

## THE FIRST QUESTION

All right, the legwork is done. You've handicapped the race, analyzed each horse, assigned speed figures, checked out jockey/trainer combos, projected the pace, established positive/negative form cycles, made adjustments for distance and surface preferences, considered all other significant aspects of the puzzle, eliminated the pretenders and are ready to focus on the contenders.

What's the first question you ask yourself? If it's not, "what chance does the favorite really have?", you're about to be lost in a maze of guesswork, supposition and, more than likely, buried in a stack of losing tickets.

Successfully determining the relative strength or weakness of the favorite is the jumping off point to success. Failing to even address the question is the first step to jumping off the bridge. Monday's Del Mar card offered a wealth of false, or at least vulnerable, chalk types. Here's a look:

FIRST RACE -- GIOVANNETTI (5/2 to 1/1): Off since June 23 (53 days), this sprinter had been claimed for \$16k by Mark Glatt last out and was entered on a suspicious drop to \$10k. He had a sporadic work pattern with the most recent published drill 11 days earlier. He had not won a race in nearly 18 months and had been out of the money in all nine starts since then. He featured acceptable, but hardly exciting, connections (Glatt and Martin Pedroza). How in the ever-loving name of common sense could this horse be even money???? Giovannetti again faded off the board while the race was won by a playable price horse in Heaven's Cat at 12/1.

SECOND RACE -- ANYONECANDREAM (5/2 TO 6/5): This juvenile filly had bombed at 8/5 in her debut when she could only beat two of her six rivals in a low-rated dash back on June 22. Solid connections (Matlow/Gomez) but she hardly dominated the other five previous starters on figures. Improvement was certainly a possibility but if either of the two first-time-starters in the field could run anywhere near par, they would probably win. Vulnerable, if not downright false at 6/5, 'Dream was never a threat while all out to be up for second money behind free-wheeling firster Dancing Baci at 9/2.

THIRD RACE -- RENA DE SONORA (2/1 TO 4/5): This filly had run a couple of decent grass races at Hollywood Park (the last 39 days ago) but she didn't lay over the other contenders on numbers. She had never raced on the Del Mar turf and did not show a published work in two weeks. She was a good one to bet against, for sure, but even false favorites will win 10% to 15% of the time. This was one of them as she rallied to split horses and catch a determined loser in the final furlong. Hey, it happens.

FOURTH RACE -- YES I'M TRICKY (5/2 TO 5/2): She drew the rail post at Del Mar and only 7% of the meet's sprints (through August 12) had been won from the wood. She had speed but had lost significant ground in the final furlong of each of her three career races. Even though the competition was weak, there was every reason to think she would lose late ground again. A shaky favorite, at best, she set the pace but, true to form, weakened and was beaten by La Maga (7/1) in a dismal 1:05.82.

FIFTH RACE -- HIGHEST HONOREE (4/5 TO 3/5): This filly was given one by the stewards on opening day when she finished a well-beaten second but was elevated to first money against \$32k company. Now, Vladimir Cerin cut her price in half to \$16k, looking to win one and lose her. She had no published works since her July 20 "victory" (27 days), so she hardly could be backed with confidence despite an overwhelming edge on figures. On the lead all the way, she managed to stick it out late and win in 1:18.00 which represented at least a five-length regression off her July 20 effort. Cerin probably threw a party when she was taken by Lloyd Wicker.

SIXTH RACE -- SANDRA'S ROSE (8/5 TO 1/1): A first-time filly by Old Trieste, she had trained fast but ALL by this sire train fast. Few, however, win at first asking and most are better going long than short. There was no reason to believe that she was better than 3/1 to win this race and she didn't. Part of the early pace, she faded to fourth without any sort of fight while It's All Mine (3/1) rallied from last to draw off.

SEVENTH RACE -- EXCESS TEMPTATIONS/EXCESS TAXES (7/5 TO 1/5): From two different barns (Howard Zucker and Bill Spawr), this entry did look good on paper. 'Temptations had run a big figure over the track July 30 but the rating was almost too big. Not overly quick early, he might bounce, he could be vulnerable to a solo pacesetter and was from a stable that just doesn't win all that many races. 'Taxes had broken his maiden with a perfect trip July 22, showed no works in the last 24 days and had been beaten 3 1/2 lengths by Maximum Heat (entered back here while offered at 14/1) on July 4. Yes, either part of the entry could win but did they really have an 83% chance of success? Hardly. Neither finished in-the-money behind front-running winner Slide Home who paid \$14.80 to win and \$19.60 to show. Maximum Heat ran second (\$25.80 to show) and Martinblestme (both legit contenders) finished 3rd to the tune of \$32.

EIGHTH RACE -- STEVIE D (7/2 TO 9/5): This second timer was bet down on the strength of a drop from straight maiden company for Doug O'Neill after chasing future stakes winner Cougar Mtn Lodge and easy maiden breaker Da Stoops. Personally, I thought he was the right horse in the race, made him top pick at 8/5 and a bet at 5/2 or higher. At 9/5, he was a pass. He ended up a troubled second behind morning line choice Suddenlyglitter who shipped in from Kentucky and paid \$8 for the Mullins' barn. It's odd that the only betting favorite on the card not to be favored in the program ending up losing to the morning line choice but that's the way it goes.

Eight races, two winning favorites and six losers. None of them looked like they had to win their race but there were more than a few folks that bet on most, if not all, of them. The old saw says that you can't bet every race and expect to win but on this particular day in was perfectly all right.