

## Statistics and Garbage

By Barry Meadow

*Barry Meadow has spent more than 30 years in the gambling world. He wrote his first book, *Success at the Harness Races*, in 1967. He's also written *Money Secrets at the Racetrack*, which has been lauded as the definitive guide to money management at the track. Meadow's eclectic resume includes serving in Vietnam, writing television sitcoms, playing the professional tennis circuit in India, doing standup comedy in California, and, of course, playing blackjack at the professional level in his spare time.*  
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A trainer wins 18% first off the claim. A handicapping system hits 29% winners. A jockey's year-to-date win percentage is 6%. Will any of these stats, or others, help your bottom line? Or will they simply mislead you?

Until William Quirin's *Winning at the Races* was published in 1979, few handicapping books offered much in the way of statistics, mainly because compiling them was an exercise in tedium. You'd have to buy every Racing Form, every day, and then go through each race searching for some characteristic you wanted to research. When you finally found a qualified selection, you'd grab a different Form to check the chart, and then record each result. Doing even the simplest work took incredible patience, or a staff of unpaid students.

All that changed with the introduction not only of the personal computer, but more recently with the availability of daily downloads. Now, for just a few dollars a day, anyone can download every past performance line for every horse in the nation, write a simple query, and find out if horses really do yield a flat-bet profit if they return in exactly five days (they don't) or whether you can make money by playing every dropper from a straight maiden into a maiden claimer who showed early speed last out (ditto).

The gathering of horsey data is no longer much of a problem. Ask the computer a question, and it will spit out answer.

However, while accumulating data is one thing, interpreting it correctly is something else altogether.

The essential problem is that while ideas should be forward-tested (you state a hypothesis, then test it), many data miners work backwards, falling victim to what is known as "hindsight bias." They start with already-known results, and then look for patterns that might have contributed to these results. Typical: A player notes that many recent winners at his track were dropping in class, so he decides to check the last three months' results. Sure enough, class droppers did well, but because the survey includes the recent results that he already knows, his sample will be skewed.

Let's look at some basic principles. Understand these, and you won't be misled by handicapping stats:

- \* The larger the sample size, the more likely will the percentages be accurate. Conversely, anything goes when looking at tiny sample sizes.
- \* The less often a result occurs and the higher the payoffs, the greater the sample size you need to measure the validity of the idea.
- \* Unlike groups cannot be lumped together: 3-5 shots cannot be lumped in with 7-1 shots.
- \* Check the actual number of plays, not simply the number of races investigated to obtain those plays.
- \* Rules that appear arbitrary (horse's last race must have taken place within the past 21 days, horse must go off at odds of 5-1 or above, etc.) indicate that the system came from back fitting with the arbitrary rules added to get rid of a bunch of losers.
- \* Whenever an idea has been developed from one set of results, it must be tested on a completely separate group of results.
- \* Once a result has been proven (e.g., coin flips win 50%), you can use a statistical formula known as standard deviation to predict the range of results; however, if a result is merely recorded and not proven, you cannot accurately predict the range of results since you do not know whether the result is typical or atypical.
- \* Return-on-investment statistics are often skewed by a handful of longshot winners--sometimes even by one such winner.

*(continued on next page)*

\* Any study of race results should look at what the usual results are for the particular odds category, and compare the usual ratio of wins, places, and shows to the results in question.

\* Streaks, both positive and negative, often happen for no reason other than the statistical fluctuations that are part of any long mathematical series

Whenever you see a handicapping statistic, ask these questions:

### 1. Could it be false?

Years ago, betting every favorite lost only half the track take. However, my own survey of 400,000 more recent favorites showed conclusively that you would lose the full track take by betting every favorite today. Yet some authors still continue to mistakenly tell their readers that the old stat is still valid.

### 2. Who says so?

A man touting his own system might tell you that it had an ROI of 37% last year at Belmont. Nice (if it's true), but what about every other track? Did it lose everywhere except Belmont? Often, it's the information that isn't being revealed that it is the most revealing.



[Belmont Park](#)

### 3. How many plays were there?

A sample size of 1,000 plays for a system whose average winning payoff is \$24 is just about useless. If a guy tells you he bet 417 longshots last year and showed a 15% profit, don't be surprised if he does the same this year and shows a 30% loss.

### 4. How was the number derived?

Who compiled the numbers? How far back? Which tracks? What were the odds? What was the 1-2-3 record, and what was the expected 1-2-3 record for horses at those odds?

### 5. If an ROI figure is not included, is the number of any use?

If a stat has an impact value of 2.3 (horses with characteristic win 2.3 times their fair share of races), that's good--but if they average a \$3.80 payoff, who cares?

### 6. If an ROI figure is included, how many plays is it based on, and did a few big payoffs skew the results?

A 500-play report that shows a 7% profit is worthless if its two biggest winners accounted for all the profit.

### 7. Is it possible that the result is simply a fluke?

If horses from post 6 showed a net profit for a particular meeting but posts 5 and 7 were losers, it's likely the result is nothing more than a statistical anomaly.

### 8. Have others, using different races, found similar results?

If you based a method on the results of certain races, you need to test it on different races - as many as possible. Better yet, have somebody else test it.

### 9. Is there evidence that the tested factor was more successful than can usually be expected, less so, or about average?

That includes not only the win percentage, but whether the prices were better or worse than usual.

These are starter questions. If you really want to get serious about the subject, study books like *How to Lie with Statistics* (Darrell Huff), *Fooled by Randomness* (Nassim Nicolas Taleb), *Innumeracy* (John Allen Paolos) and *Statistics for Dummies* (Deborah Rumsey).

Don't believe everything you read - even if it's got a number attached.

RANK	JPN	NAME	ML ODDS	S	P	PAYOFF
1st	10	1) WIDE OPEN 2) VA APPREHENSION 3) SKINTHO 4) NO BITTING 5) SILVER BELL 6) WE'LL BE THERE IN A MIN 7) SUNDAY 8) BRIGHT FUTURE 9) GEMME CLARY 10) CRYSTOPHER COLUMBUS	1			18.9
2nd			19			88.9
3rd			28			18.3
4th			8			17.9
5th			9			18.6
6th			10			28.9
7th			18			18.1
8th			28			88.9
9th			8			42.4
10th			10			28.4

## When's The Supertrainer Not So Super?

In October, Jose emailed us and asked "Can you please run Chad Brown in your supertrainer spotlight?"

Because we like a challenge, we said "yes." I am not sure we should've said yes, though. Chad has had a great year and many of his horses' fire in any situation.



Chad Brown – photo courtesy of [Horse racingnation.com](http://Horse racingnation.com)

From a 2013 database, Chad has a win percentage that hovers around 28%, with an ROI of about \$0.98 for every dollar bet. That's more than solid!

How about sprint to routes, horses off bad lines, graded stakes, or first time starters? Chad is effective with no statistical anomalies.

We're pretty much stuck with some suspect data (a small sample size, which Barry Meadow explained earlier), but maybe, just maybe we can find a couple of chinks in the armor.

With horses returning in 30 or fewer days, Chad is only 13 for 68 with an ROI of \$0.69. Considering he is so effective almost everywhere else, this is an interesting statistic. We may want to look a little closer at his horses wheeling back, who look like solid bets off good lines. Perhaps they are not.

Does the tote board talk? This one may get us in trouble with Barry Meadow again, but Chad has not brought in many longshots this year. His first timers over 9-1 odds are one for 20 with only two hitting the board. With second time starters and above he is 0 for 17 with horses over 10-1 with only two hitting the board as well.

This year, unlike some pockets in his career, maiden claimers have not been a strong suit. His win percentage has been decent (23%), but his horses are very over-bet (returning 77 cents on the dollar)

That's it for this month's supertainer Spotlight. Congratulations to Chad Brown for stumping the database with a wonderful training year!

## Speed & Handicapping Maiden Claiming Races

As Barry Meadow alluded on page one, the granddaddy dropper of them all, the golden "maiden special into a maiden claimer" is simply not profitable. In 2013, in sprints on all surfaces, this angle resulted in about a 14% win clip but for a terrible return on investment of 73.1 cents on every dollar bet. It's been like this for awhile.

