

TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

GOOD HORSE/BAD HORSE

While it's true that handicapping should be an exercise in picking winners, there are some bets on the wagering menu these days that reward picking losers. Yes, we're talking in particular about the Super Trifecta.

To win a Super Tri, you need to pick one winner and three losers. Virtually all handicapping theories are designed to isolate the horses in the field that are most likely to win the race while eliminating the ones most likely to lose. When approaching the Super Tri, the majority of horseplayers will use the same approach that they use if they're looking for singles in the Pick Six. They simply "key" their top choice on top to their second, third, fourth choices in the secondary spots of the Super. In so doing, they pretty much take themselves out of the hunt.

Truth be told, it's the "bad" horses in the field that lead to the big payoffs. The late-running plodders who rarely, if ever, get their picture taken in the Winner's Circle yet stumble in third or fourth at huge odds to ignite massive payoffs. For this reason, players need to include these "stiffs" in their thinking if they are going to be successful in the gimmick game.

This column is not meant to encourage Super Tri participation. The best way to succeed at the races remains playing overlays to win. However, no one can deny the growing popularity of the Super. Santa Anita is offering the wager on more and more races and Golden Gate Fields has one on just about every event. If you play it, you may want to read the following. If you don't, you may just want to turn the page immediately rather than risk getting sucked into such nonsense. I'll give you a moment.....

Okay. For those still with me, here goes.

To have a reasonable chance of hitting you MUST first handicap the race looking for a "good" horse. Then you must reanalyze the field looking for a "bad" horse.

Your "good" horse should meet all the normal criteria associated with positive handicapping. It should be in good form, it should fit on numbers, it should be saddled by a solid trainer, it should be ridden by an acceptable jockey, it should be properly placed from a class/distance/surface standpoint and it should be facing a suitable pace scenario. Nothing new here. In essence, you should believe in your heart that this runner has an excellent chance to run first or second against today's field.

In most situations, you will end up with a top selection and a group of two or three others that appear to be the biggest dangers. Your top pick is the "good" horse and the others are your "contenders".

Now, you need to look for the "bad" horse and it can't be one of your "contenders". This horse was probably an immediate toss out the first time you handicapped the race. It doesn't have any speed, it never wins races, it may be saddled by a low-profile stable and ridden by some guy who resides way out of the top ten list. None of that matters. What does matter is that the horse tends to run third or fourth quite often while passing tired horses in the stretch. It should also be listed at more than 10/1 on the Morning Line. A lot more, if possible. The expected pace for the race should also be hot and heavy. You're looking for races at any distance where two, three or more horses are expected to vie for command early. Logic says that some of these pacers will be wasted by the time the field hits the stretch which will create the opportunity for the plodders to do their thing in the lane and secure the lesser placings in the race.

Sounds simple, right???? Well, it is. Kind of.

The next thing to consider is the old bankroll factor. It takes some money to play this thing properly. To be honest, to win the real big Supers, two "bad" horses are generally (but not always) required. Now, it's hard enough to pick out one stinker at 20/1 that can hit the board. To get two, you generally need to do some "wheeling". Unfortunately, "wheeling" costs money which makes life hard on the small bettor. Well, nobody ever said life was easy.

We'll use a mythical ten-horse field to illustrate the strategy. Four tickets are required for play as follows with the "A" key being your "good" horse and the "B" key being your "bad" horse.

TICKET A

1st: A key with
2nd: 3 contenders with
3rd: B key with
4th: All

TICKET B

1st: 3 contenders with
2nd: A key with
3rd: B key with
4th: All

TICKET C

1st: A key with
2nd: 3 contenders with
3rd: All with
4th: B key

TICKET D

1st: 3 contenders with
2nd: A key with
3rd: All with
4th: B key

This strategy wins if three things happen: (1) your "good" horse runs first or second, (2) one of your contenders runs first or second and (3) your "bad" horse runs third or fourth. Obviously if some outsider runs third or fourth in the wheel, it's party time. In a ten-horse field each ticket will set you back \$21 for a total cost of \$84. In an 11-horse field, it's \$96; for 12 it's \$108. Of course, if there are only nine in the race, it's "only" \$72. So it is pricey but, hey, some of you guys have lots of bucks. You can also lower the ticket cost dramatically by using only two contenders instead of three to back up your "good" horse. In a 10-horse field that would cost \$56 instead of \$84.

This Super Tri approach can be a crowd pleaser for a group. Everyone tosses in \$10 or \$20 (depending on how many friends you have) and you just might carve up a good chunk of change. If not, nobody really gets hurt.