DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
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Date: 9/1/2019
Race 9: $250K Del Mar Derby (G2) for 3-year-olds going 9F on turf (rails at 0-ft.)
Post: approx. post 6:09 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've got a fine renewal of the $250K Del Mar Derby (G2) as today's contest race, a 9-furlong turf affair for 3-year-olds only. It's the conclusion of the excellent sophomore turf series of races we have every summer at Del Mar, which includes the 8-furlong Oceanside and the 8.5-furlong La Jolla (G3). A solid field of 10 horses have been entered—and there sure looks to be a decent amount of speed on **OptixPLOT**.

#1 WALKER STALKER (30/1) goes out for the first time for the hot Bonde barn, but this seems like a tough spot for this gal's SoCal debut: trying turf for the first time after a mixed bag of dirt races in the minor leagues. I have to think Fuentes is just going to send hard and hope for the best while breaking from this rail post. I am perfectly fine letting this one beat me today. GRADE: X.

#2 HACKBERRY (20/1) was even-money last time against seven other maidens, and he did what he was supposed to do, winning fairly easily with a perfect tracking trip. It was a nice, professional effort for a maiden-breaker, and the way he finished up suggests he should continue to improve as a lightly raced sophomore—but I doubt the quality of the field he beat. Several have come back to run blah races, and the only winner out of that race needed $50K maiden-claimers to graduate. Maybe look for down the road against allowance runners. GRADE: C.

#3 NOLDE (5/1) should have won the Oceanside, but a 3-wide stalking trip was the "nose" difference in that race. Espinoza rode that race like it was a dirt race, stalking wide and pouncing—and that's rarely the winning move on turf. But this one has an abundance of talent, so that ground-loss trip last time almost didn't matter. Plus, he lost to a quality animal, so there was no shame there. I like that Shirreffs skipped the La Jolla (G3) to run here, and any added ground today shouldn't be an issue based on this one's come-home times. He's super-obvious in here, but I really don't trust the jockey to give this one the best ride possible, though 5/1 is a pretty good price on this talented runner. GRADE: B.

#4 ORIGINAIRE (IRE) (4/1), the first of two Mullins runners, was very average in Kentucky, but he made his first SoCal start a winning one by dropping out the back despite a slow pace and then exploding home to win by a length. One horse from that race came back to win while a few others finished second and third, so it wasn't a bad entry-level allowance. The strongest thing, however, is that this horse was able to close so well despite having zero pace to close into. Clearly, the removal of the hood did wonders for this guy, and it wouldn't shock me if he ran another big one today. GRADE: A.

#5 NEPTUNE'S STORM (7/2) should have won the La Jolla (G3), but Van Dyke allowed rival Kingly to get an easy lead, and he wasn't able to make up the deficit late, losing by a neck. He was 19/10 that day, so he probably should have won anyway, but I can be forgiving of that defeat, since Kingly was basically

handed the race. He gets a jock switch to Geroux today, and we've seen how good that Frenchman has been in his limited starts out West this summer. That said, it's likely that Van Dyke sided with another in here, and that is a slight knock against this very honest runner who projects a perfect forwardly placed trip and has enough class to get the job done today as a legitimate threat. GRADE: B.

#6 VISITANT (8/1) traded decisions with Kingly on the synth up north, so if you believe Kingly's La Jolla (G3) win, then you should consider this one a threat in here. Unfortunately, I think Kingly's win was fraudulent, so this guy will have to show he can be competitive against some quality turf runners while making his first start on the lawn. On the plus side, they wanted to run him on turf up north, but the Alcatraz was washed off and run on the synth—which he won. He's also been competitive on dirt against some quality animals, so he's a very adaptable runner who also has a versatile style. There are some questions to answer here, but there is also quality, so we'll see if Gaines can move this guy forward in his first start for her barn. GRADE: B.

#7 PARSIMONY (15/1) has never run a bad race on turf—but he's also never run a race good enough to win, hence the reason he's still a maiden. A few of these have beaten him pretty easily, so he's going to need to take a big step forward today, and it's hard to overlook that 0-for-15 record with 10 minor placings. Maybe he can spice up your exotics, but he's hard to support on the win-end in a field filled with quality animals who know how to find the winner's circle. Still, hats off to this one's consistency as a steady check-earner. GRADE: C.

#8 MOODY JIM (IRE) (5/1), the second Mullins runner, looked terrific when breaking his maiden last time in his first SoCal start, exploding through the lane despite having zero pace to close into. He beat a next-out winner that day, but he faces a class test having to face winners (and a few multiple ones at that!) for the first time. Win-rider Van Dyke stays put, despite having ridden main contender Neptune's Storm, so that should give this one a vote of confidence, and I really think this guy will only get better as the races get longer, since his come-home times in his two U.S. starts are well above par. This is a tough spot, but there is ability here. GRADE: A.

#9 NOLO CONTESTO (8/1) ran second to Carnivorous (who was entered in a race on Saturday, so be sure to check the charts to see how he did), but the rest of the field behind him wasn't inspiring (the only next-out winner needed $32K claimers for his next win). Still, that was this guy's first try on turf, so he's eligible to improve, especially with Prat taking the call for the first time. Plus, this guy is battle-tested, having raced against some really nice dirt horses, and his trainer has won an abundance of graded-stakes races this meet. That said, this is by no means an easy spot for a horse who lost lengths in the lane in his two dirt starts beyond a mile. There has always been talent here, so it wouldn't shock me if he won, but I prefer others. GRADE: C.

#10 KINGLY (9/2) was allowed to walk the dog last time in the La Jolla (G3) and was basically gifted the race, as Neptune's Storm had too much to do while eating away into this guy's lead late. The added ground plays against this one—as does the outside post. And while this guy doesn't need the lead to win, he will have to use some energy early to angle over and gain position out of the chute, and I'm willing to bet that softens him up late. I'm against him today. GRADE: X.

<u>CONCLUSION</u>
I've always been a fan of #3 NOLDE (5/1), but I'm going to try and beat him today, hoping he gets a bum ride at a short price. I also think that #5 NEPTUNE'S STORM (7/2) is an eminently logical contender,

but again, I think the price will be too short. As for the alternatives: I know it will be difficult to pair up big races for both Mullins' trainees, but I'm going to focus on **#4 ORIGINAIRE (IRE) (4/1)** and **#8 MOODY JIM (IRE) (4/1)**, as I was super-impressed by the way they both leveled out in the lane to win going away despite adverse pace scenarios.

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