

## **Winning Horse Racing Handicapping Angles – Part 1**

### **Handicapping Angle #1 - Maiden Special Weight to Maiden Claiming**

A drop in class from Maiden Special Weight races to Maiden Claiming races produces one of the most profitable betting scenarios in horse racing, even if the horse has shown absolutely nothing in the Maiden Special Weight races. If the horse was close to the pace, went off at odds lower than 10-1 or experienced some degree of trouble in its Maiden Special Weight races, it should be given even more consideration. Regardless, because the class drop is often steeper than it looks on paper, and because the horse now has some racing experience, it has to be given extra consideration. Surprisingly, these droppers often go off at excellent odds.

### **Handicapping Angle #2 – Dropping Speed**

A horse dropping in class, that has also shown speed at the higher class level, can be one of the best bets in racing. Even if unable to get the lead at the higher class level, if the horse was able to stay within three lengths of the pace at the first and/or second calls of the race, it can be a major contender on the class drop. And the cheaper the race, the more dangerous the dropping speed will be. While early speed is always an advantage, it tends to be much more powerful in the cheaper, shorter races, especially maiden claiming races. The drop in class after facing faster fractions and better horses is often just what the horse needs to find the winner's circle. If the horse has been showing speed and stopping badly in all its races, the class drop might not be enough, but these kind can and do come back to win every day at good odds.

### **Handicapping Angle #3 – Lone Speed**

A horse able to get the lead by itself is an exceptionally good bet no matter what the class or distance. Horses with speed simply win more races than come-from-behind types, much more than their share. While lone speed is more effective in shorter cheaper races, it is also effective in higher class races and route races. Horses coming from behind are always at a disadvantage behind a lone speed horses able to relax on the lead. Even with the introduction of synthetic racing surfaces, which so far have tended to favor closers, a lone speed horse still has an advantage and should be bet at the right price. A horse that has been showing speed but that has always been under pressure in its

previous races can romp when finally able to get the lead by itself. Not always – but enough times at good odds to make it worth betting.

#### **Handicapping Angle #4 – Jockey Switches**

While a good rider can't make a bad horse win, a bad rider can definitely get a good horse beat. If a trainer is making a jockey switch from a mediocre or average rider to a top rider it deserves special consideration. If the horse has early speed even better - and if it is dropping in class it becomes an almost automatic play. Trainers put leading riders on their horses for a reason, and top riders tend to ride well meant horses. Additionally, if the horse is of the cheaper variety and it does win, it can often repeat or run well in its next start if the same rider stays aboard. This is an angle not used by many, and it continues to be very effective. Cheaper horses generally perform at the top of their game for only a very short period of time in their yearly form cycle. If you catch a horse getting good on a rider switch (or even another angle like surface switch, blinkers on or off, distance switch etc.) and they are well spotted to take advantage of the same angle in their next start – pay close attention. Obviously, a combination of multiple repeating angles will make the horses an even better proposition.

#### **Handicapping Angle #5 – Running Style Changes**

Whenever a horse does something it hasn't done before you have to take a serious look at its past performances. This is especially true with regards to running style and it works both ways. If a horse that has been showing speed and fading in its races suddenly changes its running style with a good effort from off the pace the light bulb may have gone on. It now knows what it is supposed to do (get to the wire ahead of the other horses) and is showing a willingness to do that. Conversely, when a horse that has been plodding along and passing a few horses every race suddenly shows wake up speed to the first (and hopefully second) call of a race, it may also be ready to run a big race in its next start. The running style change angle is often missed or dismissed by average handicappers but you should definitely keep it in your toolbox.

There are numerous handicapping angles in horse racing, all of which can lead to profits when identified and applied at the right time. In part two of our series on horse racing handicapping angles we will be covering First and Second Time Lasix, Layoff Horses, Blinker Changes, Turf to Dirt Surface Switches and Trouble Lines.

### **Handicapping Angle #6 – Lasix - First and Second Time**

First-time Lasix was once a powerful handicapping angle. It still works, just not as well as it used to. Lasix is a diuretic, and when given to a horse that is suffering from Exercise Induced Pulmonary Hemorrhaging (EIPH), it can improve the horse's performance. The key to Lasix is using it with additional angles, especially trainer patterns. If a trainer has a high win percentage with first-time Lasix horses, the horse deserves extra consideration. Not only may the horse be getting Lasix, it may also be receiving a number of additional "legal" medications that help improve a trainer's win percentage with such types.

A better yet trickier angle on its own may be second-time Lasix. The theory is that if a horse has been suffering from EIPH, it will often be reluctant to perform to the best of its ability - even after being administered Lasix for the first time. But after a positive experience running on first-time Lasix – which may or may not be visible in the horse's actual performance, the horse can improve next time out. If you have binoculars, try to watch the first time Lasix horses when they return for unsaddling after a race. Look for any distress (or lack of it) and watch the body language of the jockey and trainer looking for positive gestures that might indicate the horse felt good or gave a good effort. An improved performance could be forthcoming in the horse's next start, and because you're one of the few handicappers with this "inside" information, you'll get your price.

