

## TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

### "I WANT TO BE ALONE"

Greta Garbo and Howard Hughes probably would have been great handicappers. The two most-famous recluses of the 20th Century may have been driven by anti-social demons but all that time by themselves would have allowed them to work those tricky handicapping puzzles without being undermined by the opinions of others.

If your goal is to become a successful investor at the track, one of the most-important lessons to be learned is to believe in yourself and YOUR opinions over all others. Handicapping is essentially a singular game, like professional golf or tennis or any other endeavor when the outcome depends almost entirely on the individual. The human species, however, is a social animal for the most part. Sociologically speaking, people feel most comfortable when part of a group and prefer to agree rather than disagree. Handicapping, however, rewards free-thinking and action that is contrary to the herd. That's why most who try to become serious handicappers fail.

The track is like no place else on earth. Once inside any equine emporium, you can stop and ask virtually any total stranger who they like in any race and get a cheerful response. Some people don't even wait to be asked--they simply tell you who they think will win. The tribal instinct takes hold. If you stop the same people on the street and ask for directions, you're likely to be greeted with a cold stare and a mumbled, unintelligible answer.

The local newspapers have selections, the DAILY RACING FORM is full of them, TODAY'S RACING DIGEST has its share and there are scads of others (myself included) who are happy to peddle their analysis for a price. There is nothing wrong with this--it's just business. The majority of people that go to the races regularly are not really interested in the process of picking winners. They are interested in making money and they don't give a hoot how they do it.

However, this publication and this column are dedicated to those of you who truly want to succeed at the game on your own merits. In order to do so, you need to develop an independent-thinking process and then put it into play at post time.

Most serious players have no difficulty locking themselves into a room for a couple of hours of hardcore handicapping. They analyze the chances of each entrant, project how the race will be run and, some, even compile an accurate betting line that should tell them when a horse offers the proper value to be worth a play. They retire for the evening with a pretty good idea of what they think will happen, what events look playable and which should be passed.

Then they get up in the morning. They check out the newspaper to see how their local handicapper sees the day's races. They read the editorial stuff in the FORM. They get more opinions from other public prognosticators. They go to the track and talk to their handicapping friends. They overhear someone who has talked to a certain trainer who thinks his horse can't lose the 4th. Suddenly, they have five or six different opinions crowding their memory bank and, often, the first horse to be tossed out is the one they loved the previous night. You know the rest--their \$22+ winner rolls home and they've haven't got a dime on it, even though they had the horse as a legitimate 4/1 shot on their betting line.

It's perfectly OK to seek out information from a wide-variety of sources, as long as it helps you make an intelligent decision on how to approach any given race. It's even OK to interview (or read) a reliable source for help in events that never did come into focus during the handicapping process should you need help in multiple-type wagers like the Pick Six or Pick Three. However, when it comes time to make your major plays for the day, they should be YOUR plays.

This can become very difficult if you attend the races with other good handicappers, especially if you happen to believe them to be more-successful long-term than you are. Example: You've made your top selection 5/2 in a certain race and it's going off at 5/1. However, your well-respected colleague is in love with something else that you made 5/1 and is holding at 7/2 on the board. He goes off to bet and you become torn to smithereens over whether he's right and you're wrong. It's essential, however, that you stand firm and make YOUR play. If you lose and your buddy wins, don't go into a deep funk. Instead, discuss the race with him afterwards and try to learn what he saw that you didn't. Perhaps there is something to be learned here that you can profit from down the road. Perhaps you'll come away feeling you made the right play, even though it lost.

Many people find the written word particularly difficult to ignore. There it is in black and white, it must be true. A certain public handicapper is strong on the 8/5 favorite, writes a sentence saying why this horse "should" win and goes on to the next race. It all sounds so convincing that you think betting your 8/1 overlay is a waste of money. After all, this fellow is being paid real cash to perform this public service and you're just somebody with a real job who enjoys handicapping. Again, don't listen.

Most public handicappers are just like you. They like the game, have enough knowledge of the process to do an adequate job and have enough ego to get a charge out of seeing their names/pictures in the paper. This, however, does not necessarily qualify them for "expert" status.

Mentally, media pundits come in all shapes and sizes. Some are quite diligent, very honest and sincerely try and do a good job. Others just do it for the money. Some bet their own money, others don't. However, the vast majority believe it their job to try and pick the "most likely" winner of the race and are "logical" to the hilt. I once heard one of these individuals on a radio talk show who said it was his job to pick the favorite for the good of the public rather than put his true choice on top. One thing for sure, taking an "obvious" approach is a one-way street to financial failure.

However, these handicappers can serve a useful purpose. After I handicap a race, I like to see how my contenders stack up selectionwise in both my local newspaper and in the pages of DAILY RACING FORM. If we agree, I generally figure the race to be unplayable because my thought process was either too logical or the race is simply too obvious to be bet. However, if my top contender is well down the list (or not mentioned at all), I tend to get excited. With very few exceptions, public handicappers will generally mirror the thinking of the "common man" which can point out probable underlays even more accurately than the program's morning line odds.

The lesson to be learned here is that anyone who has read this far has what it takes to be a newspaper handicapper. That makes YOUR opinion as good as any you may read anywhere. If you learn from your mistakes and don't repeat them, you will eventually become a winning player. Believe it.