORZA (12/1) has never run a bad race, but he's still a maiden, failing to graduate in four tries, including three times going two turns on turf. Two back, he had the lead late at this distance but was overtaken. Last time, he stalked wide before getting outfinished late. Prat sticks with the rail horse, and

that's a red flag to me, since he and Miller have teamed up for a lot of wins this meet. The presence of Garcia means he's likely to get a very similar wide stalking trip today. GRADE: C.

#6 SWAMP SOUFFLE (15/1) has some early speed, so I expect him to be in the vanguard despite the fact that he chased the pace last time while racing on dirt against tougher older foes. He's now back on the lawn against fellow 3-year-olds, and if you look at those races of his from Santa Anita, you'll see that he attended the pace before getting weak late. I think a similar fate awaits today, especially since this one has done his best work against weaker foes. That said, that last race is a toss-out race, so it wouldn't shock me if this one ran much better today second off the bench and getting class-relief. Still, I'm not crazy about the pace scenario for him. GRADE: C.

#7 CRYSTAL TRIBE (IRE) (5/1) adds Lasix for his U.S. debut—and that's enough for me to make him my top selection, since Mullins is having a terrific meet, and owner Karl Pergola has done well with his stock. Van Dyke takes the call, and this guy's Euro form has him having won two races, so he knows how to find the wire. I expect to see a big stretch run today on a horse who showed he could finish races overseas. The problem is: I doubt he'll be 5/1 if he's truly live. GRADE: A.

#8 EAGLE SONG (IRE) (6/1) is another European import who notched two wins before embarking on a U.S. campaign that saw him run a decent race at this level back on February 1 when racing a mile on the lawn at Santa Anita. Toss the off-the-turf Pasadena and focus on the fact that he makes the second start of his form cycle after prepping in a 5-furlong turf race, where he ran on nicely through the lane, looking every bit like a horse who would appreciate more ground today. GRADE: A.

#9 SOBERANO (FR) (20/1) is yet another runner who has earned two victories overseas. He now makes his U.S. debut for Bell, whose only other recent import is still looking for his first win in three tries here at the Del Mar meet, so I'm inclined to watch this guy today, especially since his two wins in France were on the synth. Still, you can't fully discount Euro imports against our lot. GRADE: C.

#10 OCEAN FURY (6/1) got a perfect trip and set-up last time when beating starter-allowance foes going a mile over this course. The waters get deeper today, but at least you get a horse who is in good form with a win here at Del Mar. Maybe you can use him underneath, since the post is no picnic—and this is a pretty fair step up from the runners he beat last time (and I should know because I expected second-place finisher River God to run much better in his next start, and he didn't!). GRADE: C.

#11 CARNIVOROUS (8/1) has tactical speed, so Gutierrez will have to use some of that to angle over and get position from this tough outside post. Still, this one has won at this N1X level twice before, so he fits like a glove here (and hence the \$80K optional tag). The concern to me is the distance, since two back he had the lead late at 8.5-furlongs but was easily overtaken. He seems better suited to underneath. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION

I feel pretty good about **#7 CRYSTAL TRIBE (IRE) (5/1)** in here, since he won't have to be a superstar to beat this N1X group; if his odds make him unplayable, I have a good alternative in **#8 EAGLE SONG (IRE) (6/1)** who should move forward big-time today second off the bench and with Smith hopping back aboard.

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