

# **TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS**

## **WORKING WITH FIRSTERS**

First-time starters tend to give handicappers a severe case of the 'willies'. Many players choose the easy way out and simply pass races dominated by newcomers while others allow themselves to be touted on debut types featuring flashy works, expensive sales numbers or blueblood pedigrees, generally at short prices.

The first approach gives them no chance to cash in on the many firsters that win (often easily) at inflated mutuels while the latter path consistently leads to torn up tickets at less than 2/1. It's a 'damned if you, damned if you don't' situation for the typical bettor.

So, you may ask, how should a value-oriented handicapper attempt to cash in on this sometimes lucrative maiden market? The significant factors are: (1) Pedigree (2) Works (3) Connections (4) Intent (5) Value.

Pedigree is the most important since statistics indicate that certain bloodlines produce more winning firsters than the norm, yet it's the most overlooked part of the equation. Works that are solid, but somewhat subtle, are preferred to a string of rapid bullets that jump off the page and deflate the price. Successful connections are significant since honing an unraced maiden requires skill simply not possessed by many card-carrying trainers who somehow managed to get a license. Again, a low-profile, but winning, barn is more favorable than the press-heavy stables that maintain residence at the top of the standings on a meet-in-meet-out basis (Lukas, Baffert, McAnally, Hollendorfer, etc). However, even these outfits will send out winning rookies at nice odds on occasion. Intent is a very gray area but the one factor that seems to hold up nicely is the presence of Lasix. Firsters that open at short prices (less than 4/1) on the morning line are generally no secret and are far more likely to be overbet than underbet and playing firsters at less than 5/1 will generally produce a long-term loss.

Personally, I use the following list of sires as an index to pedigree power and, generally, eliminate firsters by all studs that do not appear. It's a list that may not be conclusive but it contains a group of 60 producers that commonly have starters in California and allows the player to make quick eliminations in this area. Here it is:

A.P. INDY  
AFTERNOON DEELITES  
ALNAAB  
ALOHA PROSPECTOR  
AMERICAN CHANCE  
BASKET WEAVE  
BEAU GENIUS  
BEAUTIFUL CROWN  
BELONG TO ME  
BENTON CREEK  
BOSTON HARBOR  
BOUNDARY  
BROAD BRUSH  
CAPOTE  
CARSON CITY  
CORONADO'S QUEST  
CORSLEW  
COUNTRY LIGHT  
CRAFTY PROSPECTOR  
DEERHOUND  
DEHERE  
DEVIL HIS DUE  
DEVIL'S BAG  
DIXIELAND BAND  
DONERAILE COURT  
EDITOR'S NOTE  
EL PRADO  
FOR REALLY  
FOREST WILDCAT  
FREE AT LAST  
FRENCH DEPUTY  
GAME PLAN  
GENTLEMEN

GILDED TIME  
GLITTERMAN  
GRINDSTONE  
GULCH  
HALF TERM  
HENNESSY  
HE'S TOPS  
HOLLYWOOD REPORTER  
HONOUR AND GLORY  
IDE  
IN EXCESS  
INDIAN CHARLIE  
IRON CAT  
KINGMAMBO  
KNIGHT IN SAVANNAH  
KRIS S.  
LANGFUHR  
LITE THE FUSE  
LOST SOLDIER  
LOUIS QUATORZE  
MEADOWLAKE  
MONTBROOK  
MOUNTAIN CAT  
MR PURPLE  
MUD ROUTE  
NOT TRICKY  
OLD STORIES  
OUR EMBLEM  
PARANOIDE  
PEMBROKE  
PERFECT MANDATE  
PERSONABLE JOE  
PETERSBURG

PETIONVILLE  
PIONEERING  
POLISH NUMBERS  
PULPIT  
RAHY  
RED  
ROAR  
RUBIANO  
SALT LAKE  
SEATTLE SLEET  
SEEKING THE GOLD  
SILVER GHOST  
SIPHON  
SMART STRIKE  
SNOWBOUND  
SOCIETY MAX  
STORM BOOT  
STORM CAT  
SUPREMO  
SYNASTRY  
TABASCO CAT  
TALE OF THE CAT  
THEATRICAL  
THUNDER GULCH  
TWO PUNCH  
UNBRIDLED'S SONG  
UNUSUAL HEAT  
VYING VICTOR  
WESTERN FAME  
WILD GOLD  
WITH APPROVAL  
YOU AND I

From this point, I require the potential contender to meet at least two of the following three qualifications: **(1) Debuts on Lasix (2) Has at least one exceptional work (3) Hails from a winning barn. Before backing this firster, it must open at 4/1 or higher on the program and go off at 5/1 or higher at post time.**

A pair of qualified firsters won at big odds on Sunday, one at Hollywood and one at Pleasanton. In the 10th at Inglewood, it was Concurrent, a debuting gelding by qualified-sire Relaunch. He debuted on Lasix and had worked 1:11.3h at Santa Anita June 15 to qualify despite low-profile connections (Willard Proctor/Joy Scott). Concurrent opened at a healthy 15/1 and went off at a tidy 13/1 in the \$50k maiden claimer and rallied late to get up at \$28.20. In the 7th at P-Town, Inclinator (by Delineator and out of a Valid Appeal mare) started his career on Lasix for the strong Larry Ross stable. That was enough to qualify him for consideration but he also had a bullet 3-furlong move in 36.1hg at GGF June 3. Again, the firster opened at 15/1 and this one went off at 19/1. He breezed wire-to-wire at more than \$40.

Winners like this show up on a fairly regular basis at all maiden levels in California and prove that betting action is not a necessary requirement before backing a newcomer. In fact, too-much action on a first-timer can be considered a negative rather than a positive.