DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY
By Frank R. Scatoni
On Twitter @ScatoniSureShot
www.FrankScatoni.com
www.OptixEQ.com

Date: 7/21/24
Race 9: $100K Wickerr contested at 8-furlongs on the turf (Rails at 0-feet)
Post: approx. post 6:14 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

Today's contest race in another one-mile turf event, this one being the $100K Wickerr for horses aged 3-years-old and upward who are non-winners of a stakes race of $50K (other than state bred) at one mile or over since October 1, 2023. Because of this stipulation, we have some quality animals who have stakes wins on their résumé prior to the aforementioned cutoff date. In other words, it's a great race, especially since I think the pace is going to be hot, and I like a few prices to come running late.

#1 NOBLE REFLECTION (12/1), the first Papaprodromou entrant, looks like he'll have rabbit duties today while likely using this 8-furlong affair as a conditioning race for a cutback next time, since this guy's best work has come around one turn. GRADE: X.

#2 CABO SPIRIT (15/1), the second Papaprodromou runner, hasn't won since he was a 3-year-old, but this 5-year-old certainly has quality, and during this losing streak, he's been facing some really tough animals. He likes this course; he likes this distance; and his stablemate should ensure a hot pace, allowing this guy to just track in a good spot from off the pace. I don't like that he's been on the shelf for so long, but if he's ready to run, he is good enough to win this race. GRADE: A.

#3 ALMENDARES (GB) (7/2), the first D'Amato trainee, looks to be sitting on a peak effort, making the second start of his form cycle after a useful prep down the hill back in May. He's clearly a two-turn animal, and his come-home times suggest he is a stakes-caliber runner (and note that he did run second, losing by a nose in a Grade 2 last year). Expect him to be flying late. GRADE: A.

#4 FIRST PEACE (5/2) is a nice horse, but I have to take him on at 5/2. He is exiting sprint races, so I expect him to be up on a very fast pace, and even though he broke his maiden going a mile (in wire fashion), he's a much better one-turn horse. He's certainly good enough to win, but there are some questions to answer, and that's an issue for me on a short-priced horse. GRADE: C.

#5 AH JEEZ (15/1) has run respectably against a few of these, but he hasn't been able to get a W. He'll need to show more oomph today to beat his main rivals. That said, he should be ready

to run a peak effort, second off the bench and getting back on turf—and it should be noted that he did run third in a Grade 1, so you can use him to spice up your exotics, but if he wins, I lose. GRADE: X.

#6 AIR FORCE RED (10/1) has speed, adds blinkers, and gets the services of a very aggressive jockey, so I'm expecting him to be attending a swift pace early, and that's going to be an issue in a field with other speedy types. GRADE: X.

#7 FLASHIEST (12/1) went a while between wins, but he got the job done last time in an N2X when he closed stoutly to get the victory at 8/1. I'm expecting him to fire, but he's been his own worst enemy throughout his career, often getting himself in trouble. It took a tactical ride by Dettori last time to coax a win out of this guy. Can Hernandez do the same? I've seen way worse 12/1 shots. GRADE: B.

#8 CONCLUDE (6/1) was terrific here last summer when winning the Oceanside and the Del Mar Derby (G2), and he looked pretty stylish in those victories. That said, he likes to be on the engine, and there is going to be a very fast pace in here. His recent comeback race was an uncharacteristically bad performance, but it was a Grade 1, and he likely needed the race. He's certainly good enough to win, but I'm not sure the race sets up all that well for him. GRADE: B.

#9 DANDY MAN SHINES (IRE) (12/1) hasn't cleared his N2X hurdle yet, and Flashiest got the best of him last time. That said, this guy has some above-par closing times, so he can easily come through with a breakout performance today given the likely pace scenario. He's worth a shot at 12/1. GRADE: A.

#10 IRIDEO (ARG) (10/1) is an 8-year-old who has danced a lot of dances against some of the best turf horses in SoCal, so I can't say anything negative about him—but I do think he's better used underneath, since he often leaves himself with way too much to do. GRADE: X.

#11 ASTRONOMER (12/1) has shown flashes of brilliance throughout his career, but he's another one who likes to be up on the pace, and that's going to be an issue in here, since he'll have to gun hard from this far outside post. I think he'll use too much energy to get forward position, and that should take the starch out of him late. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

This is a really good race with really good horses. I know I "X'd" out a bunch of them, but they all have good résumés, so it wouldn't shock me if anyone got the dough in here. That said, my top pick is **#9 DANDY MAN SHINES (IRE) (12/1)**. I've always liked his stretch run, and note that he's a perfect 4-for-4 in the money here at Del Mar (with two wins). He seems more logical than my other bomb, **#2 CABO SPIRIT**, only because "Cabo" is coming off such a long layoff, but you're getting a good price on him, so he is a solid alternative if you're not feeling "Dandy Man" as much as I am.

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