



Expert Analysis

By Brad Free

BEST BET: Mbagnick (3rd race)

First Race

1. Rehearsal	2. Justivar	3. Authentic Grace
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Sunday is closing day of the Santa Anita autumn meet, Del Mar opens Thursday. Trouble-prone ~REHEARSAL^ is the reluctant choice in this turf route for maiden-62.5k fillies and mares. A nine-start maiden who often finds traffic, REHEARSAL had to wait for room through the far turn last out, got clear too late, and finished evenly for third. It was not a horrible trip, but she was compromised. With clear sailing, she can wear down this field while stretching to a mile and one-eighth. ~JUSTIVAR^ moves up slightly after a creditable third-place comeback in a maiden-50 that was her first start in nine months. She should improve second start back. ~AUTHENTIC GRACE^ finished only a head behind to choice REHEARSAL when they met last month at DMR. 'GRACE will be rolling late. MUSICAL SONG and WILDFIRE PRINCESS are candidates to set the pace.

Second Race

1. Brunchandcrunch	2. Contrary Chieftain	3. Pass the Baton
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~BRUNCHANDCRUNCH^ can stretch out and win this Cal-bred allowance dirt route after a better-than -looked fifth in a Cal-bred sprint. He broke slowly from the rail, was climbing early while uncomfortable from kickback, finally levelled off, finished well inside and galloped out with run past the wire. Better-than-looked for sure, he ran as if two turns will be fine. This is only the third start of the season for 'CRUNCH, and his first route. He can win with a forwardly placed trip. ~CONTRARY CHIEFTAIN^ is s seven-time winner making his first start since a disappointing sixth in a \$20k claiming mile from which he was claimed. His best recent starts (June 7, Aug. 16) were fast races that compare favorably to this bunch. 'CHIEFTAIN is proven at two turns; his 7 starts at SA produced 3 wins, 2 seconds. ~PASS THE BATON^ will be grinding away late; stretch-out BAZOOKA CHARLIE will set or press the pace.

Third Race

1. Mbagnick	2. Midland Money	3. Elwood Blues
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~MBAGNICK^ returns to the N2X/optional claiming level of his best U.S. start. That was three races back when he won a similar allowance with a 100 Beyer. He was overmatched both starts since in graded stakes, but now returns to his winning level. He continues to work well, and is arguably the fastest in the field on figures. Lightly raced ~MIDLAND MONEY^ scored a fast allowance win in August at Saratoga, then finished sixth in a G1 for 3yos. That was more than two months ago. He moves into a N2X; he won his only start at SA by six lengths. One uncertainty is a gap in his workouts between Sept. 21 and Oct. 13. But this stable rarely starts short horses; both wins by 'MONEY were following layoffs. Off-the-pace runner ~ELWOOD BLUES^, who won this condition in 2024, will be rolling late. He and the top choice are entered for the optional \$80k claim tag. KINGDOM HEART finished in the money all three starts this year at this level.

Fourth Race

1. Island Home	2. Tiz Grace	3. Wild Like the West
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A promising fifth-place debut gives ~ISLAND HOME^ a license to upset ~TIZ GRACE^ in this turf mile for maiden 2yo fillies. 'HOME ran well her only start. She tucked inside near the rear, saved ground, hit brief traffic in the stretch, but ran her final quarter-mile in a respectable :23.90 and missed by only four and one-half lengths. It was a good debut by a filly who can spring an upset if she improves second time out. Trainer Michael McCarthy and jockey Kazushi Kimura teamed to win 3 of their last 4 together, and 6 of their last 16. TIZ GRACE continued her improving pattern with a solid runner-up finish last out in a similar turf mile. She has more speed than the top choice, and therefore will get first run. ~WILD LIKE THE WEST^ stretches out following a disappointing debut in a dirt sprint. She got bet (6.80-1) showed brief speed, and cracked. She worked well before and since that debut, and should improve second time out. She is quick enough to influence the pace.

Fifth Race

1. Howbeit	2. Carol's Comic	3. Morello
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~HOWBEIT^, a 14-for-56 pro who won the G2 Santa Anita Sprint Championship in 2022, now runs for a \$5k claim tag. This is a class drop from his recent comeback at Los Alamitos. HOWBEIT has speed to be forwardly placed in a sprint that does not have much gas, and enters as the "best horse" in the field. ~CAROL'S COMIC^, off nearly three months, drops to the lowest level of his career. The late-runner faces a potentially problematic pace scenario in a race without much true speed, but he certainly fits at this level. He won a \$20k claiming N3L sprint over the SA track in April. ~MORELLO^ figures as one of the favorites while dropping from a fourth-place finish for \$8k that he lost by less than two lengths. MORELLO is a late-runner. STREET TALKER and THE KEY IS UNITY both have a little bit of speed.

