

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

By Frank R. Scatoni

On Twitter [@ScatoniSureShot](https://twitter.com/ScatoniSureShot)

www.FrankScatoni.com

www.OptixEQ.com

Date: 11/25/23

Race 7: \$200K Seabiscuit Handicap (G2) contested at 8.5-furlongs on turf (rails at 12-ft.)

Post: approx. post 3:25 p.m. PST

OVERVIEW

The parade of daily stakes races continues on this 9-race Saturday card with today's featured event, the \$200K Seabiscuit (G2), an 8.5-furlong turf affair with the rails set at 24-feet. D'Amato seems to have this race surrounded. Note: there are two contest races today—Race 9 is the other one—so you've got two shots to make a move.

#1 SUMTER (12/1) has speed, the rail, and an aggressive jock, so he'll look to take them as far as he can for as fast as he can. Maybe he can hold on for a slice, but I have to think one of the stretch-runners will reel him in late, but at least you know he'll be in front turning for home, if you're a believer. GRADE: X.

#2 **EASTER (FR) (3/1)** makes his first start for D'Amato (who also saddles two others in here) after winning the restricted Lure Stakes at Santa Anita for Graham Motion. He finished up very strongly in that mile race, despite having no pace to close into. All of his best races have come at a mile, so we'll see if he has the same punch going an extra half-furlong today, but if this is where D'Amato spots him, then I have to think the distance won't be an issue. GRADE: A.

#3 BALNIKHOV (IRE) (8/1) is a tough nut to crack because he has hinted at so much ability at times, but other times, he just doesn't show up. I've bet him plenty of times, mainly because his come-home times are always pretty solid, but he never seems to get the job done. His last win came up at Golden Gate in a Grade 3, and he won that by a nose. I like him less than the other two D'Amatos, which means he'll probably win today! GRADE: B.

#4 **HONG KONG HARRY (IRE) (8/5)** is such a cool horse. He's won 10 times in 17 tries with four placings as well. He's won at this distance, and he has never finished out of the exacta in two starts over this course. You don't need me to tell you that he's going to be tough in here. GRADE: A.

#5 YES THIS TIME (20/1) was claimed for \$80K three back, and new trainer Miller has protected him while running him in stakes races in both of his following starts. Unfortunately, he hasn't exactly shown that this is the level he wants to run at. He was 9/1 in a Grade 2 last time, and he lacked the needed punch to hit the board. GRADE: X.

#6 CABO SPIRIT (8/1) was terrific as a 3-year-old last year, but he's yet to get a win since turning four, and that's a bit of a concern. Granted, he's been knocking heads with the best turf horses out here, and he always comes on with a late run, but it's been too little too late for this stretch runner. I do like that his only try at this 8.5-furlong distance resulted in a win in the La Jolla (G3) over this course, so perhaps this intermediate distance is what this guy needs for a wake-up call. GRADE: B.

#7 ASTRONOMER (3/1) ran too good to lose two back in the City of Hope Mile (G2) when he got run down in the shadow of the wire by Hong Kong Harry (Ire), whom he has to face again. I can see the same thing happening, since I'm sure Astronomer will angle over and stalk the rail horse until the real running starts. Callaghan has kept him mostly at a mile for a reason, so we'll see how much starch this guy has left late in the lane. GRADE: B.

#8 FRONT RUN THE FED (12/1) is the new face in the crowd, a 7-year-old East Coast horse who has made a fine career out of winning turf sprints. I can't fault the connections for taking a shot here, but I'm having a hard time seeing the path to victory, since he's going to have to use some speed to angle over and stalk the pace, likely wide, and then he's going to have to show he can do some damage going 8.5-furlongs. His numbers are competitive, but it's hard to know if he can replicate that sprint form in a route. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

It's D'Amato's world, we just live in it. #4 **HONG KONG HARRY (IRE) (8/5)** is clearly the one to beat, but I think #2 **EASTER (3/1)** looks pretty solid too. And it would be just like #3 **BALNIKHOV (IRE) (8/1)** to beat me the day I don't have him as an "A"!

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Date: 11/25/23

Race 9: \$50K starter-allowance for fillies & mares going one mile on the lawn (rails at 12-ft.)

Post: approx. post 4:25 p.m. PST

OVERVIEW

We've got a second contest race to dig into, so it's double the fun on this Sunday at Del Mar. This one is a \$50K starter-allowance for fillies and mares going one mile on the turf with the rails at 12-feet.

#1 IN YOUR FACE (5/1) has pretty solid come-home times, so she's a good fit right back off that conditional-claimer win. This is a tougher spot, and she does have to turn the tables on Ruff Ride, who looks solid in here as well. I think she offers a whiff of value, and I like that Hernandez can save ground and power through the lane. GRADE: A.

#2 MISS LIZZY (7/2) ran a good second at this level, but it was in a turf sprint. Her one try at a mile wasn't bad, but she couldn't beat allowance foes up at Golden Gate. She's definitely fast enough on paper, and she should be in a good spot turning for home, but I prefer others. GRADE: C.

#3 VINCERO GRANDE (6/1) seems like the value play of the race to me. I thought she got a useful prep off a long layoff when running fourth in a turf sprint. Clearly, this gal is a better router, as is evidenced from her Golden Gate form. I know Puype has been ice cold the last few years, but he's still a very good trainer, and I think he can make some noise with this girl at a good price. GRADE: A.

#4 RUFF RIDE (5/1) looked really good last time when beating Cal-bred allowance foes while racing on dirt, but do note that win-rider Hernandez sides with the rail horse, and that's something to seriously consider. Also, her one turf try at this level was just okay. She lagged out the back and put in a mild late bid. She will be running on through the lane, but will it be too little too late? GRADE: B.

#5 BUILT DIFFERENT (20/1) will probably bounce back after a poor effort at this level last time, but before that, she outran her 31/1 odds to finish third at this level over this course. She will need a step up to get the W, but she is making the third start of her form cycle, so she should be sitting on a peak effort. That said, I like her more for underneath. GRADE: C.

#6 INNER BEAUTY (IRE) (3/1) has speed and experience at this level, but she hasn't been able to get the job done. Two back, she set an easy pace all alone on the lead, and she still got overtaken late—and that was at Santa Anita, which plays more to speed than Del Mar does. Sure, he can wire them, but I'm not excited by him at 3/1. GRADE: B.

#7 ANNIE'S JOY (7/2) will look to make it three in a row, so it's hard to ignore her current form, but she does face better horses today, and it's not like her come-home times in her wins were all that strong. That said, she'll be in a good spot turning for home, because she's tactical, but I'm expecting one of the stretch runners to overtake her late. GRADE: B.

#8 UNA PALABRA (30/1) is a 3-year-old who looks a little slow on paper, so she'll need a big step forward today to get the job done. She has tactical speed, so I can see her angling over to stalk the pace 3-wide, but on this turf course, that trip is the kiss of death. GRADE: X.

#9 COURT SNORT (15/1) is a half-sister to the terrific Cal-bred Brandothebartender, but she hasn't exactly followed in that horse's footsteps. That said, she was just claimed by Knapp, who promptly protects her and moves her back to turf after a dirt win against much weaker company. She does have okay turf form from earlier in the year, so we'll see if she can run back to that, but she will have to work out a trip from out here. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION

I'm not crazy at all about the morning-line favorites, so I think we can find some value. My top pick is #3 VINCERO GRANDE (6/1), but #1 IN YOUR FACE (5/1) is a possibility too.

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