DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

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Date: 8/27/22
Race 9: $250K Pat O'Brien (G2) contested at 7-furlongs on main track
Post: approx. post 6:02 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

We've got an excellent renewal of the $250K Pat O'Brien (G2), a 7-furlongs main-track affair for some of the best elongated sprinters in the country. The East Coast invader is the morning-line favorite, but I've got my eye on some locals who could pop at a price.

#1 C Z ROCKET (15/1) looked good coming off the layoff and beating a decent group of upper-level allowance horses in what was surely a prep for this—and he did it from the rail, which was quite impressive. He'll have to do it from the rail again, but he's always been a very strong finisher—and if Rispoli can work out a trip, I'm sure this guy will try hard all the way to the wire. That said, as much as I admire this 8-year-old, I prefer others. GRADE: C.

#2 PRINCIPE CARLO (15/1) is a very honest Cal-bred who really seems to like this 7-furlong distance, but his main nemesis, American Theorem, is back, so this guy will have to show he can beat that foe, as well as some other really good sprinters. I like that he got a useful run off a layoff in the Bing Crosby (G1), but he was on the best part of the track that day and still lost. He'll now have to work out a trip from down inside. GRADE: X.

#3 RESTRAINEDVENGENCE (30/1) is a very cool old boy who has earned more than $1 million the hard way—on dirt, synth, turf, and at all manner of distances. That said, I'm not sure this guy is at a point in his career when he's going to beat some really good sprinters, especially since this guy's best work has come around two turns. If he wins, he'll make a great story. GRADE: X.

#4 AMERICAN THEOREM (4/1) was sensational when taking the Bing Crosby (G1), tracking a slow pace and then powering home to easily overtake them to win going away at 7/1. He was a top pick for us that day for two reasons: I always thought he had ability and that he was heading toward fully realizing his potential; second, he was drawn outside on the absolute best part of the track, so I knew he was going to have that in his favor. He now moves in a few spots, so we'll see if he can replicate that smashing performance with a bit more adversity today. I think last time was the time you wanted to have him. GRADE: B.

#5 GET HER NUMBER (8/1) was also a pick for me in the Bing Crosby (G1) for a similar reason: he was drawn the farthest outside, and I knew he would get the perfect tracking trip on the best part of the track. Well, he did, but he wasn't good enough to beat his inside neighbor, who is probably just a slightly better animal. That said, this guy is no slouch, and he can continue to improve as a lightly raced 4-year-old. Still, he'll have to turn the tables on American Theorem. GRADE: B.

#6 THE CHOSEN VRON (12/1) gets wise-guy consideration here. I know he's a Cal-bred and that his speed figs don't look as flashy as some of the others, so he may not be good enough to win, but I just think he's sitting on a huge race. He came off a November layoff to run a very good third in an 8.5-

furlong turf race against good Cal-bred turf horses in what was clearly just a prep for this, since this guy is a legit dirt horse. He also has plenty of back class against open-company, so he's got that to build on. I'm very curious to see how he does today. GRADE: A.

#7 LAUREL RIVER (5/1) came off a near-year layoff and was dominant in a one-mile dirt race against only four other foes—but he looked terrific. That race should set him up very well for this, cutting back after showing good route speed. There is also still plenty of upside here from this lightly raced 4-year-old, so I'm interested to see if Baffert can get this guy his first stakes win, since it should be noted that The Chosen Vron beat him on the square back in the 2021 La Brea (G3). GRADE: B.

#8 SPEAKER'S CORNER (6/5) has some monster figs to build on, so that's why he's so short on the morning-line in what I think is a pretty competitive field. In fact, the fastest race of his life came in the 7-furlong Carter Handicap (G1), so this distance is right up his alley, so you can take his defeat to the extremely talented Life Is Good last time with a grain of salt. Clearly, he's the fastest horse in the race and the one to beat, but we'll see how he does shipping all the way across the country to run against California sprinters. GRADE: B.

#9 DEFUNDED (8/1), the second Baffert, is interesting to me, since he had no shot in the San Diego (G2) last time when he was stuck on a dead rail and tried to wire the field. He should be much more fit after that race, and I love that he's now drawn outside with the blinkers coming off. I thought he was in it to win it last time in the San Diego (G2), so I'm a little concerned that this spot might be an afterthought for Baffert, but this guy broke his maiden going 6-furlongs before plying his trade in routes. Hmmm….GRADE: A.

#10 SENOR BUSCADOR (30/1) will like getting back to one turn after just running around the track in the San Diego (G2), which was probably a tune-up for this more sensible spot. Still, is this guy fast enough or good enough to beat these beasts? I'm a little skeptical, but his trainer wins a lot of races, so I'll be curious to see how this guy does today. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION
I'm having a hard time deciding between **#6 THE CHOSEN VRON (12/1)** and **#9 DEFUNDED (8/1)**, but I'm leaning toward the former, since I know he's been pointed to this race, and I know that last race was just a strong prep for this. Plus, he's a better price on the morning-line.

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