Sixth Race

1. Cal's Goal	2. Throwthefirstpunch	3. Dark Blue
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Based on his creditable third-place debut, ~CAL'S GOAL^ can win this turf sprint for Cal-bred maiden 2yos. 'GOAL pressed early three-wide, tucked in to chase from fourth on the rail, and finished evenly to miss by only slightly more than two lengths. Solid debut, two easy works since, likely improvement second time out while stretching from six furlongs to six and a half. ~THROWTHEFIRSTPUNCH^ makes his third career start after a pair of better-than-looked five-furlong starts at DMR. He had severe traffic trouble in his debut; second time out he did not get away well from the rail, but finished willingly for fourth. 'PUNCH should relish this longer distance. ~DARK BLUE^ was only prepping in his fifth-place debut. He lacked speed, saved ground and went evenly. He ran like a colt who wants two turns, although he is likely to improve second time out in this sprint.

Seventh Race

1. She's a One of One	2. Que Bella Luna	3. Going Great Guns
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~SHE'S A ONE OF ONE^ drops from maiden-30 to maiden-12.5k, with speed to be forwardly placed while shortening to five and one-half. ~QUE BELLA LUNA^ makes her first start of the season. She showed hints of ability last year vs. maiden-20s, her workout pattern suggests she will run her best race first start back. And she does have some speed.



~GOING GREAT GUNS^ is a dropper with speed, adding blinkers and likely to influence the pace if not set the pace outright. STORMY ROUGE has been facing better company on turf and synthetic; this is her first try on dirt. The figures she earned on synthetic in 2024 would make her the winner of this dirt race.

Eighth Race

1. Innovative	2. Take A Breath	3. Warming
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~INNOVATIVE^ is a two-turn filly, but she was sharp enough to win a G3 turf sprint stakes last out on the hill. Now she stretches back to two turns in a G3 for 3yo fillies, with speed for a pressing trip. She is basically the fastest in the field. ~TAKE A BREATH^ is making her third U.S. start. She finished a close fourth in the G1 Del Mar Oaks in her local debut, then got sawed off at the eighth pole last out and lost all chance as the favorite in an allowance race. 'BREATH will be rolling from the back of the pack, and should be right there with a clean trip. ~WARMING^ finished less than a length behind the top choice last out in a turf sprint; WARMING can run long and is another who will rally late. LEE'S BABY GIRL is the speed of the field. She set the pace and got nailed late last out in the sprint won by INNOVATIVE. Win or lose, LEE'S BABY GIRL is the one to catch. SLICK might be listed too low. Troubled sixth in the G1 Del Mar Oaks, she followed with a sharp allowance win. A good filly getting better, SLICK is one of several legit contenders.

Ninth Race

1. Jerry's Spirit	2. Sharp Aza Tack	3. Wound Up
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A competitive starter allowance/optional \$32k claiming sprint could go any number of ways. ~JERRY'S SPIRIT^ is back doing what he does best, which is sprint on dirt. He pressed and faded last out in a N2X on turf, but his five previous dirt starts were highly rated races including four wins. He is fast, drawn outside, and ready to fire in his first start in two months. ~SHARP AZA TACK^ led to deep stretch on turf last out, he also can run on dirt. He won a N1X dirt sprint at SA early last year. ~WOUND UP^ was in too tough in a pair of graded stakes; he finished nowhere on dirt and turf. But he won six straight before that, and returns to a claiming-caliber race that he fits perfect. the challenge is the inside post; he'll be under pressure every step of the way.

Tenth Race

1. Yellow Sun Dress	2. Royal Charter	3. Dare to Fly
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The closing-day program ends with a N1X for fillies and mares on the hill. ~YELLOW SUN DRESS^ figures to like the six and one-half furlong distance. She ran well last out rallying from seventh to finish third at six furlongs; her rally was ineffective because the race was dominated by the two front-runners. At this longer distance, 'DRESS can wear them down. ~ROYAL CHARTER^ drops to N1X/optional claiming, which is the class level of her only U.S. win. She has been running okay against higher-class rivals than these. With a drop in class, she looms an off-the-pace threat. ~DARE TO FLY^, runner-up last out in her first try on turf, has speed to be forwardly placed. GYSPSY WOMAN also has speed.