

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 8/1/24

Race 6: \$32K/N2L conditional-claimer contested at 8.5-furlongs on turf (rails at 30-feet)

Post: approx. post 4:37 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

There have been so many competitive turf races so far this meet, and it looks like that trend will continue as we head into Week 3. Today's contest race is a very tough \$32K/N2L conditional-claiming event contested at 8.5-furlongs on the lawn with the rails at 30-feet. I thought there was a fair amount of early speed in here, so I definitely want someone from off the pace, but it is possible that one of the classier horses can hang on for a slice as well.

#1 WHAT A DUDE (5/1) has run well since joining the O'Neill barn, but he's winless in four tries against horses of this level or lower, so he'll need a big step forward today. He likes to be forwardly placed, but Fresu will need to suck back and avoid getting caught up in a duel. Then he'll have to hope something opens up in this full field. I prefer others, but he's usable underneath as he gets to save all the ground. GRADE: B.

#2 MIGHTY KAI (15/1) gets wise-guy consideration in here for a few reasons. First off, this new gelding returns to the races and gets a positive jock change in the process. Berrios is riding this turf course extremely well, and this is the kind of horse he can move up several lengths, since he's a deep closer in a race that should have a very fast pace. Upset special. GRADE: A.

#3 CUPID'S CRUSADER—program scratch.

#4 VORPAL (8/1) has been able to track the pace in sprint races, but I suspect he'll be a bit keen on the stretch-out today when trying to chase classier horses than he faced last time. His only win came on dirt, and it's hard to overlook that 0-for-4 winless record on turf. GRADE: X.

#5 PIONEER PRINCE (5/2) looks solid in here, but he's also likely to be overbet, running for a tag after facing starter foes; plus, he's owned by My Racehorse, and their fractional ownership participants typically bet their runners off the board. Still, I can see this one getting a good tracking trip, and those starter foes he was running against are better than the group he's facing today. GRADE: A.

#6 BEAR HUNT (30/1) adds blinkers for his first SoCal start for Capestro, who does a fine job with her new acquisitions, but this 3-year-old has never been on turf before, and this is probably the toughest field he's ever faced in his life. GRADE: X.

#7 BALDORO (7/2) was 10/1 at a similar level last time, and he just ran evenly while chasing the pace. There was a time when he could come from off the pace and pass horses, but ever since he returned from a long layoff, he just seems to be content running along with the race flow. Perhaps he'll chase in a good spot before inheriting the lead when everyone backs up at the same time! GRADE: B.

#8 TRIBAL (3/1) just broke his maiden when dropping in for a tag for the first time. Sadler saw fit to claim him off Mandella, which is interesting—but when Sadler claims, it's typically because he feels he can move up the horse. Here, Sadler has entered this 3-year-old for less than the claim price while having to face winners for the first time. He also likes to be forwardly placed, so he'll have some questions to answer, especially at a low morning-line of 3/1. You can upgrade if you want, but I'm fine taking him on. GRADE: C.

#9 BRONKO NAGURSKI (10/1) will re-add blinkers while dropping in for a tag after several races against Cal-bred allowance types. This is an easier group, but will this one be up on the pace after exiting some sprint races? That would be an issue. That said, Frey has been riding really well, so I can see this guy outrunning his morning-line odds. GRADE: B.

#10 PINEHURST (IRE) (8/1) has been facing lesser sprint foes while racing forwardly placed. He'll have to go hard from out here, and that means he's going to get caught up in a pace duel. His two-turn races aren't terrible, but they aren't fast enough to get the W here unless he moves forward. I'm always hesitant to toss a D'Amato trainee, but this seems like a tough spot considering the post, the class hike, and the race shape. GRADE: C.

#11 FOXTROT HARRY (8/1) (AE) broke his maiden two back on the Tapeta at Gulfstream, so we'll see if he can build off that fast race while trying SoCal turf for the first time. His best races have come up near the pace, and that's going to be a problem here. His one turf race saw him attend the pace before weakening. I'm fine watching this 3-year-old. GRADE: X.

#12 NASHOBA'S JOY (12/1) (AE) knows how to sit off the pace and pass horses, so he's looking at a great pace set-up if he gets in—but it should be noted that Carla Gaines will be re-adding blinkers today, so who knows if he'll have the same late punch. Note that he tried blinkers before way back in 2022, and it didn't help him at all (though it was a dirt sprint at Keeneland). GRADE: C.

#13 CIRCLEOFCHAMPIONS (15/1) (AE) is a Carla Gaines trainee who hasn't won in a long time, so it's tough to overlook that 1-for-20 career record. He was 15/1 at this level last time, and he just ran evenly to finish sixth. The only thing to recommend is that he ran a good second at this level and distance back in November over this course, so a repeat of that race would put him in the frame—but the post does him no favors if he gets in. GRADE: C.

CONCLUSION

This seems like a no-brainer contest play to me, since **#5 PIONEER PRINCE (5/2)** will likely be too short in this full field. That leaves **#2 MIGHTY KAI (15/1)**. He gets some class relief and is the only solid closer in a field filled with early/presser types. If that one doesn't float your boat, perhaps **#9 BRONKO NAGURSKI (10/1)** can punch one in the end zone for you!

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