

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

By Frank R. Scatoni

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Date: 8/23/25

Race 9: \$250K Pat O'Brien (G2) contested at 7-furlongs on the main track

Post: approx. post 6:03 p.m. PDT

OVERVIEW

It's time for one of my favorite main-track races of the meet, the \$250K Pat O'Brien (G2), a 7-furlong main-track affair, which is also a "Win and You're In" race for the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile (G1). Only in horse racing can a one-turn 7-furlong sprint victory qualify you for a two-turn mile race!

#1 DR. VENKMAN (4/1) drew the short straw by drawing the rail, and that really bums me out because I pegged him as the winner of this race after he was up against it in the Bing Crosby (G1) earlier in the meet, where he also had to race inside and just grinded away for fourth. I think he's the best horse in the race, so if Rispoli can just get him off the rail early, he'll have every chance to show his best stuff—but if he doesn't, then he's screwed. Hopefully this lousy rail draw will be factored into his price. **GRADE: A.**

#2 SPEED BOAT BEACH (5/2), the first Baffert entrant, is one fast son of a gun, but he missed all of 2024, and his one race this year was awful. He was favored at Churchill Downs, chased a fast pace, and spit the bit. That was back in May, so he's been off for a while, and that's a bit of a concern. On the plus side, maybe that time off has given Baffert enough time to figure out how to get this guy back to his brilliant winning ways. He's the fastest horse in the race, and I'm not sure anyone will be able to keep up with him early, so this race could be over before they even leave the backstretch, but I'm sure he'll be way overbet. **GRADE: B.**

#3 SPIRIT OF MAKENA (20/1) ran some monster races back in the day, but this 7-year-old is a mere shadow of himself. That said, he now makes the third start of his form cycle, so perhaps he can turn back the clock and show up with one of his faster races, but that's not something I'm willing to bet on, even at a big price. Don't get me wrong, I've always liked this guy, and 7-furlongs is his specialty distance, but it's been a while since he's run a race fast enough to win a Grade 2. **GRADE: X.**

#4 MAYMUN (5/1), the second Baffert, is coming off a February 2024 layoff, so he clearly had something go wrong after he reeled off two scintillating victories to start his career. I like that he has sharp speed, but since he's drawn outside, he can just stalk his stablemate and look to take

over if Speed Boat Beach isn't the same horse he once was. I also like that he has a win at a mile, so 7-furlongs should be just fine for him, even off such a long layoff. He's the "other Baffert," but how many times have we seen this movie? GRADE: B.

#5 AWESOME RHYTHM (20/1) screwed me last time when he won at 10/1. I hated the favorite in that race, so I used four horses but not this guy! It was a nice effort, but it came against N1X foes with a perfect trip on the best part of the track. No way he wins this. GRADE: X.

#6 STRONGHOLD (3/1) is a very nice horse, but after a good second in the Malibu (G1) last year, he was thrown to the wolves in the Pegasus World Cup Invitational (G1), and he was up the track, forcing a layoff. He now comes back from a January break in a race that is probably a prep for something longer down the road, since this guy's best race was in the Santa Anita Derby (G1) at 9-furlongs back in 2024. GRADE: B.

#7 EXPRESS TRAIN (12/1) is a very cool horse, but he has always been his best around two turns, so this is a curious spot for him, especially since I was fully expecting him to be entered in the Pacific Classic (G1) next week. He has a lot of class and is a very cool horse, but he's going to have his work cut out for him at this shorter distance. He should be rolling late, but it's not like there's a ton of speed in here to set up a late run. GRADE: X.

#8 TAPALO (12/1) put up a big number last year when beating age-restricted foes in the Laz Berrera at today's 7-furlong distance. He made the lead and just crushed that field. He hasn't been able to replicate that effort since, but he is making his second start of the year, and if he can get back to that type of race, he could make things tricky for Speed Boat Beach—but that's a big *if*. GRADE: X.

#9 MAN O ROSE (7/1) has shown good speed against far lesser company, so he seems up against it today while trying to chase Speed Boat Beach and Tapalo. I can't knock a horse who has seven wins and three seconds in just 14 career starts, but this is a tough spot for your comeback race off a November layoff. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

Ugh! I absolutely detest the post for #1 **DR. VENKMAN (4/1)**, but I think he's the best horse in the race, and 4/1 would be a great price on a horse as talented as he is. I know I'll kick myself after the race when the inside beats him, but if Rispoli can just get him off the rail in a good tracking position on the outside, he'll at least have a fighting chance.

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