

TODAY'S RACING DIGEST HANDICAPPING TIPS

IT'S ALL VERY ELEMANTRY

Even if most are strictly fictional characters, you have to think that the world's most famous detectives would have been great handicappers if so inclined.

Can you imagine the "little gray cells" of Hercule Poirot, the uncanny logic of Sherlock Holmes or the down-and-dirty bullheadedness of Sam Spade cracking some of the difficult mysteries offered every day at any racetrack in America? After all, isn't picking a winner just like finding the murderer in a whodunit?

Serious players would be wise to approach each race they intend to bet in the same manner these sleuths attack a new case. They identify the suspects, sift through the evidence, envision the possible scenarios, eliminate those who couldn't have done it and focus in on those who may have committed the crime. Of course, the handicapper has to perform these tasks before they happen but the process is essentially the same.

So how is it done, you may ask. Nothing worth doing is easy in this world and beating the races certainly fits under that description, though much of the population would quarrel about the "worth doing" part. Who cares. We who are horseplayers learned long ago to dismiss the naysayers as an inconsequential part of the equation.

STEP ONE--Decide on the cases you are going to accept. Holmes, for one, was totally disinterested in any situation that didn't thoroughly test his mental talents. In racing, there are some contests that are simply so obvious that they offer no fulfilling rewards, either mental or financial. They are, in essence, a waste of time and in this era of simulcasting from all over the country, it is essential for bettors to identify and pass races of this sort. When the favorites look strong, there is no reason to get involved. Learn the kinds of races that offer 'value' and which ones seem to suit your talents as a handicapper. It might be turf or Maiden-Claiming sprints or Graded Stakes or high-level one-turn heats for hard-knocking veterans. It might be anything; but understand where your talents lay and proceed accordingly.

STEP TWO--A good gumshoe may crack a case by using scientific information or reliable informants or may simply follow the facts in a logical progression. None of them work exactly alike. Well, there is no one way to be successful in the racing world either. There is certainly no shortage of helpful aids available to the handicapper. TODAY'S RACING DIGEST, by itself, offers volumes of facts that may help illuminate what is about to happen. From DAILY RACING FORM to more specialized publications and rating services, the information is out there, but you must learn where to look and decide what's meaningful for you before seriously accepting any case.

STEP THREE--Eliminate the non-suspects. Just about every race features horses that can't win and figure to play no part in the festivities. Remove these individuals from the thought process and zero in on those that may actually be "guilty" of crossing the wire first. Once you have determined what can't happen, you are that much closer to figuring out what will happen.

STEP FOUR---Begin the search for motive and opportunity. Investigate the background of each of the suspects to try and determine that they have been entered in a race that suits their capabilities. Most evidence of this sort is unearthed by finding out what each individual has been good at in the past. Are they proven sprinters at or above today's class level? Do they prefer turf to

dirt? Have they handled wet tracks in the past? Are they moving from a trainer that rarely wins to a barn that wins all the time? Is there something unusual about what's happening in the morning? All of these, and more, are potential motives for success. As far as opportunity goes, is the horse fast enough to beat today's rivals on his best day? Do some of the potential perpetrators have alibis for past misfortunes? Is there a red herring in the cast of characters? The kind that often seem capable of murdering the opposition but rarely, if ever, does.

Of course, there are times when you may not have the hard-core evidence you need to answer all of these questions. In these situations, you may need to take the subjective approach. Can a sprinter get a mile? Will the proven dirt horse recreate main-track form on turf? Does this first timer with sneaky looking works and a nice win-early pedigree have any talent? Instincts can be critical here and the more you work at it and play the game, the sharper those instincts should become.

STEP FIVE--Detectives recreate the crime in their mind before they solve it. Handicappers must see it before it happens. Taking the evidence gleaned in Steps Three and Four, envision the events as you believe they will unfold in reality. Will the likely pace picture favor any of the suspects in particular? Which of them figure to be disadvantaged?

STEP SIX--After going through the mental gymnastics described above, if you reach the same conclusion as your handicapping colleagues, drop the case and let others take the glory en masse. There is very little to be gained by solving mysteries that are easily solved. You are looking for cases that will build both your bankroll and your ego because those are the ones that give you the confidence to take on the ones that will make you famous, even if only in your own mind.