

# TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

## PLAYING THE PICK FOUR

Racing these days has a "shop 'til you drop" mentality. To be a successful shopper (i.e. handicapper) you've got to shop the races for playable events, shop the field searching for realistic contenders, shop the toteboard for true value and then shop the wagering menu seeking the right financial approach. You can't buy everything in the store, of course, the budget just can't take it.

Every once in a while the owners bring out a "new and improved" product that merits your attention. In racing's store, just such a product is the Pick Four and, so far, it looks like a real bargain for one and all.

It's better than the Pick Three where the pools are small and one big bettor on the right combination can skewer the payoff. It's better than the Pick Six where people with big bucks have all the advantages over those with smaller bankrolls. In fact, it may well be the perfect bet.

The advantages of the Pick Four:

1. It only costs \$1 per combination and gives the smaller player a chance to construct a ticket that packs a punch for a modest investment. For example, a ticket using three horses in each race requires only \$81 but if you make one race a 'single', the cost drops to \$27. A ticket with two horses in each event, is just \$16. Make one a single and it's a mere \$8.

2. The span of four races makes it far more difficult for the high rollers to crush the pool with \$50 or \$100 tickets on single combinations. These guys are likely to continue looking for their scores in the Pick Six and the rolling Pick Threes. The Pick Four payoffs (which seem to typically come in between \$200 and \$6,000) don't provide the inducements necessary for them to change their mode of play. Management is "selling" the bet as a consolation prize for Pick Six losers but it remains highly unlikely that the some guy who just dumped \$2,000 into the Pick Six will turnaround and toss another \$1,000 into the Pick Four.

3. The value is there. Here are the payoffs for last week at Santa Anita has compared to a \$1 win parlay on the four winners:

<u>WEDNESDAY</u>	PARLAY, \$264	PAYOFF, \$359	<u>SATURDA</u> <u>Y</u>	PARLAY, \$243	PAYOFF, \$508
<u>THURSDAY</u>	PARLAY, \$4,562	PAYOFF, \$5,931	<u>SUNDAY</u>	PARLAY, \$1,316	PAYOFF, \$1,524
<u>FRIDAY</u>	PARLAY, \$478	PAYOFF, \$1,182			

Pick Three payoffs, on the other hand, often come in at less than the parlay. Back on March 17 at Golden Gate, for example, the Pick Threes paid off after the 5th, 6th and 7th Races were as follows:

<u>3RD/5TH</u>	PARLAY, \$598	PAYOFF, \$169
<u>4TH/6TH</u>	PARLAY, \$581	PAYOFF, \$306
<u>5TH/7TH</u>	PARLAY, \$1,044	PAYOFF, \$556

Even when cashing on these babies, you felt ripped off. That's what can (and does) happen when you stumble onto the same horses as some guy betting \$10 or \$20 or \$50 combinations while  
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you're betting at the \$1 level. Since it's a blind pool, you have no way of knowing if you made a wise play until after the second leg becomes official and they post the Pick Three payoffs possibilities.

As in any multiple race wager, beating the favorites is the key to the overlaid payoffs. Unlike the Pick Three, however, you don't have to beat all three chalkers to be well paid. On Sunday, the Pick Four included a \$3 winner yet still returned \$1,316 because there was another 1-2 shot that lost and the final leg was taken by a 25/1 screamer. On the other hand, you don't NEED a big bomber to win big. Friday's \$1,182 windfall came from imminently playable winners that returned \$6.80, \$14, \$11.20 and \$7.20. While it's true that the Pick Four is also a "blind" pool, it's important to note that all the money played is concentrated into one pool and not spread out over six or seven on the day. A concentrated pool is going to lead to an overlay vs. the parlay payoff in the vast majority of cases, so you can be relatively assured of getting a decent return on any winning play. Locating false or vulnerable favorites and going against them in deep spreads (unless you have a strong single or double) that include many longshot chances is the way to go. Use your imagination and don't be afraid to include marginal contenders going off at big prices in events that have that longshot look.

A winning single (at any price) is huge. Unlike the Pick Six where a small investor realistically needs at least two or three singles to have any chance, you can score nicely in the Pick Four with just one. The single allows you to go deep in the other legs while still keeping the investment to something you can handle. Combine one single with a six-horse spread and use three contenders in the other legs adds up to a \$54 play. Of course, if you feel good about using only a couple of horses in three races with one single, you can always buy a \$5 ticket and only pay \$40.

Unlike the Pick Six, the Pick Four seems a good play EVERY day, unless you believe obvious horses are going to dominate all four contests. If you beat just one of them, the returns are more than worthwhile based on what I've seen happen so far. Beat two of them with horses paying \$20+ and you could be sitting on a real bonanza.

In short, the Pick Four seems a more honest handicapping test than either of its wagering cousins. The playing field has been leveled nicely and the little guy has as good a chance as the high roller. Good handicapping is rewarded and you can't just buy the pot. The presence of the rolling Daily Doubles affords some nice insurance along the way, too, since you can guard against the near miss by playing your Pick Four horses in that pool as well. The Doubles continue to pay better than they should more often than not.

You may not cash on the bet every day, but all-in-all, it seems a winner.