DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
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Date: 9/3/23
Race 10: $300K Del Mar Derby (G2) for 3yos going 9-furlongs on the turf (rails at 0-ft.)
Post: approx. post 6:10 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

It's going to be very tough to top the performances of yesterday, but if one field can do it today, it's this group of 3-year-olds in the Del Mar Derby (G2), a 9-furlong turf affair for sophomores. I love that we have both the winners of the Oceanside and the La Jolla (G3) here, so right off the bat, this is a competitive race. Throw in a few others who interest me, and we've got a great race to bet on.

#1 AH JEEZ (15/1) is a cool horse, who even has a win at Meydan, so nothing fazes this guy. I also like his versatility with wins on both dirt and turf—but all of his wins have come sprinting, so that's a bit of an issue. That said, he did have trouble in the Oceanside and still managed to run third. He now makes the second start of his form cycle, and it wouldn't shock me if he ran well today with a ground-saving trip, but there are some proven routers in here, so I'm fine watching this guy today. GRADE: X.

#2 CONCLUDE (9/5) was terrific in the Oceanside. He came off a May layoff while trying two turns for the first time, and he delivered the goods. He stalked the pace, took over when asked, and easily won a pretty competitive race. Will he be able to show the same sharpness going an extra furlong? He's in good hands with D'Amato, and I always like to root for Little Red Feather horses, but 9/5 seems a bit short to me. GRADE: B.

#3 MALTESE FALCON (IRE) (3/1) broke his maiden in the La Jolla (G3) as the 3/1 favorite. You don't see that too often, but trainer Leonard Powell knows a good horse when he saddles one, so it was nice to see his confidence rewarded. I like the way he tracked the pace in a good spot before showing a nice turn of foot. He's run well at this distance before, so the extra half-furlong should be just fine—and I like that he showed more tactical speed last time. That said, 3/1 does me no favors. GRADE: B.

#4 REIQUIST (15/1) was the beneficiary of a DQ last time in an N1X where he was clearly second-best—but the winner did deserve to come down. I like that he ran so well breaking from the 12-hole, but he didn't come home particularly fast, so I'm not sure the added ground will help his cause today against some really nice animals. GRADE: X.

#5 ALMENDARES (GB) (3/1) took no money in his first start in the U.S., going off at 7/1, but he won that N1X so easily, it's no surprise that D'Amato is racing this guy here. Do note that he was getting Lasix for the first time last time, but he won't have that luxury today—so we'll see how this Euro import does here. Also note that win-rider Berrios sticks with Conclude, so that gives me pause as well. GRADE: B.

#6 PANIC ALARM (IRE) (5/1) will get the nod for me, even though he'll need to make up a length to Maltese Falcon (IRE), who just beat him in the La Jolla (G3)—but I can see this guy turning the tables today. First off, that was his first U.S. start, and Sadler isn't so great first off the boat. Secondly, he was well off a very slow pace, yet he still ran on through the lane. Thirdly, he was wide. Add it all up, and I can see this one running a corker today as the clear value in this race. GRADE: A.

#7 SMART CODE (12/1) has never run a bad race on turf, so I appreciate his consistency, but he does seem a cut below the best, since he's had several tries and hasn't been able to clear the N1X hurdle. I'm also not sure the added ground will help this guy. GRADE: X.

#8 JUSTIN'S LEGACY (15/1) should be the pacesetter, as he's had the role before and has been run down, like in the La Jolla (G3), when he contested the early pace but was easily overtaken in the lane. I'm afraid the same fait awaits. That said, he does get one of the best front-end riders in the colony, if you're a believer. GRADE: X.

#9 KID AZTECA (30/1) ran a better-than-looked fifth in the La Jolla (G3) last time, so it wouldn't shock me if he threatened today. Still, he'll need a big step forward to beat a few of these who already have his measure. The post doesn't help, and it's interesting to note that both of his wins have come in turf sprints. Maybe for underneath. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION
This is a very cool race where a few of these can win, so to me, it's all about value. At these morning-lines, **#6 PANIC ALARM (IRE) (5/1)** is the clear play for me.

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