DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
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Date: 11/17/23
Race 8: Cal-bred $20K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 8-furlongs on turf (rails at 30-feet)
Post: approx. post 3:58 p.m. PST

OVERVIEW

We've got an oversubscribed field of 14 horses entered, with 10 eligible to greet the starter, in today's tricky contest race, a Cal-bred $20K optional-claiming/N1X contested at 8-furlongs on the lawn with the rails at 30-feet—so let's hope Mother Nature cooperates and doesn't wash us off the turf after rain showers from earlier this week were expected to continue through Saturday evening. But let's proceed as usual, and if the race comes off, we'll just have to revisit on Twitter. (For what it's worth: this race looks like it's going to have a very fast pace.)

#1 SILENT HEAT (8/1) gets a massive jock upgrade to Prat, so right away I'm more interested than I would normally be in a horse that took nine tries to break his maiden, which he did last time in wire fashion at 14/1. There should be a pretty quick pace in this race, so I'm expecting Prat to suck back a little so he can stalk and pounce—but the real question is whether this guy is good enough. GRADE: C.

#2 BRAVESTONE (15/1) ran a respectable third at this level and distance last time at 68/1, putting in a nice move around the turn before flattening out a bit. Still, he outran his odds, and I expect him to do so again, since he can build off that race, assuming he gets a ground-saving trip and doesn't have to swing so wide. But that's easier said than done in a full field like this with a jock who isn't exactly known for his turf prowess. GRADE: C.

#3 FORE FLAG (5/1) loses Hernandez, which is concerning, but he does have several races that are a good fit here—and even though he's winless over this Del Mar turf course, he does like it here, having never finished out of the money in six starts on the Del Mar sod. I like him to break through today, making the third start of his form cycle and getting a quick pace to flatter his stretch run. GRADE: A.

#4 YO TIME (12/1) hasn't been seen since February, when he graduated with a stalk-and-pounce run against eight other foes at Santa Anita. D'Amato can bring them back ready to run, and you can always project improvement late in the season with these 3-year-olds. That said, this one does like to be forwardly placed, and he'll probably be a little keen off the layoff, so we'll see if that kind of up-front trip softens him up late. GRADE: C.

#5 BIGOFROMFRESNO (3/1) just wired 10 other maidens at Santa Anita to graduate, but his come-home time was still pretty strong despite setting a fair pace. Before that wire win, he rallied from off the pace, so at least you know he can pass horses, which will come in handy in this race. I like him right back, but I'm not crazy about the short 3/1 price. GRADE: A.

#6 SUPER CHIEF (4/1) has races on paper that are fast enough to win this, but those races all came while sprinting on dirt. In fact, he won this level already last time in a 6-furlong sprint. We'll see if he can handle two turns on the turf, but at least win-rider Hernandez sticks around, so that's a vote of confidence, if you're a believer. GRADE: C.

#7 BILLY'S BET (12/1) has hinted at ability, but he hasn't exactly been campaigned all that well—getting thrown to the wolves a few times in Cal-bred stakes races, where he was overmatched. He'll appreciate a return to the allowance ranks, but it should be noted that this guy's only win came on the lead in a 5-furlong turf sprint, and he's never been two turns—so he seems more of a pace factor to me. GRADE: C.

#8 TALKLESSWORKMORE (5/1) has a win at this level on dirt, and he's been knocking on the door for the same type of win on turf, but someone always seems to prove just a little bit better. That said, he's a must-use in your exotics, since he always seems to fire. I'm surprised he's not shorter on the morning-line, since he just went off at 7/5 at this level and distance last time—and even though he finished fifth, he had some trouble. GRADE: B.

#9 ALPINE THUNDER (15/1) put in a mild late bid last time at this level, but he was still well-beaten. He did have some issues before the race, so I won't be too harsh, especially because he already has a dirt win at this level—but he'll need a step forward today, as well as a good trip from a tough post. GRADE: C.

#10 BIG COUPE (6/1) ran respectably in his comeback race last time, putting in a mild late bid to finish fifth in a starter-allowance. He should move forward off that race, but he's also facing better animals—and he has to break from a really tough post. I do think he's good enough to contend for a slice, but he'll need a lot of things to go right for the W. GRADE: B.

#11 LUKA GRAZIE (7/2) (AE) broke his maiden over this course last year, so he'll appreciate a return to the seaside oval—but this 3-year-old did need a perfect trip in that race. His turf form before that was just okay, so he's not impossible here (especially if he's Prat's first call), but I'm not too excited about him either. GRADE: C.

#12 DISCRETIONARY DAY (4/1) (AE) has tactical speed and an aggressive jock, so I'm sure he'll be in the race from the bell, and that is going to cause problems for him late, since he's not exactly the strongest finisher in the world. GRADE: C.

#13 MEESH (6/1) (AE) ran on late to finish third down the hill last time, but that doesn't necessarily mean he'll appreciate a stretch-out to two turns. He tried a route once before on dirt,

and he ran half a race. That said, I trust D'Amato to put him where he belongs, but will this guy be good enough to overcome such a tough post? GRADE: C.

#14 BARELY FUNCTIONAL (5/1) (AE) has decent sprint form, but he hasn't been two turns over this course, so who knows how he'll do. What I do know is that he'll need a great ride from all the way out here, so I'm skeptical of his chances today, even though his paper form is decent enough to get a W at this level. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION
I'm not crazy about anyone in here, since I wouldn't be shocked if any one of these guys won, but at these prices, I think 5/1 on **#3 FORE FLAG** is decent. He had trouble against a few of these last time; he should trip out; and he likes this course. If it's not him or my other "A," throw a dart!

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