

DEL MAR FEATURED RACE OF THE DAY

By Frank R. Scatoni

On Twitter @ScatoniSureShot

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Race 9: \$300K Bing Crosby (G1) contested at 6-furlongs on the main track.

Post: 6:03 pm PT

OVERVIEW

What a doozy of a race today's contest race is: the 72nd running of the Bing Crosby (G1), a 6-furlong dash that features a decent field of nine runners, including last year's Breeders' Cup Sprint (G1) winner, who makes his seasonal debut. We also have a couple of graded-stakes winners, along with some hard-knocking sprinters who should make this an interesting race.

#1 DENMAN'S CALL (20/1) shocked the world three starts ago when he captured the Triple Bend (G1) at 16/1 in what was just his second victory. Before that, he had been struggling against lesser company, despite always showing an ability that was never fully realized—until that Triple Bend (G1) run. Since that 7-furlong event, however, he's been pretty well-beaten in two subsequent starts, though I suppose you can make excuses for each of them: he caught a wet-fast track at Churchill Downs two back, while last time, he found a one-turn mile beyond his scope. He's been freshened since that flop in the Met Mile (G1), but I have to think that this might be a leg-stretcher for the 7-furlong Pat O'Brien (G2) later in the meet. That said, his very best race fits, and there should be enough of an early pace, so expect him on the scene late as a closing sprinter. GRADE: C.

#2 DREFONG (5/2), ladies and gentlemen, is your 2016 Breeders' Cup Sprint (G1) victor, a ridiculously fast sprinter whose only defeat came in his maiden race when he had to break from the rail. Since then, he's won five in a row, including the aforementioned Breeders' Cup race, as well as the always prestigious King's Bishop (G1) at Saratoga, showing that he could carry his sharp early speed beyond 6-furlongs if he needs to. Fortunately, he won't have to today, since he's back to pad his perfect 3-for-3 record at 6-panels while returning from a lengthy vacation in preparation for a title defense in early November. Baffert should have him ready to run, and it's encouraging to see that he has a win over this track. On the negative side, he should face some pressure early from one of the Miller trainees, so we'll see if he can repel an early challenge while shaking off the cobwebs after a 266-day vacation. GRADE: A.

#3 ST. JOE BAY (6/1) got really good once Peter Miller decided to reinvent him as a run-and-gun sprinter. After clearing his N2X hurdle here at Del Mar going 6.5-furlongs, he then went on to win (via a dead-heat) the Midnight Lute (G3), also at 6.5-furlongs, and the Palos Verde (G2) at 6-furlongs. In each of those races, he dueled early while showing a gameness in the lane. He's been freshened since a fourth-place finish in Dubai, so we'll see if he will have his sea legs about him today. Miller is solid off the bench, so this guy should be ready—but the big concern is that he's never had to duel with the likes of Drefong before, so there's a strong possibility that this guy will get cooked trying to keep up with that seemingly superior foe. GRADE: X.

#4 RANSOM THE MOON (7/2) is another horse who has been reinvented as a crack sprinter, so it will be interesting to see how he performs today after three very good races at Santa Anita, one of which saw him capture the Kona Gold (G2) at 6.5-furlongs. Before D'Amato got him, he was plying his trade around

two turns on synth and turf at Woodbine, so it's nothing short of remarkable what this guy has accomplished here on the dirt. He's got a really nice closing kick, so he should be motoring late, but note that he's been racing beyond 6-furlongs, so Prat will have to make sure he's not too far back at this shorter distance. GRADE: B.

~~#5 BIG MACHER is such a cool horse—a 7-year-old warrior who has danced some big dances and who looks to become a graded-stakes winner at this ripe old age after missing more than a year of racing after he was sidelined after the November 2015 Cary Grant here at Del Mar. This Grade One winner came off that long break to capture the Cal-bred Thor's Echo in game fashion, so at least you know he's still competitive—but can he achieve the highest glory today while facing the best sprinter in the world? I trust Baltas to have him ready, and you have to love that last work over the track, suggesting he's ready to fire a big shot. Expect him to start rolling around the turn if he's back to his old form. GRADE: B.~~

#6 MAGIC TASTE (50/1), who just beat starter-allowance foes at LRC, looks to be hopelessly outclassed in here. GRADE: X.

~~#7 COASTLINE, the second D'Amato runner, is a cool horse who has acted on all surfaces (with wins on dirt, wet, synth, and turf), but he looks to be a cut below the very best in here, since he's had several tries sprinting at the graded-stakes level and has often come up empty, losing to several of these already. GRADE: X.~~

#8 ROY H (3/1), the second of three Miller entrants, went from being a career mediocrity to suddenly becoming a major force in the sprint division—an amazing feat for a 5-year-old (like his stablemate St. Joe Bay). He's a perfect 3-for-3 this year with wins down the hill, on a wet-fast/sealed track, and at Belmont, where he destroyed a pretty solid True North (G2) field going today's 6-furlongs. His stalking style will suit him well in this spot, and you have to like the fact that Paco Lopez, who rode him in New York, comes all the way out West to keep the mount. He'll have to prove his mettle against the best sprinter in the world, but at least he'll trip out if he's good enough. GRADE: B.

#9 SOLID WAGER (20/1), the third Miller runner, dead-heated with stablemate St. Joe Bay in the Midnight Lute (G3) back in December when the track came up sloppy. Before that, he won the Cal-bred Cary Grant here at Del Mar in closing fashion, so you know he likes this track. That said, his races since those two efforts have been just okay—and that's because he's a closing sprinter who will need everything to go his way. At least Miller can triple tag-team Drefong here, with St. Joe Bay pushing him every step of the way, Roy H sitting a tracking trip, and this guy coming from the clouds in case the big horse falters. Still, I have a hard time saying, “Grade One winner Solid Wager” after such a workman-like career. GRADE: X.

#10 KOBE'S BACK (8/1) is a closing sprinter who has always needed things to go exactly right for him to set up his late run (mostly because he's such a bad gate horse). That said, he is a multiple graded-stakes winner, so the quality has always been here—and his stretch run is often visually impressive since he likes to mow them all down from the clouds. Unfortunately for him, several of these have him on recent form, so he'll need to do a lot better, especially over a track where he's currently 0-for-3. Optimists, however, can point to the fact that Eurton has been on fire, so if Kobe's Back is ever going to recapture his past sprint form, today could be the day making the third start of his form cycle. GRADE: C.

#11 MOE CANDY (20/1) has run well over this track, and he's held his own in two Grade 2 races this year—but he's run second both times to runners who are in this field. His tracking style means he'll probably get a wide journey, and that will be a problem as they turn for home. On the plus side, Sadler and Espinoza just slayed the great Arrogate in the San Diego Handicap (G2), so if you think lightning can strike twice, at least you've got giant-killing connections—though do understand that this guy will have to run the race of his life to get the job done today. GRADE: X.

CONCLUSION

Sorry to say that I don't have a clever opinion in here. You don't need me to tell you that #2 DREFONG is the horse to beat, while #4 RANSOM THE MOON and #8 ROY H look like viable alternatives. If you want to be a little clever, maybe you can use #1 DENMAN'S CALL in the mix, since he's a lightly raced 4-year-old who still has room for improvement—and his very best race is certainly good enough to contend for a slice.