But, if you inject a little more than 'last out speed', at least you can up your chances of success.

In 2013, if the dropper has the top early number (I am using my top early number, but you can find those via Bris or at Timeform and get a similar result) and has two or more starts, he or she wins at about a 27% clip and you only lose about five cents on the dollar. This trend is noticed in a much larger database, as well, with an ROI in the 90's.

If you add a little more handicapping chops to the mix, there's a good chance you can be profitable.

This angle provided a couple of bomb winners in 2013, including Phil's Thunder at Woodbine who paid \$77. Out of 29 horses in 2013 who possessed a top early number, dropping, at over 20-1 odds at post time, seven of them hit the board. These bombs can pay their way in pick 4's and pick 5's as throw-ins, and should not be discounted.


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## Fan or Handicapper? Take The Quiz!

In recent issues of Horseplayer Monthly, we've asked Q & A interviewees the following question: "What percentage are you a fan and what percentage are you a handicapper?" This is seemingly a straight forward enough question, but for those seeking a little guidance, here is a quiz to help you determine your ratio:

1. When planning a weekend trip to Lexington in April or October, which of the following best describes your dream itinerary/thought process about the trip?
    - A. Two days straight without leaving the Bluegrass Room, except perhaps for an occasional restroom break, but only if there is more than 20 minutes left to the next post (10 pts)
    - B. One day at Keeneland, one day visiting horse farms (5 pts)
    - C. Feeding retired race horses carrots at The Kentucky Horse Park (1 pt)
    - D. Putting on a set of goggles and doing the backstroke in a giant oak bourbon barrel at the Maker's Mark production facility (No points, but sounds like fun)
    - E. Both A and D, but not C (7.5 pts)
    - F. What's so special about Lexington? (Automatic disqualification from bettor or fan status)
    - G. The Drive-Thru betting windows are the greatest invention since the gift of flight (20 pts)
  2. You overhear a discussion about the "Horse of the Year" and your first instinct is to think to yourself which of the following?
    - A. Who cares? (10 pts)
    - B. I will defend Zenyatta to the death (1 pt)
    - C. I will defend Zenyatta to the death and then haunt you after my passing with impunity (0.5 pts)
- 
- Zenyatta – Breeders' Cup photo*
- D. Yeah, yeah, yeah....Anyway, who won the fourth at Portland Meadows? (15 pts)
  - E. Seems like a popularity contest for really wealthy grown-ups (no pts up for grabs, just an observation)
3. The term "Dime Supe" refers to what?
    - A. A four horse vertical wager made in 1/10 fractional increments (10 pts)
    - B. An option that comes with the lunch special at Wong Foo's (0 pts)
  4. While attending a Breeders' Cup or Triple Crown race card, you must see and/or do the following:
    - A. Visit the horses in the paddock before every race (2.5 pts)
    - B. Concern yourself with sartorial choices (0 pts)
    - C. Drink beer (5 pts)
    - D. Have a mixed drink with any form of fruit or mint (1.5 pts)
    - E. Only drink water since you, "can't focus properly on your handicapping while buzzed" (10 pts)
    - F. Remember to print out Track Bias and Trip Notes prior to leaving the hotel (15.5 pts)
    - G. Check the website of the hotel you plan to stay in for the event ahead of time to confirm proper Business Center accommodations to make sure you can print out Track Bias and Trip Notes (16.5 pts)
  5. Let's say "hypothetically" you went to France to visit your then girlfriend who would eventually become your wife as she finished her last week of a semester abroad at a large university. Let's also "hypothetically" say that while she was in class, despite the French language proficiency of a preschooler, you purchased the French version of the Form, visited Vincennes Harness track, spoke broken French lacking any form of lucidity to a mortified teller who couldn't stop laughing at a silly American, won four of six races with enough ROI to upsize from a croissant to a *chocolate* croissant (oui, oui) and was back in time for dinner. (100,000pts - especially if you passed on visiting the Louvre or Musee d' Orsay)
  6. William Hill and Ladbrokes are:
    - A. Characters on Downton Abbey (0 pts)
    - B. British based wagering services (7.5 pts)
  7. My favorite horse of all-time is:
    - A. The one in which I cashed the biggest ticket (10 pts)
    - B. Silver Charm, because he always gave his best (2.5 pts)
    - C. The one with the same name as my pet turtle when I was a kid (0 pts)

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8. Aside from horse racing, my other hobbies and interests include:
  - A. Watching and/or wagering on football, basketball, and hockey (7.5 pts)
  - B. Luge (0 pts)
  - C. Challenging my friends to various bets such as which raindrop will get to the bottom of the windowsill first (100 pts)
  - D. Watching the Oscars (0.5 pts)
  - E. Watching the VMAs (-500 pts)
9. You are most likely to be able to name:
  - A. All of the winners of the NHC (25 pts)
  - B. The Kentucky Derby winners of the past 20 years (5 pts)
  - C. The Louisiana Derby winners of the past 20 years (500 pts)
10. A Triactor is:
  - A. The Canadian term for Trifecta (10 pts)
  - B. A triple threat that can sing, dance, and act (0.5 pts)
  - C. Unplayable in the state of Pennsylvania with a 30% takeout (25 pts)

If you scored less than 50 points, you are more of a fan than a bettor. 50 or more points and you are more of a bettor than fan. If you scored 500 or more points, e-mail me your contact information and you can join my support group.

In all seriousness, this is a great game no matter your specific fan to bettor ratio. All of us are passionate about the game regardless of our specific lens, slant, or specific involvement in it. Breeders' Cup weekend was a nice reminder of what many of us love about the sport without care if your handle is five figures or two figures, you own a Classic starter or just a can of Classic Coke, or if you just love to be with friends and family watching thoroughbreds do what they do best.

For just a few days, hopefully we forgot about realities such as signal fees, ADW fights, medication issues, takeout concerns, and wagering integrity, and could take pride in all that is good about the game.

Good luck and good racing.

Jerod Dinkin - [@J Dinks](#)



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# Track Profiling

By Lenny Moon

There are countless variables involved in determining the outcome of a horse race but one can singlehandedly dwarf all others: track bias. Breeders' Cup Friday dispelled the myth that track biases don't exist as the Santa Anita main track carried several horses to the wire first that on an unbiased track wouldn't have finished in the top half of the field.



photo by [Penelope P. Miller](#), [America's Best Racing](#)

Longshots that took advantage of the speed friendly main track littered the Pick 5 causing it to carryover to Breeders' Cup Saturday. Goldencents ran away with the Dirt Mile, and even though he was a legitimate contender, the track definitely carried him home after a sensational early pace. A few races later in the Distaff the ultra-consistent Princess of Sylmar spun her wheels and never made up an inch on the leaders while Beholder tracked the pace and rode the bias to a likely year-end title in the three-year-old filly division.

The five Breeders' Cup races run on Friday were overshadowed in both print and social media by talk about the main track speed bias. The main track received ample water overnight as the track maintenance crew tried to neutralize the speed bias, which they accomplished. The following day the focus shifted away from talks of a track bias and onto the results of the championship races, as it should've.

Track biases like the one at Santa Anita, which was in place for much of the meet, are obvious and the opportunity to take advantage of them is limited. Short term and more subtle track biases however give astute horseplayers a major advantage and it takes only a few minutes a day to find them.

## Building a Track Profile

Building track profiles is not a new strategy and chances are most horseplayers have read about the strategy and/or have used it at some point. To build a track profile a horseplayer need only consult the results charts published by Equibase, gather a few key pieces of information and enter the information in a spreadsheet. The basic information that needs to be collected is:

- Track
- Date
- Race number
- Surface
- Distance
- Winner's position at the first call
- Winner's beaten lengths at the first call

That information will provide a basic track profile for each distance/surface combination. Adding a little more data however will provide an advanced track profile. The extra information that needs to be collected is:

- Track condition
- Rail position (for turf races)
- Number of runners
- Winner's post position
- Winner's position at the second call
- Winner's beaten lengths at the second call
- Winner's odds

While the basic track profile will be useful, the advanced track profile will allow for additional analysis of how the track is really playing. For example the track profile may change when it rains, inside or outside posts may be favorable at certain distances, or the beaten lengths at the second call may be crucial in separating contenders from non-contenders.

