

TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

THE SUPERFECTA--RISKY BUSINESS

The Superfecta. Is it a legitimate investment opportunity or just a pie-in-the-sky pipedream?

Track management and players seem equally befuddled by this wager. Hollywood Park loves it and puts up two or three a day. Santa Anita hates the thing and doesn't offer it at all. Del Mar has taken the middle ground and cards the last race as a Superfecta when field size permits the play. The Bay Area tracks are pretty confused

by the whole thing and after a brief experimentation awhile back don't offer it at present.

Some bettors get involved but it's not one you hear many talk about, unless they happen to reel in a biggie. Many shy away simply because they can't figure out how much a potential ticket actually costs. Being one who persists in "never saying never" when it comes to handicapping, I have taken the stance that it's a good bet--if you win and a bad bet if you lose. Talk about walking the line.

Here are some thoughts about the Trifecta-plus-one that may help you along in making your ultimate decision.

(1) Most Superfectas aren't playable. It takes the right set of circumstances (to be explained later) to make this bet.

(2) Accept the fact that it's a throwaway wager. You can't EXPECT to win it no matter what the odds of the horses you're using. It's just darn hard to get four horses to do what you want them to do. That means you must employ the bet-a-little-to-win-a-bunch philosophy.

(3) Never "chase" this wager on a losing day. If you're on a roll and want to take a shot at a windfall, so be it. If you're already in a hole, chances are strong it will get deeper.

(4) You must have a relatively strong opinion on the potential winner in the race and it shouldn't be the favorite. These things can pay peanuts when logical horses are involved and there are just much easier ways to get 8/1 or 10/1 without getting involved in multiple-horse wagers. If your top selection in the contest is 3/1 or higher, you may want to take a small percentage of your proposed investment and use the horse as your "key" on top in the Superfecta.

(5) You should also "hate" the chalk and believe it has an excellent chance to be off the board entirely. Since many of these races feature cheap maiden claimers, one such bad favorite could be an early-speed type that figures to get hooked on the pace (especially in two-turn races) and is already a proven loser at the class level. When this kind folds, they really FOLD.

(6) No boxing allowed. It's too expensive and if you don't believe in your top choice strong enough to put him alone in the top slot, you probably don't have a real handle on the race itself.

(7) You better look twice (or three times) at horses that were eliminated early in the traditional handicapping process. Horses that don't win races, horses that have no speed, horses from losing barns, especially if they're double-figures on the board. Plodders do their thing in these races and often stumble home 3rd/4th to complete the big payoffs. Remember, that in this bet, it's just as important to run 4th as it is to win.

(8) Strategy???? Well, there are at last three logical ways to go.

(a) El cheapo. Take your key horse on top to three others in the 2/3/4 slots. This only costs \$6. Of course, there is no margin for error but, after all, it's a throwaway bet you don't figure to win. Always have some win money on your top choice since you don't want to feel like an idiot if it romps, pays \$22 and you don't cash the Super.

(b) Big spender. Take your key horse on top to four others. This costs \$24 which is OK if you normally will risk about that much on a 20/1 shot that has a chance. You get a bit more horseflesh to work with here. Again, win money on the key horse is essential.

(c) Grand slam. Take your key horse on top with your second selection by itself in the two-hole. Use two other contenders to run 3rd and then wheel the 4th leg. The price on this one will vary due to the number of horses in the field but it will never cost more than \$20 in a 12-horse lineup. Zero margin for error here but if you get Mr. 99/1 to struggle in 4th, it's party time.

So that's it in the proverbial nutshell. This is NOT a high-percentage wager but if you keep your play to a minimum, you may well end up showing a profit on the Superfecta, even if you only hit one or two a year.