

## **Del Mar Betting Guide:** Tips and Trends to Know for the 2025 Summer Meet

by Noel Michaels

Summertime ushers in California's most anticipated season of horse racing starting on **Friday, July 18** with the opening of Del Mar's summer meet. The 86th Del Mar summer season will encompass 31 race days conducted mostly on a four-days-a-week basis, Thursdays through Sundays plus Labor Day, until Sunday, Sept. 7.

The Del Mar meet will include six Grade 1 stakes races topped by the meet's signature race, the \$1 million Pacific Classic Stakes on Aug. 30. The Pacific Classic will serve as a track-and-distance prep race for the Longines Breeders' Cup Classic, which will be contested at Del Mar Nov. 1.

For horseplayers, however, Del Mar is about much more than just important stakes. The meet will offer handicappers day-to-day competitive racing and wagering with large fields, promising 2-year-olds, and the return of turf racing that has been absent in SoCal since the end of Santa Anita Park's meet in mid-June.

Read on for some handicapping advice and tips to help you win "Where the Turf Meets the Surf" at old Del Mar.

### **Del Mar Top Jockeys**

The Del Mar jockey colony is strong at the top and is led by Juan Hernandez, who is the defending Del Mar summer meet leading rider from 2024 when he won 46 races from 165 mounts for a 28% winning percentage. Last year marked an uptick in Hernandez's production even above 2023 when he also led all Del Mar jockeys with 39 winners from 174 mounts for a 22% winning percentage. Hernandez usually rides first call for trainer Bob Baffert and will get many of his best mounts during the season for that high-percentage barn. Second in the 2024 jockey win standings for the second straight year was Antonio Fresu, who won 38 races from 214 mounts for 18%. Fresu's win total went up last year compared with his 2023 meet when he scored 31 wins from 173 mounts for an equal 18% win percentage. The rest of the top 5 was made up of Umberto Rispoli, who had 31 wins from 143 mounts for 22%; Hector Isaac Berrios, who had 22 winners from 110 mounts for 20%, and Kyle Frey who won 20 times but also had 178 mounts, resulting in an 11% win percentage.



Other jockeys to watch are led by Kazushi Kimura, who continues to make his mark on the SoCal circuit after winning 18 races from 173 mounts (10%) at Del Mar's summer meet last year. Edwin Maldonado finished in the top 5 two years ago at Del Mar's summer meet with 20 wins from 162 mounts (12%) and followed that up last year with a 12-for-114 record (11%). Veteran Mike Smith continues to ride selectively and went 9-for-63 at the 2024 summer meet for a 14% clip. He won 20% of his mounts in 2023.

### **Del Mar Leading Trainers**

Phil D'Amato and Bob Baffert have engaged in a back-and-forth battle atop the Del Mar trainer standings the last two years. Baffert won the 2024 Del Mar summer trainers title with 23 wins to beat D'Amato, who finished with 21 wins. Baffert turned the tables on D'Amato who had edged Baffert by one winner to take the 2023 summer training title. While these two trainers are expected to continue their success at Del Mar and the 2025 meet title could go either way, their win percentages cannot be compared with Baffert holding the edge in that category. Baffert accomplished his 23 wins last summer with just 77 starters for a big 30% winning percentage. D'Amato's wins came from 147 starters, making his win percentage a much more modest 14%. Both Baffert's win percentage and D'Amato's were similar to their numbers from the 2023 season when Baffert won 32% and D'Amato won 16% of their races.

The other trainer very likely in the mix to compete for the Del Mar summer training title is Doug O'Neill, who missed the title by just two wins at the 2023 summer meet when he won 19 times and then missed the 2024 title by just three wins when he won 20 times. O'Neill's record was 20-for-129 in 2024 for 16% after he won at a 13% clip in 2023.

In terms of winning percentage, it will be a tall challenge for any trainer to compete with Baffert at the meet, but for bettors, Baffert's horses usually pay very low prices. Some other trainers you may want to rely on for better profits this season, based on their performances at the 2024 summer meet, include John Sadler (17-for-69, 25%), Michael McCarthy (13-for-70, 19%), Jeff Mullins, (11-for-46, 24%), Craig Dollase (5-for-21, 24%), and Ron Ellis (4-for-17, 24%).

Finally, Mark Glatt is sitting on the biggest Del Mar summer meet of his career. Glatt won the Santa Anita training title at the Dec. 26-April 6 meet when he won 31 times from 122 starters for 25% after going 16-for-100 for 16% and finishing fifth in the trainer standings at the 2024 Del Mar summer meet.



