

## TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

### THERE ARE NO LOCKS

Surfside was the kind of horse that winning handicappers dream about. She was coming off a bad race at 3/5. She's a "need-to-lead" type who figured to be hooked every step of the way by a talented and hard-nosed campaigner. She was facing a couple of potentially nice mares from South America who had already proven their ability in the US and had every right to move forward. Still, she was expected to win the Santa Maria Handicap. She was expected to win by her stable, expected to win by the media and expected to win by the vast majority of fans on hand despite the fact that most of the evidence suggested she would lose. Sharp players were licking their chops.

Personally, I've never been a Surfside fan. I bet against her last spring with Spain in the Las Virgenes and with Kumari Continent in the Santa Anita Oaks and came within a length of beating her at 1/5 and 2/5 in those races. I thought she had no chance at 5/1 in the Santa Anita Derby and she didn't. The only time she really surprised me was her big race in the Breeders' Cup Distaff when she set the pace but proved no match against 50/1-stablemate Spain. In hindsight, that Distaff may have been the weakest in history with Riboletta going wrong and the East Coast mares on the downside of their form cycles. True, Spain went on to take two of the three legs in the La Canada series for 4-year-old fillies but those were hardly fields that screamed of quality and all earned ratings that fit better in Grade III company than Grade I.

The Lukas barn trains every good filly and mare they get as if they were Lady's Secret. They grind them and grind them until they can grind no more. The most classic case in recent years was Serena's Song who, with more patient handling, might have developed into the best distaffer in history. She had the talent and she had the spirit until they trained it out of her by continuing to run her in every race that came up. Even so, her raw ability put her in the hunt to mid-stretch but she simply refused to win. She'd gotten smarter as she'd gotten older and appeared to notice that she was treated no differently whether she won or whether she lost. Why should she bust her gut trying?

One of the worst things that can happen to any horse is to get a "reputation". It's also one of the best things that can happen to the handicapper. Tiznow was a recent casualty in The Strub when he was gunned down by Wooden Phone at 1/5. There were reasons to think the recently-crowned "Horse of the Year" would be beaten that day: bad feet, an unsuitable pace scenario and the simply explanation that Tiznow is not a super horse and that public expectations were not based on a proper foundation. For every horse like Cigar, there are hundreds and hundreds who can't take the pressure when it comes to winning every time they go to the gate.

Yet the public expects them to win every race (and bets them accordingly), while simply ignoring the dynamics of horse racing. The best horse loses two out of three times out, if you put any belief in the wagering public's ability to select the proper favorite. Horses have form cycles that don't last forever--they gradually get good and then the rigors of war take its toll and the horse tails off while losing to improving runners who are just finding their stride. It's certainly true that a good horse will maintain form longer than a cheap one but unless they are handled carefully and with patience, the next race can always be the last race.

As bettors, you must seek out reasons to believe these hype horses will not win for the obvious pari-mutuel reasons. Even with her flaws, Surfside was probably a legitimate 5/2 to win the Santa Maria. That means she had a 28% chance of success. With the public betting her to 3/5, they were saying she had a 62% to win. That's 34% of the pool that's mis-directed, a huge advantage for those willing to go against the flow.

It was pretty easy to dismiss Miss of Wales entirely in the Santa Maria. As a turf-mare going on the dirt, she had run some good grass races in this country but had yet to win and was taking on

four runners who had combined to succeed in 32 of 74 lifetime starts. The other three contenders all had plenty of appeal:

**FEVERISH**---The queen of the Cal-breds, Feverish has never been better than she is right now. She has all the tactical speed in the world and a rider (Eddie Delahoussaye) who is ultra savvy when it comes to pace. Anyone who thought that Eddie D. would just let Surfside go early was sadly mistaken. Her numbers were more than good enough to win once you figured that Surfside would not get the kind of pace scenario needed to produce a big figure like she did in that wire-to-wire walkover against colts in the Grade II Clark Handicap at Churchill Downs. Working on a five-day pattern for trainer Dan Hendricks since taking an overnight event back on January 18, there seemed no reason to believe that Feverish would not run her race in the Santa Maria. I made her 3/2 to win it.

**LOVELLON**-- A useful horse in Argentina, the five-year-old mare had done little for trainer Ron McAnally in aborted campaigns in the spring and summer. However, she ran big when cutting two lengths of Feverish's margin in the stretch January 18 following a five-month layoff and certainly appeared to be acclimated to the US. All the evidence suggested that she was going to move forward in the Santa Maria. With a favorable pace duel looming, I made her 5/1.

**CRITIKOLA**--Pretty much a mirror-image of Lovellon except for the fact that she had made a more favorable impression in her US debut. After a slow start, she had rallied boldly in the lane and had only been beaten 1 1/2 lengths in the Grade II Bayakoa while 4th behind Feverish, Gourmet Girl and Lazy Slusan. She also figured to be helped by the likely Feverish/Surfside duel and also looked 5/1 in the Santa Maria.

**My betting line:**

FEVERISH	3/2	(40%)
SURFSIDE	5/2	(28%)
LOVELLON	5/1	(16%)
CRITIKOLA	5/1	(16%)

**The odds:**

FEVERISH	3/1	(25%)	( <b>overlay</b> )
SURFSIDE	3/5	(62%)	(underlay)
LOVELLON	8/1	(11%)	( <b>overlay</b> )
CRITIKOLA	4/1	(20%)	(underlay)

Feverish and Lovellon were both legit overlays with Surfside a huge underlay and Critikola a lesser one. My plan of attack was to key Feverish on top in the Exacta to both Lovellon and Critikola, "save" with Quinellas to both the South Americans and bet Lovellon to win at 8/1. I also saved a bit with a Feverish/Surfside/Lovellon-Critikola Trifecta since I didn't want to lose everything if Feverish beat Surfside but the favorite still managed to run 2nd.

A case could certainly have been made to simply crush Feverish on the win end at a generous 3/1 but I feared both Lovellon and Critikola, so the above approach seemed the most reasonable.

The rest is history. Eddie D. did his part by being aggressive on the pace and tackling the favorite from the start. Feverish looked well in hand on the front end but things went amiss somewhat when Gary Stevens made a quick inside move on Lovellon to grab the lead into the lane which may have taken Delahoussaye by surprise. When he asked his mare in the lane, Feverish was all heart to the wire but couldn't regain the advantage. You can make a case that the rider lost the race but, in reality, it was Stevens who actually won it.

I was certainly happy enough with the result. I'd made a nice profit on the \$26.80 Quinella and had collected \$18.40 on the win end. Of course, I sort of lost my cookies when the show payoffs came up on Lovellon (\$18.60), Feverish (\$9.20) and Critikola (\$12). The "plunger" had read the paper and was sure Surfside was a dead cinch to run no worse than 3rd. He plunged, she ran last and life goes on for the rest of us.