

TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

IT'S ALL ABOUT ATTITUDE

Horseplayers live in a different world. They go out there, put themselves on the line four, six, ten or more times a day and just ask for abuse. An inch one way or another can mean hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars to their bottom line but, more importantly, that slim divide can make them feel like a genius or the dumbest S.O.B. ever to set foot on this earth.

In racing, just like in life, success tends to breed success and failure tends to breed, well, failure. Learning to cope with disaster is a critical part of the quotient that leads to a winning handicapper. If a tough beat sends you into a sudden depression, you're far more likely to encounter future problems than to enjoy a sudden run of good fortune. It's all about attitude, my friends. An upbeat approach that sees the glass as half full rather than half empty is simply more likely to get you future profits. Check out the following item posted recently on a stock trader website. True the venue may be different but for day traders making scores of plays every day, it fits in nicely with the run-and-gun workings of the handicapper.

"Today I sold DHI at 31.28. That's a 17% gain in only three months over my (split-adjusted) purchase price of 26.82. In the meantime, the S&P 500 was up only 6%. That makes 51 consecutive profitable trades of 15% or better. Can you do that? You? YOU? YOU?"

"Show me where anyone else has such an amazing record. I must be the greatest stock pricer on the planet. I am HUGE. Bring me your finest meats and cheeses. Build me a temple so high that it pierces the ceiling and makes hailstorms. Build a statue of me sitting on a stallion for the fattest pigeons to roost upon.

"When I go play Black Jack and my first two cards total a hard 12 and the dealer shows a six, do I cower and hide? Nope. Do I take a hit? Nope. Mr. Market doubles the hard 12 against a six. I live what others dream."

Now, that's attitude. I don't have a clue who Mr. Market is and I can't tell you how he reacts to failure because, at least according to himself, he never fails. Even when he does, I would be willing to wager that he never admits it and moves right along waiting for his people to erect that statue.

The point being is that if you expect to fail, you probably will. If you fail once and mope about it, you'll probably fail again, again and again. If you fail and proceed as if nothing happened, the chances of winning your next bet are better. If you fail, review the situation and determine the bet you made was a good one that just didn't work out, that's not a bad thing. If you fail, review the situation and determine you made an avoidable mistake and vow not to repeat the same transgression, that's good, too. If you're unable to bring closure to the incident, you're probably in for a long afternoon.

What you don't want to do is beat yourself up every time you lose a bet because you're going to lose a lot more bets than you win. You don't want to blame the jockey (even if he screwed it all up). You don't want to blame the loudmouth sitting next to you who backed the winner (he didn't have anything to do with it). You don't want to blame the bumbling little old lady in line in front of you who causes you to get shut out on a winner (bless her heart). Just move on.

And when you win, reward yourself. Pat yourself on the back, graciously accept the good wishes of those sitting around you who are genuinely impressed with your ability to see the future. Even in the throes of an ongoing slump, it's important to maintain your confidence. You've picked winners before and you will pick them again.

If it makes you happy to scream "What do you think about me now?" to nobody in particular when your horse sails under the wire on top, just do it. This will probably not endear yourself to those around you who did not win but you can't please all the people all the time.

Anyone can learn the in's-and-out's of handicapping. Some can even develop a style that puts them into working practice on a short-term basis. However, it's only the few who learn to control their emotions that will become the successful player over the long haul. Whatever it takes to do the latter is acceptable. If you want to build a statue of yourself in the backyard after a good day, go to it.