DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

By Frank R. Scatoni
On Twitter @ScatoniSureShot

Date: 7/17/21
Race 10: $250K San Diego Handicap (G2) contested at 8.5-furlongs on the main track.
Post: approx. post 6:30 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

Today's featured event, the $250K San Diego Handicap (G2), an 8.5-furlong main-track affair for horses aged 3-years-old and upward, is a traditional prep for the vaunted Pacific Classic (G1) later in the meet. We've got a nice assortment of runners, but who's in it to win it…and who is prepping for the major race in just a few weeks?

#1 RUSHIE (5/1) is a talented 4-year-old who looks to be sitting on a peak race, making the third start of his form cycle and cutting back in distance after an even fourth against a few of these in the Gold Cup (G2). He will need to do better, but he did have an eventful journey that day, and I also think that he's more effective at the middle distances, so this seems like a very good spot for him to take a step forward. I also like that Rispoli rides, so he should have this horse in a good position just tracking the pace. He's also in good hands with Michael McCarthy. The only thing I don't like is the rail, since we've seen a lot of dead rails at Del Mar the last few seasons, so just pay attention earlier in the card to see how that path is doing. Still, the price should be right on this guy. GRADE: A.

#2 KISS TODAY GOODBYE (8/1) is a grinder who usually finishes up races pretty strongly, but he's going to need some help up front, and part of me thinks he's probably going to need one, coming off a March layoff. That said, he's run well twice over this track, including the fastest race of his life in the Shared Belief last year when he finished third to two very nice horses. There is ability here in this 4-year-old, but I'm not crazy about him today. GRADE: C.

#3 SHERIFF BROWN (20/1) invades from Texas, where he was riding a three-race win streak until he caught a sloppy/sealed track and lost to Mo Mosa, whom he has to face again today. He's pretty honest, and he's done fine work under Fincher's tutelage, but this seems like a tough spot for his SoCal debut. GRADE: X.

#4 ROYAL SHIP (BRZ) (9/5) is in excellent form ever since running a troubled trip in the Kilroe (G1) on turf to start his 5-year-old season before he switched to the dirt, where he won the Californian (G2) and then just missed in the Gold Cup (G1). He has finally acclimated to the U.S. after a dominant career in his native Brazil, but that's not a surprise since he's trained by one of the all-time greats in Richard Mandella. He has tactical speed, and he should be super-fit cutting back from longer races. There are no knocks here at all, but if you're trying to find one, I suppose you could say that this guy has bigger fish to fry in the Pacific Classic (G1). Still, he's the horse to beat (though he's unlikely to offer any value). GRADE: B.

#5 EXPRESS TRAIN (3/1) was not ridden optimally last time in the Gold Cup (G1), so I'm willing to forgive his third-place finish and defeat to Royal Ship (Brz), especially because I've always liked this guy, and I do think he's been a bit unlucky of late. Like his inside neighbor, he'll be super-fit cutting back in distance, and you have to love his perfect in-the-exacta record over this track, sporting a 3: 2-1-0

record. He's the solid second choice, but if folks go crazy over Royal Ship (Brz), perhaps there can be a whiff of value here for the contest. GRADE: B.

#6 MO MOSA (6/1) has won two in a row, posting a career best last time when capturing the Steve Sexton Mile (G3) at Lone Star, beating one of today's foes in the process. It was a nice race, but note that it came on a sloppy/sealed track—something he surely won't see here at Del Mar. All of his main track races before that were just okay, so he'll need a big step forward to contend with the best in here. That said, Maker is no dummy, so if he thinks this guy belongs, then you should at least consider him for your exotics, but he seems like a cut below the top few in here. GRADE: C.

#7 MAGIC ON TAP (12/1) is a 5-year-old who has had some issues, but he has finally been able to put a campaign together this year, winning two of three, including a very nice victory in the 7-furlong Triple Bend (G2), powering home in stylish fashion after tracking very fast early fractions. Even though that race was shorter, he does have a win at today's distance, so stretching out won't be an issue. I don't like that win-rider Hernandez sides with Express Train, however, and it should be noted that Royal Ship (Brz) easily beat this guy two back in the Californian (G2). Look, you can never count out a Baffert runner, especially here at Del Mar, but this one will need a career-best to beat the best in here. GRADE: C.

#8 TRIPOLI (8/1) reinvented himself as a dirt horse last time when he switched to the main track and put up a gaudy figure when capturing an N2X. That's the good news. The bad news is: it was a four-horse field, so I have to take the figure with a grain of salt. Before that, his turf form was just okay; he always ran well, but he never really wowed. That said, he gets in light at 118 pounds on the handicap scale, so if you think that will help his cause against the top few, at least you're getting some kind of advantage, since those two are carrying 124 and 123 pounds, respectively. I'm tempted to see if he can replicate that last dirt race. GRADE: X.

#9 HEYWOODS BEACH (20/1—program scratch.

CONCLUSION
I do think that **#4 ROYAL SHIP (BRZ)** is a deserving favorite, while **#5 EXPRESS TRAIN** is a solid second choice (and a good alternative if that one gets overbet), but to me, the value of the race is through **#1 RUSHIE**. He has always hinted at ability, and he's a lightly raced 4-year-old who could step up and run a good one.

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