Building an advanced profile starts with adding the bullet points above as headers in a spreadsheet in the following order: Track, date, race number, surface, distance, track condition, rail position, number of runners, winner's post position, winner's position at the first call, winner's beaten lengths at the first call, winner's position at the second call, winner's beaten lengths at the second call, winner's odds and running style.

The first call is after a quarter of a mile in sprints and half a mile in routes. The second call is after half a mile in sprints and three-quarters of a mile in routes. The running style assignments are subjective. Personally I use the "EPS" running styles where "E" is for horses that were on the lead or within three-quarters of a length of the lead at the first call, "P" is for horses that were one to three lengths behind the leader at the first call and "S" is for horses that were three and a quarter lengths or more behind the leader at the first call.

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### Analyzing the Track Profile

When preparing for an upcoming meet it is extremely useful to compile the data above to get an idea of how the track plays on a normal day. I did this for the current Hollywood Park meet by looking at last year's fall meet results. I found that the main track favored "E" and "P" style runners in sprints up to six and one-half furlongs but was fair to all running styles in sprints at seven and seven and one-half furlongs. Main track routes at a mile and a sixteenth favored "E" and "P" style runners. Turf sprints were fair to all running styles while turf routes gave a slight edge to "S" style runners.

The first few days of the current meet followed the trends above but that quickly changed. The main track was no longer favorable to "E" style runners in shorter sprints and routes. Instead "P" style runners gained an edge at six and six and a half furlongs and "P" and "S" style runners gained an edge at a mile and a sixteenth. At the same time sprints at seven and seven and one-half furlongs were favorable to "E" style runners. Both turf sprints and routes maintained the profiles from the previous meet.

Maintaining a track profile for specific meets provides insights into how the track is playing from day to day and week to week. Tracks are constantly changing because of track maintenance and weather in addition to the usage they get during the morning hours for workouts and the afternoon and/or night hours for races. Picking up on a shift in preferred running styles or post positions before the general public can lead to finding winners at overlaid prices and vulnerable favorites at underlaid prices.

Track profiles are equally valuable for spot plays or handicapping contest play. If an unfamiliar track is hosting an attractive card or is included in a contest lineup, building a track profile for the previous week of races can reveal which running styles, if any, are preferred on each surface and at each distance.

Track profiles can provide the edge in a game where the slightest edge can be the difference between a profitable and unprofitable day or meet or the difference between cashing in and finishing out of the money in a handicapping contest. They only take a few minutes to construct and the reward for the little bit of extra work far outweighs the time it takes to put them together.

For anyone that is interested I am currently maintaining a track profile for Hollywood Park, which you can download for free at the following link:

<http://www.equinometry.com/free-stuff/> and it will be updated after each race day for the rest of the meet.

*Lenny Moon is the founder of [Equinometry.com](http://www.equinometry.com) where he shares his thoughts on handicapping and betting horses and handicapping contests. You can also occasionally find him in the grandstand of Laurel Park and more often in a handicapping contest on [Derby Wars](#).*

## Question of the Month

*Last month a reader of the Horseplayer Monthly asked this question, "I would love for someone to explain the track bias and how to identify it. How could there be an inside bias and the 7 & 8 horses are winning?"*

*We asked several horseplayers to share their thoughts on this question, and their answers are as follows.*

**Ed DeRosa** - I think many handicappers put too much emphasis on track bias. It's too often seen as an oracle to explain why a certain result happened rather than just as another piece of the puzzle.

Is it a speed bias when a horse goes gate-to-wire after setting a pace with fractions below par? I don't think so, but let's take an extreme example. Let's say there's a Sprinter showcase day at a track featuring six graded stakes races all going six furlongs. In every race the horse with the lead coasts through an opening quarter in :25 and a half in :49. Is it a speed bias, then, when these horses are all able to win after such soft fractions? Of course not, but if you showed those charts to a group of handicappers, I guarantee most would conclude that the track "favors front runners."

That's not to say biases don't exist, but most people use that word as a catch all to explain away anomalies when really it's just physics at play. To take another extreme example, think of a half-mile harness track. Is there an inside bias because posts 7 & 8 or so bad? No. It's just common sense that starting that far out at full speed with the first turn rapidly approaching isn't ideal.

Without question certain tracks favor certain dynamics, both in terms of pace and position on the racetrack, but strange weather aside, those dynamics are more typically long-term than a short-term bias.

**Melissa Nolan** - Track bias occurs when either certain areas of a track are winning more than expected, or certain running styles are winning more than their fair share of races.

For instance, perhaps the most well know track bias occurred at Keeneland on the main before the Polytrack was installed in fall 2006. Deemed the "Golden Rail," it was well known that speed horses who got to the rail had a tendency to keep going when their past performances indicated otherwise. Essentially horses could "ride the bias" to victory. A famous example of the "Golden Rail" was Sinister Minister, who wired the field at 8-1 for Bob Baffert and Garrett Gomez in the [2006 Bluegrass Stakes](#).

Another example was the track at Santa Anita on the first day of the 2013 Breeders' Cup where it was also well-perceived as speed biased though surface maintenance

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that evening resulted in a much fairer surface on Breeders' Cup Saturday.

As opposed to the old Keeneland surface where it was advantageous to not only be on the lead but on the rail, the main track at Parx Racing is notorious for having a deep and slow "dead rail." At that track, it doesn't so much matter if you horses are speeds or closers as long as your jockey knows to get a few paths off the rail towards the middle of the track. I've heard Jerry Brown of ThoroGraph mention that he gives more "dead rail" denotations at Parx than any other track in the United States.

Being able to identify a bias and which horses were helped or hindered by a track bias/profile can be very profitable if you can identify what's occurring before other handicappers. If horses are running on when you think they should be stopping, or stopping when on the rail at comfortable fractions, you may be encountering a bias.

Pay attention and you may be laughing all the way to the IRS windows when others are still wondering why no horses can close.

**Jeff Platt – HANA President** - As a horseplayer, once you recognize a path bias, part of your job is predicting which of the horses are likely to take advantage of it.

Take the case of a bias where the footing along the rail (or inside) is better than the footing on the outside. Such a bias does not necessarily mean that horses with inside posts will get the best of it. Quite often races unfold in such a way that the horse with the best early speed, even if that horse drew an outside post, gets over to the rail - and on days when the inside is best - that's the horse most likely to take advantage of an inside path bias.

The [Cangamble](#) Blog - The naysayers have gone extinct or changed their tune, track bias exists. There are two types of track bias that could affect the results on a given day, inside/outside and running style (speed/closer).

Sometimes the rail is better than average, sometimes the outside has an advantage. Sometimes speed horses have an advantage, and of course there are days when closers do exceptionally well. And many times, there will be two biases that seem to be prevalent, for example, speed-rail, or outside-closer.

The problem with bias is that it can be very subjective and sometimes a correct assessment is hard to figure out. Having an objective number for track bias can be very useful in explaining past races, but also, if calculated after three or four races on a live card, can be very advantageous to the horseplayer.

In the handicapping book, *Power of Early Speed*, Steve Klein came up with a simple way to objectively come up with a running style bias. Here is a variation on it, as well as a way to tackle the rail/outside bias as well, and shouldn't take more than a couple of minutes to calculate the bias for a card.

A couple of things, turf and dirt are separate when doing bias numbers, and sometimes due to wind or weather, a bias can change halfway through a card, but this will become apparent when looking at your work, and the result will be two sets of bias numbers for that specific day.



For the running style bias, add one point if the winner was positioned within the top half of the field, first call (that shows lengths beaten). In a field with an odd number of horses, a horse positioned in the exact middle is considered to be in the top half. Add one point if the horse who finished second was positioned in the top half of the field first call. Add another point if the winner was on the lead first call. And finally, if the race favorite started in the back half of the field and didn't finish in the top three, add another point. Repeat this for every race on the same surface for the card. Divide the total number by the amount of races used. If you are OK looking at a number that has decimals, round off to two decimals, if you don't like decimals, multiply by 100.