## **Del Mar Main Track Trends**

Del Mar's main track winning profile can be speed favoring at times, and that was especially true at Del Mar's two meets in 2024, which were dramatically more speed favoring than in 2023.

In dirt sprints, speed horses, as defined for this article as racing on the pace or within a length of the lead, accounted for wins in 64% of the 145 dirt sprints in 2024 (93 wins). Stalkers coming from 1-4 lengths off the pace won 28% of the races (40 wins) and closers from four or more lengths off the pace won only 8% of the dirt sprints (12 wins). In 2023, those dirt sprint stats were 47% for speed horses (71 wins in 152 dirt sprints) with stalkers winning almost as many races (68 wins in 152 dirt sprints for 45%). Closers fared about equally poorly in 2023 as they did in 2024, with late runners winning just 13 of the 152 dirt sprints in 2023 for 9%. The bias against closers existed at all of the various sprint distances.

The vast majority dirt route races run at Del Mar are run at the distance of one mile and it is very rare to find a non-stakes race carded at a longer dirt route distance than a mile. Del Mar ran a total of 77 dirt routes in 2024 and 65 of those races were at one mile. The stats for the longer routes were all very similar to the races at one mile so let's lump them all together for this analysis.

In Del Mar dirt routes in 2024, the running style advantage went to front-runners, who did by far the best with 43 wins in the 77 races to account for 56% of the winners. Stalkers won 26 times to account for wins in 34% of the races, and closers won just eight times for 10%.

Post positions also played a major role in Del Mar dirt routes in 2024. With an average field size of 7.3 runners per route race, horses breaking from the three inside posts won 55% of the races (42 wins in 77 routes). Additionally, the combination of early speed breaking from one of the three inside posts was lethal in Del Mar routes in 2024. Inside speed horses alone won 30% of the 77 dirt routes.

## **Del Mar Turf Route Tips**

On the turf, Del Mar runs some of the country's best summer grass racing. In the current era of Del Mar turf racing since its new turf course was installed prior to hosting the Breeders' Cup in fall of 2017, the vast majority of Del Mar's turf routes have been run at one mile or 1 1/16 miles. A handful of races each summer also are run at 1 1/8 miles and 1 3/8 miles on the turf. The Longines Breeders' Cup Turf will be run at 1 1/2 miles. Turf routes at Del Mar in 2024 had a terrific average field size of 9.38 runners.



In terms of running style preferences in turf routes, the Del Mar course was remarkably fair in 2024. Horses racing on or close to the pace won 42 of the 137 total turf routes to account for 31% of the winners, while stalkers won 48 times (35% of the races) and closers won 47 times (34% of the races). These stats represented a big turnaround from 2023 when stalkers and closers did the best and horses on or close to the pace were at a disadvantage (speed horses won only 23 of the 122 total turf routes run at Del Mar in 2023 to account for only 19% of the wins). Keep an eye on this trend as the 2025 season progresses to see if front-runners are doing poorly like in 2023 or if they are holding their own as they did in 2024.

Del Mar's turf course mostly plays fair in terms of post positions in one-mile races, which is by far the most common turf route distance (89 races in 2024). The outside posts tend to be more problematic at 1 1/16 miles on turf based on the 30 such races run in 2024, and at 1 1/8 miles on turf (9 races in 2024), with horses breaking from post positions #7 and outward in those races winning at lower percentages.

### **Del Mar Turf Sprint Trends**

Del Mar's turf sprint races are all run at the distance of five furlongs and Del Mar ran 76 turf sprints in 2024 which is by far the most the track has ever run (by comparison there were 62 turf sprints run at Del Mar in 2023). Expect plenty of upsets in these races. Turf sprint form from Santa Anita, which includes races on the downhill course and mostly consists of longer turf sprints, may not translate well to Del Mar.

For Del Mar turf sprint handicappers, running style trends are more important than post position trends in terms of being able to sort out the horses with the best chances to win. Del Mar's turf sprints in 2024 had an average field size of 8.78 runners and, just like in 2023, horses from inside, middle, and outside posts won at nearly identical rates.

Being that these Del Mar turf sprints are run at five furlongs, it shouldn't be a surprise that it pays to have early speed in these races. While speed can be beneficial, however, it is not essential to success and plenty of winners come from off the pace. In 2024, 31 of the 76 turf sprints (41%) were won by horses on or close to the pace, while stalkers won 26 times (34% of the races) and closers managed to win 19 times (25% of the races). Closers did much better in 2024 than they did in 2023 when they won only 11 of the 62 turf sprints to account for 18% of the wins.

Enjoy the 2025 SoCal summer racing season where the turf meets the surf at Del Mar. Best of luck!