

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 8/3/24

Race 8: \$40K optional-claiming/N1X contested at one mile on the main track

Post: approx. post 5:33 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've got a really nice 11-race card on this fine Saturday in August that features two stakes races: the California Dreamin' Stakes for Cal-breds going 8.5-furlongs on the turf, and the prestigious Clement L. Hirsch (G1), the second Grade One of the meeting, an 8.5-furlong main-track affair for horses of the female persuasion. That said, neither of these two races are today's contest race. That honor goes to Race 8: a competitive \$40K claimer/N1X contested at one mile on the main track.

#1 FULL SERRANO (ARG) (5/1) is an X-factor. He was last seen in his native Argentina, running seventh in a Grade One. It's always hard to evaluate those races, but there is precedence for South American horses acclimating well here at Del Mar. That said, imports haven't really been Sadler's bag, so I'm tempted to watch one, especially since I think it's curious to import a 5-year-old just to run him in an allowance race. Perhaps this is a prep for something more lucrative down the road? GRADE: B.

#2 SMART MO (6/1) is a little interesting to me. Shirreffs is a pretty conservative trainer, but once this guy broke his maiden going long at first-asking, Shirreffs put him in stakes races. That might have ruined him a little, because he didn't put things together until he was laid up and brought back in April as a 4-year-old. He ran too good to lose in his comebacker. I can't explain that bad last race, but he has that really good April race to build upon, and Shirreffs is off to a nice start this summer. GRADE: A.

#3 WENDELSSOHN (8/1) ran off the screen to break his maiden at Ellis last time, setting a fast pace and widening his lead with every step. It was a really nice race, but now he has to stretch out *and* face winners for the first time. I have to think that theft will be on the agenda, but I'm going to bet someone will run this 3-year-old down. For what it's worth, I did an "In the Money" podcast, and host Mike Pribozie gave this horse a push. I'll clap for Mike if this guy wins, but I'm fine watching one today. GRADE: X.

#4 BIG HAT WILLIE (3/1) is your lukewarm 3/1 favorite based on his last big-fig when he was game in victory at this level and distance at Los Al. I'm not buying the figure, and I think it's interesting that Miller now risks this one for a tag—can you say "claim bait"? If he repeats that last race, he'll be a threat, but he's the kind of horse I love to take on. GRADE: C.

#5 BETTER THAN GOLD (15/1) is a 3-year-old who began this year by getting pasted in the Robert B. Lewis (G3). He didn't belong in that race based on his juvenile form, but clearly the connections thought very highly of him. His two races since the Lewis (G3) were a mixed bag on turf, and he showed that he was no match against older horses last time. There is still upside here, but he'll need a big step forward off an April layoff to have a say in the outcome today. GRADE: X.

#6 BIRTH OF COOL (15/1) will make only his third dirt start after a career consisting mainly of turf races. Last time, he was 26/1 against starter foes, and he ran an even third. He did lose to his stablemate, who went on to win the Cougar II (G3) here earlier in the meet, so it was a pretty decent race for the level. Still, this guy's best work has come against lesser company, so if he wins, it won't be with my money today, even though I recognize that Dollase has been on fire here. GRADE: X.

#7 CORNELL (7/2) will probably go off as the favorite. He's a lightly raced Baffert 3-year-old who just missed by a nose in the Los Alamitos Derby. He does face elders for the first time, but he doesn't catch the toughest group of entry-level allowance runners. Baffert's go-to guy Hernandez takes over from Maldonado and Cedillo—and if you go three back, you'll see that Hernandez rode this guy to victory in his maiden. I expect a big effort today. GRADE: A.

#8 SHORTMAN (15/1) is a very honest horse who always shows up for work, but he's a bit exposed at this N1X level, which is probably why Vallejo legs up a 7-pound bug-boy to try and give this guy any advantage he can get. He's also a deep closer, so he'll need a pace meltdown to flatter his late run. GRADE: X.

#9 CLOUSEAU (10/1) hasn't had a clue at this open N1X level, so Ian Kruljac will add blinkers today to try and shake things up. I can see Maldonado being aggressive with the equipment change, but that means he'll probably end up chasing Wendelsohn and tiring. GRADE: X.

#10 FIFTH STREET (8/1) looks interesting to me. Yakteen takes over training duties for Baffert, and if there is one trainer who has Baffert's number, it's his former assistant. I can recall two times already this meet that Yakteen won a race when Baffert had a heavily bet horse. Of course, these are different animals, but I like that Yakteen promptly stretches out this lightly raced 4-year-old after two sprint races—one bad and one good. He broke his maiden going long in his second career start, so it would appear that he's getting back to doing what he wants to do. GRADE: A.

#11 MC VAY—program scratch.

CONCLUSION

Based on the morning-lines, #10 FIFTH STREET (8/1) would be a solid contest play. You could also consider #2 SMART MO (6/1) if the prices flip-flop. I doubt #7 CORNELL (7/2) will be usable if you're trying to win this thing, but I'm expecting him to show up today.

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