Some tracks have a general speed bias and some do not, by comparing the number daily with numbers from the same track, you'll have a good idea very quickly how much of a bias existed.

When it comes to inside/outside bias, the best way to go is make notes, or watch replays, but if you want a decent general way to figure it out within a minute or two, using the following works well:

You may want to differentiate between one and two turn races, and perhaps only rate one turn races. Add one point if the winner had a post on the inside (again, if it is a nine horse field, for example, the 1-5 posts are considered inside). Add one point if the second horse had an inside post. If the favorite didn't finish in the top three, look at the comments, if they give you the impression the horse was three-wide or greater, add another point. Finally, look at the comments for the winner. If the impression from the comments and the horse's post are that the horse was three-wide or more, subtract a point. Once more, take the total number from all the races calculated for that day, and divide by the number of races used.

Finally, for calculating live biases, you'll need to take notes if you are at the track and/or try to watch the replay as well. This is a much easier task if betting from home, but if you have internet access at the track, you can also use what is available at Equibase, for example, as the charts come out pretty quickly these days.



## Performance Figures Explained



By [Melissa Nolan](#)

With the preponderance of handicapping tools and data now available to horseplayers it can be difficult keeping up with every new product, much less understand how to use them all. Having utilized a panoply of speed ratings, pace figures, database software, and clocker reports in my handicapping over the years, one tool remains an omnipresent weapon in my arsenal of information-- performance figures.

Commonly referred to as "The Sheets," performance figures were developed by Len Ragozin in the 1960s, using a methodology which sought to normalize the efforts of thoroughbreds so their races could be directly compared without having to account separately for pace, final time, distance, track surface, weather, weight, and other variables. Over time, his racing data accumulated, allowing his figures to evolve and become more refined. By the early 1970s, the power of the Ragozin numbers to identify undervalued or overvalued runners more than proved out at the betting windows for those few early friends and clients lucky enough to test their accuracy. To this day, his performance figures are considered by many bettors and horsemen alike as the most robust and accurate measurement of the ability of a racehorse.

Unlike basic speed and pace figures, "The Sheets" are recorded on graphically with the axis beginning on the left of the column (on Ragozin's scale, the lower the figure, the better the effort) and moving right if race efforts decline.

With each subsequent race, the number a horse runs is added to his "Sheet" creating fluctuations that start to resemble a bar graph.

Because performance figures are inclusive and absolute, rather than strictly speed or pace derived, a horse can be compared not only to its competition but also to itself. As such, when Ragozin noticed similar fluctuation "patterns" of racing performance start to emerge across runners of varying ability and quality, eventually he gained the insight that his "sheets" ultimately represented the heretofore undocumented athletic condition of racehorses. These "form cycles" show stages of fitness in a racehorse and are the basis of Ragozin's revolutionary "Bounce Theory." Horses will cycle in and out of form according to their condition. Like humans athletes, horses in training will improve in fitness until they reach a peak ("top") after which the body needs time to recover and will regress ("bounce") until enough time has passed that it can start

gaining in condition again. It's analogous to a fitness plateau in humans.

Older horses sometimes are unable to regain a prior level of fitness due to the fact that thoroughbreds reach top condition about the tail end of their four-year-old year. One horse who fits this pattern is [Cross Traffic](#), who got very good in the spring and summer of 2013 but could not find his form again after tough efforts at Belmont and Saratoga and was eventually retired. The last three races for [Goldencents](#) also show on The Sheets that he ran a new top in the Santa Anita Sprint Championship, actually bounced in the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile, and ran completely off form following a ship back east for the Cigar Mile at Aqueduct. Another extreme version of the bounce is [Big Brown](#), whose effort in the Belmont Stakes was horrendous after going undefeated through the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes.

One more condition move handicappers can watch for is the "every-other" race pattern where a horse's races condition consistently shows good efforts followed by a regression. [Justin Phillip](#) is a textbook example of horse that ran following this type of pattern.

The condition moves and form cycle theories Ragozin formulated have revolutionized not only handicapping but thoroughbred training methods and claiming as well. Finding value through hidden form and avoiding racing horses too often so as to avoid bouncing are now commonplace in modern racing. I was first exposed to using The Sheets when I worked for Padua Stable as a tool to keep tabs on the efforts of our racehorses, but soon began to view them as an invaluable tool in handicapping and now rely on with regularity in my handicapping.

If you're interested in learning more about The Sheet methodology and application, I suggest tracking down Len Ragozin's book *The Odds Must be Crazy* or "bouncing" over to his website at [www.TheSheets.com](http://www.TheSheets.com). Happy 'capping and best of luck!

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DATE	RACE	HORSE	DR	PP	W	PL	PO	W	PL	PO	W	PL	PO
1/14	1	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1/14	2	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1/14	3	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1/14	4	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1/14	5	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1/14	6	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1/14	7	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1/14	8	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1/14	9	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1/14	10	DRAGON	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

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# A Smoking Gun in Every Race



By Ed DeRosa

As director of marketing of [Brisnet.com](http://Brisnet.com), one of the parts of my job I enjoy most is getting [Ultimate Past Performances](http://Ultimate Past Performances) in more people's hands.

Partnerships with [Hello Race Fans](http://Hello Race Fans) and [HorsePlayerNOW](http://HorsePlayerNOW) have helped spread the word (and the data), but with new blood comes questions, including the most basic of all: "How do I read this stuff?!"

The race chart and past performance line are a lot like a baseball box score in that the information and how it's presented hasn't changed much over more than a century of competition. But just as Sabermetrics and the Elias Sports Bureau changed how we process that information as well as the information we want with it, so, too, has racing evolved with the advent of proprietary data ranging from "simple" speed ratings to complex indices that contrast performance.

The information available is not the only thing to expand, however, as access to that information is easier than ever as well. The aforementioned Ultimate PPs includes dozens of data points that even a generation ago would have required several sources and hours of research to track down. When people ask, "How do I read this stuff" they actually mean, "How do I determine what's important?"

Like so many questions in racing, the answer is, "It depends." And for me when handicapping what "it" most often "depends" on is PRICE, which is why my favorite line in Len Ragozin's book *The Odds Must Be Crazy* is "at 30-to-1 I loved the line [the horse's form or pattern]; at 3-to-1 I would have hated it."

I was reminded of this again (and in a good way) on July 7, 2013, when Midnight Aria won the Queen's Plate Stakes at Woodbine gate to wire at 16.6-to-1. There was enough not to like about Midnight Aria (distance questions and speed ratings tops on the list) that there's no way I'd have backed this horse as one of the favorites, but the one thing to like (lone speed) made him extremely attractive at the price.

Now admittedly you don't need Brisnet.com Ultimate PPs to figure out if there's a lone speed type in the race. A bunch of 1s on the left-hand side of the running lines on one horse but not on any others is the best indication, but that still doesn't tell the whole story.

#	Horse Name	ML Odds	Med Eqp	Days Since Run	Run L/R	Style	P T S
7	Up With the Birds	2/1	L	42		+S	
9	Nipissing	7/2	L	28		P 1	
4	Spring in the Air	10/1	L	28		+S 3	
11	His Race to Win	10/1	L	28		P 4	
1	Midnight Aria	15/1	L	28		E 8	
10	Pyrite Mountain	6/1	L	28		+S	
2	Dynamic Sky	4/1	L	28		+S 3	
3	Jagger M	20/1	L	28		E/P 3	
6	Kaigun	20/1	L	28		+S 1	
12	River Seven	20/1	L	28		E/P 5	
5	County Lineman	30/1	L	44		+S 4	
8	Rackman	50/1	L	36		P 3	

That's where the features of more designer PPs such as Brisnet.com's Ultimate PPs can come into play. Not only was Midnight Aria an easy-to-identify frontrunner but also his designation as "E8" heightened the gate-to-wire threat. It's not uncommon to find a race with only one "E" or one "8" type, but it is rare that the only "E" is an 8 with the next closest pursuer an E/P 5.

