

TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

MAKING A 'BETTING' LINE

In the hustle and bustle of a day at the track, things can get crazy. You can't play the game in a vacuum, no matter how hard you may try. Things happen--people come by to chat, you buy a beer, you wait a bit too long to get in line on a big day, the self-service machine goes batty, etc. You know the drill.

For this reason, being prepped and ready is as important for successful handicappers as it is for the horses they bet. One absolute necessity for the winning player is to make a 'betting line' before they get to the track. It's easy once the race has been handicapped and the process should remove much of the pre-race anxiety that befalls many bettors about five minutes to post. Should I or shouldn't I? That is the question.

True, you can use the official morning line as a guide to a horse's chances of winning a particular race but that's the opinion of just one individual whose job it is to predict HOW THE PUBLIC WILL WAGER and not the horse's true odds of success. At least, that's what their job description says they're supposed to be doing. What the winning player needs, however, is THEIR OWN OPINION on what's going to happen and it helps if it's written down in black and white. Prior to going to the races, they should have the following down pat: (1) Which races are playable and which are not; (2) which horses can win and which cannot; and (3) what price is necessary before a bet will be made.

The first two items are part of the every-race puzzle. It's number three where the prepared-and-effective bettor gets the edge over the crowd. With a little practice, anyone can make a 'betting line', it's not nearly as complicated as it may appear on the surface. First, handicap the race and identify the contenders and pretenders. Then, rate the contenders in the order of their chances of winning and assign an odds value by using the following table:

ODDS	Percentage	ODDS	Percentage	Odds	Percentage	Odds	Percentage
1/10	90.92	6/5	45.45	3/1	25.00	9/1	10.00
1/5	83.33	7/5	41.67	7/2	22.22	10/1	9.09
2/5	71.42	3/2	40.00	4/1	20.00	12/1	7.69
1/2	66.67	8/5	38.46	9/2	18.19	15/1	6.25
3/5	62.5	9/5	35.71	5/1	16.67	20/1	4.76
4/5	55.56	2/1	33.33	6/1	14.20	30/1	3.23
1/1	50	5/2	28.57	8/1	11.11	50/1	1.96

Once completed, your line should add up to 100%, or thereabouts. To assign a horse a line of even money, you must believe this horse has a 50% chance of winning the race. Remember that in extreme situations of this sort, that leaves only a 50% chance for the rest of the field combined. The larger the field, the more caution needs to be employed when assigning short prices to your top contenders in order to make the line work. All horses have some degree of 'value' but if you've decided a horse absolutely CAN'T win, just assign it 50/1 (or 2%). Keep in mind, the purpose of this exercise is to accurately determine legitimate overlays rather than to pick winners.

First step is to lay an approximate value on each horse in the field. Add up the percentages according to the table and see how they come out. All lines won't work out perfectly first time through, of course, so you'll need to finesse them to reach the 100% parameter. Move horses up or down as required until you hit the magic number. Once you've practiced with the percentages, it becomes rather simple to make these adjustments.

What remains is YOUR option on the chances of winning for each horse in the field. Opinions vary on what constitutes a true overlay. Some believe any horse that meets the minimum odds requirement on the line, is playable. Most, however, feel play should be restricted to runners that are at least 50% OVER the line and this makes sense. For example, if you assign a horse a 2/1 price, it really shouldn't be played unless it's 3/1 or higher. A 6/1 entry, should go off at 9/1 or higher and so forth. The 50% line ensures you are getting true value before making an investment. There are players who go so far as to demand a 100% overlay before wagering.

Now the work is done. All that remains is to follow the action on the toteboard and seek out the overlays that can make handicapping a profitable venture. **WINNERS ONLY BET ON OVERLAYS** and a betting line will help you find them not matter what sort of commotion is going on to your left, your right, your center or in your mind.