### **Handicapping Angle #7 - Layoff Specialists**

Horses that show the ability to win off a layoff of four weeks or more will often continue to win off the shelf throughout their careers - especially when conditioned by a trainer who has won with layoff horses in the past. If the horse is coming into the race off a layoff, check the past performances for any signs of a good effort off a layoff. Layoffs of more than 30 days are indicated by an underline in the past performances. A previous good performance by a horse coming off a layoff is even more powerful when combined with a trainer who wins at a good win percentage with these types. Always check the trainer pattern percentages found underneath the past performances to see if the trainer has a good percentage with layoff types. Horses are creatures of habit, as are trainers. If they have won off a layoff before – they can do it again.

### **Handicapping Angle #8 – Surface Switches - Turf to Dirt and Dirt to Turf**

Sharp trainers have known for years that running a horse on the turf is a great way to keep a horse with physical problems fit and sound while pointing towards

a dirt race. Very few horses are equally effective on both turf and dirt. Sometimes you will see a proven dirt horse that has never been competitive on the turf – in a turf race. Why? So the horse can stay fit and remain sound while waiting for the perfect spot on the dirt. Turf is physically kinder to most horses with problems. You don't see the same win percentages or trainer manipulations using the dirt-to-turf angle. That angle is generally reserved for flops on the dirt that have no where else to try for a win or for dirt flops with turf pedigrees. Dirt to turf is often more of a desperation move than anything – not so with the turf-to-dirt angle. While some trainers have no clue with regards to soundness element of the turf-to-dirt angle, others know exactly what they are doing. This is indicated in the trainer percentages which are found underneath the past performances. Always check the turf-to-dirt trainer statistics before you bet a race with such types.

### **Handicapping Angle #9 – Blinkers On or Off**

The blinkers on or off angles are generally overrated, but in some situations, especially with young horses, they can be dynamite at exceptional odds. A young horse that has been looking around in its races, getting left in the gate by not paying attention, that is fearful of its competition, or that has simply failed to concentrate on the job at hand, can often run with improved focus when blinkers are added for the first time. Often they will show improved speed and carry that speed further. Conversely, a horse that has been uncompetitive while racing with blinkers on can occasionally improve dramatically when the blinkers are removed.

In the blinkers off case, the horse might be fearful of not being able to see its surroundings and/or competition in a race. Sometimes horses with blinkers on fail to respond in the stretch simply because they can't see their rivals – and once blinkers are removed the horse turns into a real battler down the stretch. Whether blinkers on or off works depends quite a bit on the horse's personality. Some horses need blinkers and some don't. It's up to the trainer to know which horses need what and some trainers know their horses better than others.

While the blinkers on and off angles are sometimes desperation moves, the trainer percentages at the bottom of the past performances will tell you for sure. A trainer who knows his horses can have great results with blinker changes, especially if the horse has shown some talent in morning workouts, in previous races, or has been well bet in previous starts. Additionally, the blinkers on-off-on

and blinkers off-on-off can sometimes wake an older campaigner out of the doldrums at big odds.

### **Handicapping Angle #10 – Trouble Lines**

Most horses cannot overcome trouble in a race and still win. Exceptional horses can, but, well, they're the exception. In saying that, most trouble in horse races is overrated as a handicapping factor. Horses can get into trouble at the start, they can get left in the gate, they can get bumped, they can lack room, they get stopped on the turns and stretch, steadied in traffic etc.

The real key to determining how serious the trouble was is to note what the horse was doing when they got into trouble. If a proven speed horse that needs the lead gets left in the gate they might have a legitimate excuse for losing. A come-from-the-clouds rallying type would likely not have won anyways (speed always wins a higher percentage of races that it should.) A horse that gets stopped and checked behind horses while making a move into the stretch is always a better bet in its next race than a horse that was checked in the stretch after already starting to fade.

The latter scenario is why you need to read the result charts or watch the races and replays and make notes. The trip notes at the end of the past performances are limited to a certain number characters, and they often tell only part of the story. If a horse has a comment such as "checked stretch" in its passed performances, you need to know whether the horse was moving forward or going backwards when the trouble occurred. Did the horse have a chance to win or was it done? A horse moving forward when trouble occurred would have to be given extra consideration in its next start. A horse that was already going backwards when the trouble occurred would be downgraded in comparison.

The best kind of trouble from a bettor's point of view is that which occurs when a horse lacks room on the turn or stretch, but not enough to force it to steady or check. The horse might be full of run behind horses with nowhere to go, but a smooth jockey can make this type of trouble almost unnoticeable to the untrained eye. This kind of trouble is easy enough to spot after you have watched enough races, but it eludes most bettors - which of course results in good odds the next time the horse is entered.