Again, at 3-to-1 I hate the line, but at 16.6-to-1 I was willing to take a chance.

Sometimes handicapping a race requires putting all the pieces together like a puzzle to see the big picture, but other times there's such an imbalance between the potential success of a piece of data and the price a horse is offering that that is all you need to know.

1	Midnight Aria (E 8)	15/1	L	28		E 8	
2	Dynamic Sky	4/1	L	28		+S 3	
3	Jagger M	20/1	L	28		E/P 3	
4	Spring in the Air	10/1	L	28		+S 3	
5	County Lineman	30/1	L	44		+S 4	
6	Kaigun	20/1	L	28		+S 1	
7	Up With the Birds	2/1	L	42		+S	
8	Rackman	50/1	L	36		P 3	
9	Nipissing	7/2	L	28		P 1	
10	Pyrite Mountain	6/1	L	28		+S	
11	His Race to Win	10/1	L	28		P 4	
12	River Seven	20/1	L	28		E/P 5	



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## The Importance of Final Quarters



*Garnet Barnsdale is a co-host of the radio show North American Harness Update on SRN One, writes the Drive On blog for Horse Racing Nation.com and is a regular contributing writer for Down The Stretch Newspaper. He can be followed on Twitter as [@gocashking](#).*

A while back my radio show (North American Harness Update on SRN One on 148.ca) co-host Ray Coto and I were engaged in one of our many arguments...I mean..."debates." While our generation gap fosters a new blood/old guard dynamic that works quite well on our show, behind the scenes it can turn into a 14-year-old "know it all" chirping back and forth with a 49-year-old "seen it all."

In this specific case, I am pretty sure I was taking a stand that Your So Vain was going to win because he had a decided advantage in late speed – trotting his last quarters in his recent races a full second faster than any of his rivals. Ray retorted "fast last quarters don't mean anything," which, I think in some cases is true but as a blanket statement I disputed.

While Your So Vain vindicated my opinion that week and went onto trot impressive miles in the Canadian Trotting Classic elim (won) and Final (second to Hambletonian winner Royalty For Life) by virtue of powerful late moves, I still felt compelled to find more conclusive proof that fast last quarters do indeed "mean something."

From a race-to-race handicapping perspective, last quarters is and always has been (even before they were published in the PPs) one of the factors that I consider when identifying contenders. It isn't always the deciding factor, but, if I like a horse, especially on a seven-eighths or mile track, I usually demand that its most recent last quarters are at least among the fastest. I believe being able to finish strongly is an important consideration, especially on the bigger tracks with the longest stretches. If a horse holds a *decided* advantage, such as Your So Vain did in the subject race above, it is usually a no-brainer automatic wager for me, providing the price is acceptable related to post position, class and driver. In other words, if a horse has the fastest last quarters but is stepping up in a class it hasn't won at before leaving from the ten hole with Joe Unknown at the lines, the horse is still a toss.

One of the other applications of this angle for me is it can

identify a horse on the upswing. For example, a horse suddenly fires a last quarter noticeably faster than in any other race, it is quite likely coming up to a top effort, maybe a performance that eclipses its previous best miles. Quite often horses showing this pattern will pop at a big price, but with that win on their line get bet much more the following start, it's important to climb aboard for that first win! This is sometimes easier said than done, but, blind faith in this angle does pay off handsomely at times.

As a purely unscientific study, I decided to run a random test on last Saturday's races on the bigger tracks – The Meadowlands, Woodbine, Balmoral and Cal Expo. "Why is Barnsdale leaving out the five-eighths and half-mile tracks?" you may be wondering at this point. While late speed is a factor at the smaller tracks, many races are won by strong moves at the start or middle portions of races at the smaller ovals where a driver moves to command and seizes control of the race, sometimes known as the "brush and crush." Invariably, horses will build up insurmountable lead and coast home making the late fractions moot.

I kept this "study" very simple, conducted more as a curiosity than anything else. I would never blindly bet horses based on how this study was conducted, but I wanted to find out how "last quarters" might figure in their rawest form, with no other handicapping or analysis applied. So here's what I did: From these four tracks I identified in every race which horse paced or trotted the fastest last quarter in A) its most recent start and B) averaged from its three most recent starts but only on fast tracks and in pari-mutuel races. Qualifiers were excluded due to the nature they are often raced. In many cases, the fields crawl around the track and then blast home in the last quarter (the only part of the race they are asked for any real speed). I felt those races are not true indicators but rather outliers and may skew the results. There was no consideration given to class, post position, driver, trainer, recency, form or any other pertinent handicapping factor.

The results of the 63 races that were contested were interesting in a few respects. While it wasn't really surprising to me at all that the fewest number of winners and worst ROI came at historically speed-favoring Woodbine, it was a bit surprising to see positive ROIs in both categories at the New Meadowlands, which had also been favoring front-end speed early in the meet. Balmoral and Cal Expo also had mixed results.

Here are the raw numbers (ROI based on \$2 wagers on one subject horse/race)

Track	Fastest Last ¼ most recent/ROI	Fastest Last ¾ 3 most recent/ROI
WOODBINE	2 Wins from 12 races/\$9.60 = \$0.80	1/12 \$4.40/\$0.37
CAL EXPO	6/15 \$23.80/\$1.59	2/15 \$14.80/\$0.99
BALMORAL	2/13 \$5.60/\$0.43	5/13 \$30/\$2.31
MEADOWLANDS	4/13 \$43.70/\$3.36	5/13 \$48.60/\$3.74
TOTALS ALL	14/63 \$82.70/\$1.31	13/63 \$94.80/\$1.50

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Interestingly there were 24 “dual qualifiers,” meaning 24 horses that led both categories. Of those, nine won, including \$25.40 winner Fat Mans Alley that topped a \$464 exacta at The Meadowlands with the horse with the second fastest last quarter finishing second! The overall ROI on the “Dual Qualifiers” based on wagering \$2 on each was decent at \$2.43 (or 21.5% profit)

What did I learn from this rather laborious study you might ask? Firstly, after all these years following, writing about, watching and wagering on harness races I still find the odd number-crunching exercise fun. Secondly, I think I found out what I already knew – that late speed and fast last quarters do “mean something,” but that component is just one of many factors that must be considered and analyzed as a small component of a bigger puzzle when handicapping a race.

Obviously anyone intent on showing long-term profits wagering on harness races isn’t going to blindly bet races using only one piece of data and that’s not what I’m suggesting here. However, it may be wise to keep an eye out for those “dual qualifiers,” even if they haven’t been winning recently. If a horse enters a race in which he is decidedly the fastest finisher, chances are all he needs is some “racing luck” to be there on the money. In the coming weeks I will be watching that angle a lot closer.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays and Best of Luck for a prosperous 2014!

## Scott Wins Grand Circuit Handicapping Challenge

Despite attempts by other contestants to execute ‘Hail Mary’ wagers in an effort to seek the payoff positions, Richard Scott is the winner of HANA Harness’ 2013 Grand Circuit Handicapping Challenge sponsored by the Hambletonian Society, Chicago Harness, IHHA, Meadowlands Racing and Entertainment, Tioga Downs, and Vernon Downs.

Scott’s victory seemed assured as far back as July 21 when he exploded for a profit of \$1,023.40 at Tioga Downs that weekend which created a lead which would never be challenged as no other handicapper was able to get that ‘big hit’ to put them back in the running. Scott’s final winning margin was \$743.67.

However, in the last event of the season, Rusty Nash was able to use the Cleveland Classic at Northfield Park to earn a weekly profit of \$51.60, allowing him to sneak into second place, pushing Earl Paulson into third. The only other handicapper which showed a profit for the week was Scott with a profit of \$0.60.

The prize fund for the contest reached \$3,250. As a result of the final results, Scott’s horse rescue, [Changing Fates Equine Rescue](#) will be a recipient of \$1,250. Nash’s rescue, [Maine State Society for the Protection of Animals](#) is slated to receive \$875, while Paulson’s third-place finish results in a \$375 donation to [Heading for Home](#). In addition to these donations, additional donations will be made in honor of Scott’s victory by the Illinois Harness Horseman Association and Red Shores Charlottetown to local standardbred rescues. Those organizations which handle more than standardbreds have committed to using these proceeds solely for the benefit of standardbred rescues.

