

# TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

## A 'POP' QUIZ

**Here's a 'pop' quiz for you** -- True or False: A handicapper's primary goal is to pick winners?

**Answer:** False. A handicapper's primary goal is to make money. At least it should be.

There are many great mysteries to the handicapping game, but the one that really makes me scratch my head is how a horse, any horse, every goes off at 1/5. Just who are these people who are seemingly so driven to pick a winner, any winner, that they are willing to rush to the windows and bet a horse at 30 cents on the dollar? What makes them tick? Are they so insecure that cashing a bet a \$2.60 actually helps their self-esteem? Are they so ignorant of the difficulties and pitfalls involved with winning any race that they truly believe it, when some one says "This horse can't lose."? Are they the kind of individuals who simply get caught up with the rabble, follow it to the window and do what they do? Do they simply read the hype, believe the public handicappers and accept that a 1/5-shot is truly the "best bet" on a card featuring more than 100 other horses among eight other races?

It couldn't be the neophytes who made **Silver Charm** 1/5 in "The Malibu", they don't bet enough money to have any impact in a pool of over one million dollars. So, it was people with lots of money, obviously earned in endeavors other than handicapping horses. Don't get me wrong. I'm happy these people are out there, but I just wonder where they come from. It's something "The X-files" may want to explore.

True, **Silver Charm** may have won "The Malibu" with a better trip. He's a terrific horse and actually ran a terrific race. He just didn't win. No matter how much anyone loves this colt, they should have been willing to bet against him at 1/5 in a competitive field. Whether they backed winner **Lord Grillo** or **Mud Rout** or **Apalachee Ridge** or **Swiss Yodeler** or **Crypto Star** or any other horse they may have had a positive opinion on, they made a good bet, win or lose. At the very least, those who thought **Silver Charm** the biggest lock since **Secretariat** in the "Belmont"(I bet against him, too), should have passed the race and just watched their hero do his thing.

One of the biggest difficulties new players have in horseracing is understanding the concept of 'value'. How can any losing bet be a 'good' bet? The answer, of course, is simple. The game isn't about beating a race, it's about beating the races. Nothing could be further from the truth than the old bromide, "You can beat a race but you can't beat the races." The opposite is reality. You can never be sure of beating one race, but if proper fundamentals are applied, you can beat the races. A few people do it every year, most don't. The reason they don't, is that they continue to try and pick winners rather than make money.

Betting overlays consistently will lead to a long-term profit and betting underlays consistently will lead to a long-term loss. Trust me. This is no great revelation to anyone who knows a fetlock from a hamhock, but it's just very difficult for handicappers to move off their top selection and on to a secondary choice at better odds because they prefer to pump up their ego rather than their wallet.

Losing bets are part of the game, get used to making them. For myself, a torn-up ticket at 10.1 is better than cashing one on a \$3.20 horse that should have paid \$5. This is a difficult-to-accept concept for the majority of people who play the races and it's the primary reason that those folks fail. Obviously, you need to pick some winners in order to show a profit, but I don't know anyone who can't pick good-priced horses if they give themselves a chance. Many lack the confidence to do so and, in the bottom of their heart, believe they aren't going to succeed. The old "power of positive thinking" does wonders at the track, just as a negative approach to anything will generally result in failure.

To succeed, a player must look long and hard at the public choice(s), judge them harshly and seek any chink in the armor that suggests defeat is possible. Then, they must evaluate the longer-priced horses and judge them with a giving heart. If a horse is 10/1, minor drawbacks are acceptable. If it's 6/5, they are not. People tend to do the opposite, readily forgiving a favorite's shortcomings and accentuating a price horse's weaknesses.

In future columns, I'll be looking at both issues while trying to help you build your confidence in throwing out losing favorites and accepting winning longshots.