DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 9/2/2018

Race 8: \$250K Del Mar Derby (G2) for 3-year-olds only going 9-furlongs on turf

Post: 5:35 pm PDT

OVERVIEW

It's Del Mar Derby (G2) time—the traditional end of the stellar three-race turf series for sophomore runners. We had the Oceanside at a mile; the La Jolla (G3) at 8.5-furlongs; and now a field of 12 runners have been entered to contest this \$250K 9-furlong turf affair. The winners of the Oceanside and the La Jolla (G3) both show up here—but will a new face take the third leg of Del Mar's turf triple crown?

#1 EPICAL (20/1) looked really good breaking his maiden going long on turf—not an easy thing to do. He ended up beating a nice next-out winner that day as well, so it was a legit effort. His next two races, however, weren't nearly as good—so it was nice to see him put in a good performance last time when he ran a valiant second at 31/1 in an entry-level allowance. Unfortunately, he got a good ground-saving trip that day yet still finished a length behind one of today's foes while going today's distance. He'll need to step things up, but he is making the third start of his form cycle, and there is some ability here. GRADE: C.

#2 DESERT STONE (IRE) (6/1) has a very strong late kick, so he must seriously be considered here after being freshened off a fourth-place finish in the Oceanside. **OptixNOTES** gave that race a "better-than-looked" because he was impossibly far back on a course that was favoring forwardly placed runners—yet this guy was one of the only ones in the race to make up serious ground late. He came home in :23-flat—which is some serious late pace. I like that he broke his maiden at today's distance, and I love that Baltas has been pointing to this race after skipping the La Jolla (G3). He'll need a move forward to beat the favorite, but he's a viable alternative. GRADE: A.

#3 RIVER BOYNE (IRE) (5/2) has been odds-on in his last two starts, so I expect him to be shorter than 5/2 today, even though he is facing a much bigger field than he did in those last two starts. Still, this guy has shown his talent the moment he stepped off the plane and ran a good second, with trouble, in his U.S. debut. Since then, he's won five of his last six, with his only defeat coming out of state on a yielding Churchill turf course. He won the La Jolla (G3) easily in his last start, even though he looked to me like he was a bit short, grinding away a bit before showing his turn of foot. He'll be much tighter today, making him more like 7/5 than 5/2 in this spot. One thing: do note that Andesh (Ire) beat him when they squared off overseas. GRADE: A.

#4 RESTRAINEDVENGENCE (20/1) looked very good when winning the one-mile Oceanside on opening day, but he couldn't move forward off that effort when traveling an extra half-furlong in the La Jolla (G3), where he finished fifth of six, losing to a few of these at 9/2. I can't fault anyone for taking 20/1 on a horse who has done nice work over this course, but I'm not sure he's going to move forward going 9-panels today. GRADE: X.

#5 ARAWAK (8/1) has done yeoman-like work since joining the O'Neill barn and stringing a few races together here in SoCal. He came on with a nice late run last time in the 8.5-furlong La Jolla (G3) to get second at 10/1. He was never going to threaten the winner, but it showed that he could move forward today while getting an extra half-furlong to work with. I don't like that he hasn't won since last December (in a synth race at Turfway), but he is battle-tested against some nice turf horses, and he's eminently usable in your exotics at a decent price. GRADE: C.

#6 PUBILIUS SYRUS (8/1) is a legitimate turf horse, winning three of his last four—with his one defeat coming at the hands of Analyze It, who was the best juvenile turf horse last year. Still, this guy ran a good second, and he backed up that performance with two wins at Santa Anita, showing versatility by winning at a mile and also winning down the hill. Unfortunately, he's been off since February, so he cedes recency to some very sharp runners. Cerin can certainly have them ready off the bench, and I've always liked this runner, but he's going to need to fire a monster effort off the bench. GRADE: B.

#7 ANDESH (IRE) (15/1) is a bit sneaky in here, making his second U.S. start after a very useful prep against a few of these, where he came running on late to nab fourth at 7/2. He was too far back, so D'Amato adds blinkers today to help keep him more engaged early. I think he'll move forward today, but what I like best is that he beat River Boyne (Ire) when those two raced at Dundalk last October. Granted, it was a 7-furlong synth race, but he did beat him. I'm pretty sure the connections have been pointing to this race—then we'll see if he's good enough. GRADE: A.

#8 RIDE A COMET (7/2) has some good form, but his best work has come around two turns, where he looked good winning his summer races at Woodbine. He put in a late bid in the 8.5-furlong Hall of Fame (G2) at Saratoga over yielding turf, finishing third—so he'll need to do a bit better today, especially since he's never been this far. That said, I always upgrade East Coast invaders on our lovely shores. GRADE: B.

#9 TAKE THE ONE O ONE (8/1) is a cool horse, having won Cal-bred stakes races sprinting on dirt and routing on turf—so you have to love his versatility. He also has tactical speed, so he makes his own luck. He should be sitting on another good race after a sharp 7-furlong victory in the Real Good Deal Stakes here earlier in the meet—but he does have to face some really good horses, and note the few times he stepped out of the statebred ranks, he was defeated. GRADE: C.

#10 KAZAN (IRE) (12/1) has taken to this Del Mar course like a duck takes to water, winning two races and now looking to make it three in a row after breaking his maiden and clearing his N1X. That said, this is a stiff class test he faces today, and I'm not sure he's quite in this caliber. He's a bit of a grinder who should be plugging away late, perhaps spicing up the exotics, but he's going to need a monster effort to get the win today. GRADE: C.

#11 MAJESTIC EAGLE (15/1) looked good beating 11 other N1X types here opening week, clearing his N1X hurdle in facile fashion. His tactical speed means Stevens should be able to work out an okay trip from this wide post, but there's also the possibility this one gets caught a little wide given his tactical style. He also faces a class test today, since there are plenty of proven stakes-caliber runners in here. It wouldn't shock me if he won, but I prefer others. GRADE: C.

#12 ANIMOSITY (20/1) has had some weird trips, and do note that she is a filly taking on the boys today. Two back, she failed to show her customary early speed and rallied too late to get sixth. Last time,

she was leading the way when she jumped a shadow and hit the rail before weakening. She's always hinted at ability, but this seems like an awfully tough spot for her to square off against some salty males. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

No doubt #3 RIVER BOYNE (IRE) is a deserving favorite, but I also expect #2 DESERT STONE (IRE) to run a big race at a square price—so he'll be my key play. I also think you have to consider #7 ANDESH (IRE) just because he beat the favorite last fall.

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