For full contest results, [click here](#).

## HANA Harness (and Retired Horses) Thank Our Sponsors

In addition to providing handicappers an opportunity to show off their handicapping skills and provide race fans with some wagering ideas during the year, one of the major goals of HANA Harness has been to raise awareness and funds for Standardbred rescues. Thanks to our handicappers, who have been willing to handicap lengthy contests for nothing more than satisfaction in knowing they are helping unwanted horses and our sponsors who have allowed HANA Harness to donate in excess of \$7,000 over the past two years.

While HANA Harness is thankful for last year’s sponsors, we would like to specifically thank this year’s sponsors for their donations, for without their assistance, we would not be able to donate funds to this year’s worthwhile rescues.

Thanks to our Gold Sponsors, **the Hambletonian Society, Chicago Harness (Balmoral and Maywood Parks), Illinois Harness Horseman Association, Meadowlands Racing & Entertainment, Tioga Downs, and Vernon Downs**. In addition to these sponsors, recognition also goes to our Silver Sponsor, **Red Shores Charlottetown** for their donation to Canadian Standardbred Rescue.

HANA Harness looks forward to hosting another handicapping contest in 2014. We welcome sponsorships from racing organizations, tracks operators, horsemen associations, suppliers, and owners. If you wish to be considered for possible sponsorship opportunities in 2014, you may contact HANA Harness at [allan@hanaweb.org](mailto:allan@hanaweb.org) to be contacted when the time is appropriate.





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## The Retro-Graded Stakes Formula



By Mike Dorr

A considerable amount of racing chatter recently has been about the quality of certain graded stakes races and how their winners have been little more than (well-)paid workouts for the horses and their connections. I'm inclined to agree – top class races should attract many horses of a certain caliber but the graded stakes field size is, on average, one of the smallest in the sport. (Allowance races are not far behind – claiming and lower-level turf races attract the largest fields).

What's at issue here is "black-type." When horses (or his/her progeny) go to sale, having placed in a graded stakes race can mean a considerable premium to their auction price. This makes total sense – thousands of horses of all ages are sold each year and the bold, sometimes ALL-CAPS, font in the sales catalog allows buyers to assess the potential class of the [yearling/two-year-old/mare/stud prospect] they are buying at a glance without reviewing a lifetime of past performances. It's an elegant solution to a problem that existed before the Internet and electronic data was a thing, and retains some value to this day.

The American Graded Stakes Committee (AGSC) is the "be-all-and-end-all" determiner of what races get the vaunted Graded Stakes designation, those that can get the BOLD CAP font in a sales catalog. The Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association (TOBA) controls this designation, of which their policies can be found [here](#). To their credit, the AGSC has been quite responsive to upgrading the designation of races that have shown considerable improvement in the quality of horses running in them over the years. The best example, given my familiarity with them, is the upgrade of the Arkansas Derby for three-year-olds to Grade 1 status and its preps (the Rebel and Southwest) to G2 and G3 status, after the likes of Smarty Jones, Afleet Alex and Curlin used the Oaklawn route to prep for later classic wins.

My main criticism of the AGSC is that, while they have been responsive to upgrades, they have been much less so to downgrading races that haven't been as good. It's a natural response for well-meaning decision-makers: demonstrable class deserves and upgrade, suspect class deserves just one more chance. That bias has produced what I would call class "creep" whose end result is too many graded stakes with too small fields and, frankly, too many horses earning graded black-type. The AGSC uses "gut feel" more than data to determine the top quality races, which has contributed to the bias.

The main trend driving this is the declining North American foal crop, which has shrunk from a high of 40,000 in 1990 to 25,000 this past year ([source](#)). The number of graded stakes has remained steadily above 450 for the last seven years despite the [falling foal crop and the number of races run in North America](#). This means its roughly 40% easier today to earn black-type than it was just a few years ago. The AGSC has not been responsive enough to these trends; the impact is that black-type means less and less.

The fix I propose leverage the unique power of the age in which we live – use the vast information collected about races, and the past and future performance of the horses that run in them, to determine black-type. More importantly, tie the total number of graded stakes to a reasonable estimate of the foal crops eligible for those races. Lastly, tie the earning of black-type from placing in a graded stakes not to the horse's placing, but the number of contenders the placing horse beat to earn it. What results is what I call the Retro-Graded Stakes Formula. These are the guidelines I'd suggest:

- In 2006, roughly 100,000 thoroughbreds (three years of foal crops) would have been eligible for graded stakes eligibility, or roughly one GS for every 210 born (100K/475). Let's be generous and say that a GS win should be available for every 200 foals.
- Black-type is especially valuable for fillies and mares, but their graded stakes representation is outsized compared to the open races for which they are eligible. If fillies and mares are eligible for all graded stakes, but colts, geldings, and horses are eligible for all, then gender-restricted graded stakes should represent just one third (33%) of all graded stakes – currently, 41% of graded stakes are gender-restricted.
- Many graded stakes are age-restricted, so tying them to the eligible foal crop makes sense. For two- and three-year olds in a foal crop of 24,000, that means just 120 graded races to split between the two- and three-year-old races, and only 40 for fillies and mares. Currently, there are 184.
- Open company races, having a larger eligible foal crop, would get a majority of the graded stakes races. This aligns with the industry desire (supposedly) for keeping horses running at a later age.
- Field size matters in a stakes race – it is easier to place in a five-horse field than an eight-horse field, naturally. To earn black-type, require that a horse beat at least 60% of the field they are in. For a four-horse race, only the winner earns black type. In a five- to seven-horse race, top two. Only in a field of eight or more can an ITM guarantee black-type.

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- The total number of graded stakes would shrink to the foal crop of three-, four-, and five-year-olds/200 (roughly 360, based on 2011-2013) but distributing those more to open company races versus any kind of restriction. If there are 120 age-restricted races, there would be 240 without.

The above proposals are conditions that the AGSC could implement today. The biggest change, however, would be to use the past and future performances of race horses to determine the true class of a race. This would take some doing. The RGSA would assign a provisional class to a race before its run based on its current historical standing, determined by prior class of the horses in it. For example:

- A race could be graded a PG[1,2,3], meaning a Provisional Grade 1 (2 or 3) based on the level of horses who have run in it, and their subsequent performance. Minimum purse sizes would be required – the AGSC gets this right.
- After a suitable period of time, probably three-six months, the race would be graded RG[1,2,3], again based on both the past and subsequent performance of its entries. The total number of RG races will be tied to the eligible foal crop for that race.
- One revision to a races grade would be allowed should multiple horses from the race go on to greater things.
- Ungraded stakes could get bumped to RG status (and future PG status) if multiple performers win subsequent RG contests.
- Allowance level races with multiple past and future RG performers could get special “Key Race” status that could be noted in a catalog page.

I am not suggesting that the AGSC adopt these changes; though that might be ideal, it would be too radical a change. I’m saying that any group with data and sufficiently publicity could use the RGSF to challenge the status quo with regard to the class of sales horses. The AGSC has no competition – it’s time they had some.



## Release the Data

By Dan Needham

It's time. Well, in truth it's overdue, but better late than never. Time for what? It's time to release the data -- the historical data that represents the results of Thoroughbred horse races. For argument's sake, let's say data that is at least six months old. You see, these data are not readily available to the general public, like box scores in baseball. Actually, that's not quite true. Historical racing data can be purchased. But that's different. It's time to give it all away. As far back in time as is viable.



Don't fret. I'm not in any way suggesting that live past performances be made available free of charge. Not that I couldn't suggest that, but such a fanciful notion would be quickly dismissed. The suppliers of past performance data for handicapping -- our friends at America's Turf Authority and several others -- would have a bit of an issue with that. Even the most rudimentary past performance data, as long as it was free, would quickly eat into their bottom line.

