

DEL MAR FEATURE RACE OF THE DAY

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Race 7: \$62.5K optional-claiming/N2X contested at 8.5-furlongs on turf (rails at 18-feet)

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OVERVIEW

Week three of the Bing season kicks off with a nine-race card, but before we dig into today's contest race, here's a quick reminder: tune in this Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. PST for my "Best Bet" seminar, where I go over certain sequences and wagering strategies with a special guest. This week's guest is Christopher Ado (on Twitter @ChristopherAdo), a sharp young player who used to be a Wagering Ambassador at Santa Anita Park and now currently writes his own handicapping/wagering blog where his wagering philosophy is to search for a vulnerable favorite and capitalize on it. Should be a great seminar, so be sure to mark your calendars! It streams on the Del Mar Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube pages, but for more information, click here: <https://www.dmtc.com/calendar/detail/bestbet>.

Now let's get down to business! Today's contest race is a competitive \$62.5K optional-claiming/N2X contested at 8.5-furlongs on the lawn with the rails at 18-feet. It drew a big 10-horse field, and it wouldn't surprise me if any one of these stepped up with a big performance today.

#1 MURAD KHAN (FR) (7/2) is a cool old boy who has shown versatility and has run some good races against some quality competition. He's coming off a fourth-place finish in the Lure, where he couldn't make a dent against a very good field. Before that, his form here over the summer was rock-solid. Can this 7-year-old get back to that form? We shall see, especially since it's interesting that O'Neill is risking him for the optional \$62.5K tag in order to get some class-relief. He has tactical speed and an aggressive jock, so you can expect him to be in the vanguard early—but there is a speed horse outside of him, and that could make things a little tricky for this old warrior. That said, his best race is certainly good enough. GRADE: B.

#2 BARRISTAN THE BOLD (GB) (6/1) had mediocre form overseas before coming to America, where he ran okay fourths in each of his two starts, including one against Grade 2 foes and one against this kind of company. That was way back during last winter's racing. He hasn't been seen since January 20, so we'll see if this 4-year-old can show up with a career best. Glatt is very good off long layoffs, but it should be noted that Prat rode him last time but doesn't bother to ride back today. I'm okay watching one off the bench. GRADE: X.

#3 TARTINI (15/1), the second Glatt runner, has always been a hard-tryer, but his best work has always come against weaker company. That said, he is making his first start for Glatt, who is terrific with his new acquisitions, and this guy was in the best form of his life when he hit the bench after an N1X victory back in August here at Del Mar. I don't like that win-rider Rispoli ends up on another, however, so I'm willing to let this one prove to me that he can compete with this kind of company, even with the positive barn change. GRADE: X.

#4 CALI CALIENTE (3/1), the lukewarm morning-line favorite, is a hot Cal-bred who has been very sharp ever since adding blinkers in his second career start. Since then, he's 3-for-4 on the turf with one

second, where he just lost by a half-length. And therein lies the rub: his wins came at one mile while that one second-place finish came going today's 8.5-furlongs, so we'll see if this guy can show more oomph in the lane today against better competition. That said, he has good early speed, so he can either make the lead and dictate the pace or sit just off the rail horse if Murad Khan (Fr) decides to go. There's no denying his solid form, but the waters do get a little deeper today, and he offers little value at 3/1. GRADE: C.

#5 GRAY MAGICIAN (6/1) is a difficult entrant to assess because he has run some monster races on dirt, but his comeback race wasn't any good and he's trying turf for the first time, so what do we do with him, especially since he's saddled by a trainer who wins everything under the sun? Oh, and Prat shows up to ride as well, despite having other options in the race. So do all those positives outweigh the negative that he's a dirt horse trying turf for the first time? A lot will depend on his price, but I'm tempted to take him on today, knowing full well that if he's able to transfer his dirt form, he's going to be very tough to beat. I'm hoping he stalks the pace 3-wide and then fails to quicken when he realizes that he's not racing on dirt today! GRADE: C.

#6 SALVATOR MUNDI (5/1), the first D'Amato trainee, has done very good work ever since coming to SoCal by way of Kentucky. Toss his last race in the John Henry Turf Classic (G2), where he stalked the pace and just failed to kick on going 10-furlongs, and focus on his solid efforts before that while running at the \$40K level, including a sharp win over this course and distance two back. He should also get a good tracking trip in here, and it should be noted that Rispoli stays put despite having other options. GRADE: A.

#7 UNTAMED DOMAIN (10/1) looks to be the value play to me, since I can make excuses for his last three races here in SoCal at this level. Three back, he had some trouble while racing behind horses; two back, he made an early wide move in a paceless race and was outfinished by horses whose rides were better timed; last time, he ran really well to finish second, making up ground in a race where there was no pace to close into. Hopefully by now, Pereira has figured out how to ride him optimally, and I do think he'll have some kind of pace to run at today. He will need to improve, but I think that's possible. GRADE: A.

#8 MUSAWAAT (GB) (20/1) adds blinkers to shake things up after an even effort at this level when going 9-furlongs at Santa Anita, where he finished two spots behind Untamed Domain. He seems to run the same race every time, so unless you think the blinkers-on is going to move him up considerably, he seems like he's better used underneath. GRADE: X.

#9 KAZAN (IRE) (20/1) has always had a really nice stretch run, something he used to great effect when beating \$40K claimers three back over this course and distance. A repeat of that race would put him in the frame, but it should be noted that his two races since then for new trainer Javier Sierra haven't been as good (though both with mild excuses), so this guy will need to step things up today. His come-home times are always pretty strong, so you could easily use him in your exotics at a big price. GRADE: X.

#10 CLEOPATRA'S STRIKE (6/1), the second D'Amato charge, is an old warrior who runs for the \$62.5K tag today after two poor attempts against graded-stakes foes since coming off a February layoff this summer. Clearly, the old boy has lost a step, so we'll see if he can wake up against non-graded competition, but this is still a pretty competitive group. Also note that when he was at his best, he was running much longer distances, so we'll see if he can come on late with a perfectly timed ride at this shorter distance. His best races are obviously a good fit here, but it's hard to know what this old boy has

left in the tank. On the plus side, I really liked him last time in the Eddie Read (G2), thinking he was sitting on a big effort second off the bench, but he was never really given a chance to show his best stuff when Cedillo just parked him wide the whole time. Cedillo will have to do better with this guy today—and the outside post doesn't really help—but there is plenty of back-class here. GRADE: B.

CONCLUSION

There are several places you can land in here, so I would definitely watch the board and see where the value is. Based on the morning-lines and my projection for improvement, I give **#7 UNTAMED DOMAIN** a chance to upset the apple cart in here. He might not be good enough, but there are enough excuses in his recent races to see if he can do better today at a square price. If you want someone who requires less of a leap of faith, **#6 SALVATOR MUNDI** would offer fair value at his morning-line of 5/1.

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