

TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

THE LUCK FACTOR

It's a crazy little thing called luck.

In Fantasyland, the luckiest people I've ever seen were those Mexican peasants who hired The Magnificent Seven to defend their village against the local bandidos. What a break that was. The unluckiest were those who moved in next door to Freddy Krueger. Talk about a nightmare.

In the real world, the truly lucky win lotteries and the truly unlucky die in plane crashes. Since both are statistical anomalies, the rest of us land somewhere between being lucky and unlucky.

When it comes to horse racing, of course, luck IS a major element in the equation. A fraction of an inch often determines the winners and the losers as millions of dollars hang on the whim of a head bob at the wire. Professionals understand the concept that "luck" will even out over the long run and that if you're good, you have a much better chance to also be lucky.

For this reason, it's important to stay above the fray when it comes to the luck factor, for the sake of your mental well being, if nothing else. The difference between luck and misfortune is an important concept. If you pick a good horse, make the right bet and lose by a lip on the line, that's unlucky. If your horse stumbles and loses the jockey at the start, that's misfortune. In the first scenario, you should congratulate yourself for making a good play and move on. In the second, you just move on. In neither situation do you curse the Gods and rue the day you ever got hooked on this idiotic game. It's counterproductive since your negativity could well lead to future bad decisions that have nothing to do with either luck or misfortune.

The majority of people tend to remember the tough beats with a clarity that's scary. These folks have a tough time balancing the books in the luck department because they chalk up many of their defeats to bad luck while considering the narrow victories to be the result of their own personal skill rather than good luck. When you see someone moping along and muttering "I just can't get lucky", you may rest assured that this sorry individual is a big-time loser.

Generally overlooked in the good luck/bad luck discussion, is the fact that you can sometimes put yourself into lucky situations with skill. Although many experts will argue against ever using "the wheel", it remains the best tool for getting lucky at the track when employed in exotic-wagering situations that meet the following criteria:

THE TWO-HORSE RACE--This is a Trifecta play where you've whittled the field down to two contenders, a strong favorite and a viable value play, and have eliminated the rest. Traditionally, most handicappers would simply box the two in the Exacta and let it go at that. However, the Trifecta is often a more attractive investment if the remaining longshots really don't look any worse than the remaining favorites. Take Sunday's 9th at Santa Anita as an example. In a downhill turf sprint for straight maidens, the obvious favorite was comebacking Numerous Ambition (1/1) and, for me, the viable value horse was So Wistfullee (7/1). The others were a mishmash of non winners with negative recent form or suspect talents on the grass where they all seemed to have some kind of chance to finish 3rd. A win bet on So Wistfullee was appropriate but instead of boxing her with Numerous Ambition for a small Exacta/Quinella return, wheeling the 3rd leg in the Tri opened up the possibility for a skillful hit if you could get lucky in the show hole. When 60/1-bomber Fantasy ran 3rd, the Trifecta returned a healthy \$338.70 for \$1. The cost of a 7/11-7/11-ALL Tri ticket was \$20. A \$10 Exacta box returned \$117 and a \$20 Q was \$184 which made the Tri look pretty good.

THE NO CLUE RACE---This is a Pick Three play. The race is wide open with the favorites all looking false or vulnerable while the longshots don't offer enough positives to warrant individual support. However, if you've got strong opinions in two of the other legs in the Pick Three sequence, it's perfectly acceptable to wheel that other leg and hope for the best. Wednesday's 4th Race at Santa Anita provided the right kind of spot. It was a bottom-level \$25k maiden claimer for fillies and mares going 6-1/2 furlongs with a field of 10. Five of them were going off a 6/1, or less, while the other five were 10/1, or more. All the "contenders" had serious flaws which seemed to suggest

anything could win in the end. It turned out to be Maui's Magic (22/1) with Pincay getting up by a head at \$46. If you liked Confucius (\$7.40) in the 2nd Race and Echo Eddie (\$10.20) in the 3rd, the Pick Three returned \$1,797.30. If you liked Eddie in the 3rd and Onepowerfullbullet (\$9.80) in the 5th, it came back \$1,672.90. True, you needed to be lucky to catch either but by skillfully identifying the 4th as a "no clue" race, you might have made a real score.

THE ANTI-CHALK RACE--This can be either a Pick Three or a Trifecta play. If the favorites don't look strong, you attack them with what's left. In the Pick Three, you use a partial wheel with all the prices to contenders you do like in the other races in the sequence(s). In the Trifecta, you pick the longshot most likely to run 1-2-3 and key it with all the other big prices in all three slots. The Pick Three example already shown in Wednesday's 4th at Santa Anita also fits in this category. For the Trifecta, an example that could have worked for me came in Wednesday's 6th at Oak Tree. My top horse in the race was Up At the Top (9/1). After eliminating the three horses in the field at 5/1, or less, I was left with six other longshots: Glorious Linda (20/1), Undressed (14/1), Revillew Slew (11/1), Matanah (70/1), Millbrae (11/1) and Andover the Money (15/1). Matanah had nothing to like but cases of some sort could have been made for the other five. By keying Up At The Top with the five in all three Trifecta spots, each ticket would have cost \$20. Glorious Linda was up in the final stride to beat 'Top with Undressed a close 3rd to ignite a Trifecta payoff of \$2,165.20 for a \$60 investment. I didn't pull the trigger on this one, opting instead to simply bet my top horse to win.

Was I unlucky? I guess. Was I wrong? Not really. Did I curse the day I ever got hooked on this idiotic game? Maybe for a second or two, but then I moved on.