Instead I'm suggesting that historical data be set free, with a lag time of maybe six months. Yes, the revenue stream that currently accompanies the sale of these data would go away. But how significant can that revenue stream really be?

This is not to say that the Daily Racing Form, BRIS, recent plucky upstart TimeformUS and others would be prevented from selling their historical data to any interested buyers. Each data provider injects and derives its own unique value-added elements into the source data. The daily market for past performance data would be unchanged.

What we are left with to discuss then is the industry-run Equibase, the parent source of all flavors of racing data. And we're talking about a decent amount of data -- if every racing start is a data point then the volume of data theoretically available is nontrivial. But this really isn't a big deal from a consumer's perspective. Not anymore. In 2013

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this kind of analysis can be done on a cheap laptop. Sitting on the couch. In your underwear. And in a few years time your hand-held device or tablet will be able to handle it.

What good would it do for Equibase to become an "open-data" platform of sorts? It's their data. The effort, cost and infrastructure required to collect, store, and distribute racing data is far from negligible. That said, the Thoroughbred racing industry will benefit greatly in the long run if the data is set free.

A subset of all horseplayers are "database" players. They build databases of racing data and slice and dice to their heart's content looking for trends and angles. They're looking for an edge. The database players would no longer have to pay for the raw data that they need, unless they want to append proprietary speed figures of a certain flavor or some other value-added elements. And there are surely current horseplayers who would quickly evolve into database players (i.e., more engaged, more wagering) given free access to racing information. Give these players the data they need to search for their edge.

Most bettors, however, would not be directly impacted by free historical data. They lack the skills and desire to go hands-on with complex data manipulation and analysis. Instead they would interact with the data through the many "info-mediaries" that would pop up. Entrepreneurs with a vision would build products that leverage the data in some way. They'll build products to help bettors make their selections. These products and services already exist of course, but their numbers would grow exponentially. If there is a downside to this, I can't see it.

And the most interesting and beneficial (for the racing industry) uses of the data will be the ones we never saw coming. This is kind of the exciting part. Release the data. Let the innovators innovate. Maybe we'll hear someone say "you know, a vector of integers and fractions really isn't an intuitive way to visualize a horse running around an oval so we invented [cool, amazing new way to show past performances].

Release the data. I still stubbornly cling to the belief that the racing industry wants more people to bet on horse racing and horse bettors to bet more. How can the end-game underlying any promotion or strategy be anything else? But when you look at the various initiatives under way these days, it's tough to make a case that increased wagering is the ultimate objective.

Maybe the real goal is to have racetrack attendees look like a cross between a Golden Globe awards show and the beach at Panama City during spring break. That's all well and good, but it won't do your handle any favors.

Open access to historical racing data would directly create new horseplayers and encourage current horseplayers to wager more. X will cause Y. No imagination needed. Sure, I can't prove it. But I strongly believe it.

With minimal investment in setting up a platform to release the data the ROI could be impressive. It won't take

much. The data will have to exist in a reasonably convenient and machine-readable form. The data will be provided under the most lenient terms with few if any restrictions. That last part is terrifying, I understand.

Current costly industry initiatives that pass off impressions and website visits as important metrics do not readily reveal themselves as clear tactics to attract new bettors. But I could be way off base too. Who knows, we may hear this in a future NHC winner's victory speech: "There I was working the fields back in Kansas. I saw that bus go by on the highway and knew just what I had to do. I stepped down off that tractor and just kept walking..."

Release the data. And don't do it quietly. Make a loud splash.

Maybe you've heard of kaggle. This company started out as a platform for predictive modeling competitions and still does that kind of thing. Imagine the racing industry hosting a kick-off modeling competition that accompanies the roll out of open access to racing data. Who can build the most accurate model to predict winners of Thoroughbred horse races? Figure out the particulars of the contest and the data. Offer a prize about the same as the annual salary of an America's Best Racing brand ambassador. Or better yet kick it up a notch. Imagine 200 teams from all over working with racing data, including teams of engineering and physics students from MIT and Stanford. Maybe some contestants will be inspired to drop out of school, check-in to the Oasis Motel, and become a degenerate horseplayer. I hope not.

Well we're at it, let's let every statistics/data science department at every institute of higher learning in the United States and Canada know that there is a fun, new, huge data collection out there to hack away at for teaching purposes. I like the idea that thousands of horseplayers-to-be would become intimately familiar with racing data on a daily basis, don't you?

Equibase promises to "leverage information to serve the fan base and help promote the sport." Release the data. It just might be one of the very best ways to keep those promises.



## Quick Hits

### College Student Turns \$25 into \$5,000 at DerbyWars



A 23-year-old Southern Illinois University student, who is known as "apdurh01" on the site, won his way into the big game in a \$25 qualifier early in the week. An ice storm that hit the Midwest last week kept him in his dorm room for two days, but he used the time to study horses instead of economics.

"Not many 23-year-olds want to stay in on a Friday night and handicap a pick 5 carryover, but I do," said Durham. "Call me crazy, but it's more fun to study past performances, watch race replays, and study pedigrees than it is to go out and party with friends. Being a full time student and a horseplayer I know I have to be careful balancing my priorities. Obviously, getting my degree is number one, but the mobility of this game has made everything much easier."

[Click here](#) to continue reading this story.



### The Feds Visit Penn National

Probably the biggest story since our last issue came in late November when three trainers and a clocker were arrested by the FBI at Penn National. The charges against the clocker stunned the industry as it was alleged that he "would provide false workout times to racing officials and to Equibase. The times he turned in allegedly, at times, included completely fabricated time for horses that did not workout at all at the track. The indictment alleges he

profited personally from the scheme, the betting public was defrauded and his employer, Hollywood Casino and Racetrack, was denied of its right to his honest services." To read the full details of this scandal, [click here](#).

### More Bad News for Pennsylvania

While the Penn National saga was going on, we also found out that the Pennsylvania State Senate would like to create a "Bureau of Horse Racing" to run the industry in the Commonwealth. This is coming about because the Pennsylvania Racing Commission is "expected to run out of money before the fiscal year ends in June." That is despite the \$1.3 billion in slots revenue that the Commonwealth has taken in since slots were introduced. To read more, [click here](#).

### NYRA Seeks Rate Increases

The New York Racing Association wants to charge more to their simulcast partners and fans in their 2014 budget. The admission hike at the NYRA tracks was widely panned by many in the industry, including [Steve Crist](#) and [Ray Paulick](#), while [Pullthepocket's blog](#) took a look at what an increase to their signal fees would mean for the casual horseplayer.

### Ontario Wooing Horseplayers

A Horse Racing Innovation Summit was held on December 16 at Flamboro Downs as Ontario continues to transition from a slots jurisdiction to a non-slots jurisdiction. This could mean good things for horseplayers as wagering will be a key factor in purse size. "I'm very excited about an industry makeover," [said](#) horseplayer Eric Poteck. "If you cater to the horseplayer, horse racing will prosper."

### Illinois Debacle Continues

A race day cut in Illinois remains a possibility after the legislature did not take up a racetrack funding bill in their most recent session. Unfortunately for horseplayers in the Land of Lincoln, should that bill go through, it includes several surcharge increases on winning wagers, meaning you, the horseplayers, would be paying more. To read about this story, [click here](#).

### Symposium Notes

The 2013 edition of the University of Arizona Symposium on Racing and Gaming occurred in early December, and there were several stories to emerge out of that event. NYRA CEO Chris Kay [spoke](#) about the future of that entity; making advance statistics available for horse racing was [discussed](#); track superintendents are doing a better job of [sharing](#) tricks of the trade; tournaments are getting more people [involved](#) in horse racing, and social games [are good](#) for the on-track crowd.



## More Quick Hits

### Cast for "Horseplayers" Announced

Michael Beychok, who helped out with our "Breeders' Cup Dozen" segment in the Breeders' Cup edition of the Horseplayer Monthly and is a former National Handicapping Champion, leads the cast of "Horseplayers," the Esquire Network reality television show that will follow a group of handicappers as they seek spots in the National Handicapping Championship. The show debuts on Tuesday, January 21, 2014. To read more and to see the full list of people that will be appearing, [click here](#).

### Date for World Harness Handicapping Challenge Set

The 2014 World Harness Handicapping Challenge will take place on April 19 at Meadowlands Racetrack. The United States Trotting Association will be hosting a WHHC qualifier, and WHHC qualifiers will also take place at the Meadowlands, The Meadows, and Buffalo Raceway. For more details, [click here](#).

### Watchmaker: Stop Grabbing

Mike Watchmaker had a take on the recent phenomenon of jockeys deciding to take the speed out of their mounts by pulling back. His story highlighted the Remsen Stakes at Aqueduct, which featured pedestrian splits of :25.84, :52.74 and 1:17.56. To read his column, [click here](#).

### Breeders' Cup Keys November Handle Bump

Buoyed by a strongly-bet Breeders' Cup, handle from November 2012 to November 2013 was up 4.37%. Wagering year-to-date also remains slightly higher, meaning we could see a modest yearly handle increase for the second straight year, following five straight years of decline. To read more, [click here](#).

### "Players Pick 5" Boosts Belmont

Showing again what a low takeout 50-cent pick-5 wager can do, Belmont Park enjoyed their highest on-track and all-sources wagering in five years during their fall championship meet. To read all the details, [click here](#).

### Churchill Downs Takes It on the Chin

In contrast to Belmont Park, Churchill Downs saw double-digit decreases from the 2012 fall meet. The daily average was down 15.3% and on-track handle dropped by almost 28%. The track cited competition from nearby jurisdictions with slots, a decrease in field size, and poor weather conditions for the drop-off. To read the full details, [click here](#).

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Wager %	1.61%	11.75%	3.04%
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# The Back Page

## Gulfstream Championship Meet Stats

Gulfstream chose to race a longer schedule this season, but the meet does not – for many horseplayers and barns – start until January 1<sup>st</sup>. We've compiled some statistics from the 2013 meet from January 1 to April 10<sup>th</sup>.

### Dirt, By Trainer:

UDM	PLAYS	WINS	WIN PCT	WIN IMPACT	WIN ROI	PLACES	PLACE PCT	PLACE ROI
*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
PLETCHER TODD A	90	32	0.3556	2.9201	0.8644	50	0.5556	0.9083
WALDER PETER R	35	10	0.2857	2.3461	0.8657	14	0.4	0.7486
WOLFSON MARTIN D	35	10	0.2857	2.3461	1.1657	19	0.5429	1.3086
MAKER MICHAEL J	31	10	0.3226	2.6491	0.7129	15	0.4839	0.7016
VITALI MARCUS J	69	10	0.1449	1.1899	0.858	21	0.3043	0.7478
IADISERNIA GIUSEPPE	69	10	0.1449	1.1899	1.1797	22	0.3188	0.7225
MOTT WILLIAM I	36	10	0.2778	2.2812	0.7306	14	0.3889	0.6972
RAMIREZ LUIS M	26	9	0.3462	2.8429	1.45	11	0.4231	0.9423
ZIADIE KIRK	21	7	0.3333	2.737	1.3	15	0.7143	1.5
ROMANS DALE L	60	6	0.1	0.8212	0.6217	13	0.2167	0.5383
SANO ANTONIO	67	6	0.0896	0.7358	0.6567	16	0.2388	0.7776
PLESA JR EDWARD	35	6	0.1714	1.4075	0.74	9	0.2571	0.6971
KENNEALLY EDDIE	24	5	0.2083	1.7105	0.5125	11	0.4583	0.7917
DUCO LUIS	48	5	0.1042	0.8557	0.4187	8	0.1667	0.2875
NESS JAMIE	29	5	0.1724	1.4157	0.4724	11	0.3793	0.6759
QUIROZ ANGEL	30	5	0.1667	1.3689	0.7667	8	0.2667	0.7067
WILKES IAN R	23	5	0.2174	1.7853	0.7261	8	0.3478	0.8609
ESTEVEZ MANUEL A	21	5	0.2381	1.9552	3.7	7	0.3333	1.6762
GREEN DONNA	21	5	0.2381	1.9552	1.4524	6	0.2857	1.0048
CIBELLI JANE	21	5	0.2381	1.9552	1.4238	8	0.381	0.9095
FAWKES DAVID	42	5	0.119	0.9772	0.8857	14	0.3333	0.8929
MCLAUGHLIN KIARAN P	26	5	0.1923	1.5791	0.9423	10	0.3846	0.9654
ZITO NICHOLAS P	41	5	0.122	1.0018	0.4317	14	0.3415	1.022
FARRO PATRICIA	19	4	0.2105	1.7286	1.2421	7	0.3684	0.9842
ORSENO JOSEPH F	18	4	0.2222	1.8247	2.0833	8	0.4444	1.2944
GATIS CHRISTOS	27	4	0.1481	1.2162	1.2148	8	0.2963	0.7481
POMPAY TERESA M	29	4	0.1379	1.1324	0.3862	9	0.3103	0.8621



No sign up - Free race

## Turf, By Trainer:

UDM	PLAYS	WINS	WIN PCT	WIN IMPACT	WIN ROI	PLACES	PLACE PCT	PLACE ROI
*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
PLETCHER TODD A	58	12	0.2069	1.9911	0.6	28	0.4828	1.0147
CLEMENT CHRISTOPHE	42	11	0.2619	2.5204	0.8452	19	0.4524	0.9548
BROWN CHAD C	47	11	0.234	2.2519	0.8426	21	0.4468	1.0596
MOTT WILLIAM I	54	10	0.1852	1.7822	0.6889	16	0.2963	0.6176
MAKER MICHAEL J	36	9	0.25	2.4058	0.6694	12	0.3333	0.6083
WARD WESLEY A	44	9	0.2045	1.968	0.9682	13	0.2955	0.9
MCGAUGHEY III CLAUDE	24	8	0.3333	3.2075	1.1958	13	0.5417	1.15
MOTION H GRAHAM	45	8	0.1778	1.711	1.1556	17	0.3778	1.1122
ROMANS DALE L	69	8	0.1159	1.1153	0.5739	14	0.2029	0.6391
PLESA JR EDWARD	46	7	0.1522	1.4647	1.3739	9	0.1957	0.7239
FAWKES DAVID	52	7	0.1346	1.2953	1.0596	14	0.2692	0.8231
CASSE MARK E	44	6	0.1364	1.3126	0.7932	11	0.25	0.7341
MCLAUGHLIN KIARAN P	33	6	0.1818	1.7495	0.9152	8	0.2424	0.6212
MATZ MICHAEL R	32	6	0.1875	1.8044	1.0406	10	0.3125	0.9344
CIBELLI JANE	30	6	0.2	1.9247	0.9	10	0.3333	0.9033
IADISERNIA GIUSEPPE	42	5	0.119	1.1452	0.9119	11	0.2619	0.9238
HENNIG MARK A	24	5	0.2083	2.0045	1.1708	9	0.375	1.2417
CATALANO WAYNE M	30	5	0.1667	1.6042	0.7333	9	0.3	0.7933
LYNCH BRIAN A	31	4	0.129	1.2414	0.6935	12	0.3871	0.9806
SERVIS JASON	20	4	0.2	1.9247	1.21	7	0.35	1.07
WHITE WILLIAM P	10	4	0.4	3.8493	1.29	6	0.6	1.38
KENNEALLY EDDIE	22	4	0.1818	1.7495	0.7909	8	0.3636	1.2455
NIHEI MICHELLE	19	4	0.2105	2.0257	1.5526	6	0.3158	1
WOLFSON MARTIN D	16	4	0.25	2.4058	0.6937	8	0.5	1.275
CARAMORI EDUARDO	12	3	0.25	2.4058	1.9917	3	0.25	0.9417
DWOSKIN STEVEN	51	3	0.0588	0.5659	0.6529	7	0.1373	0.4314

## Dirt, By Rider

UDM	PLAYS	WINS	WIN PCT	WIN IMPACT	WIN ROI	PLACES	PLACE PCT	PLACE ROI
*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
ROSARIO JOEL	158	37	0.2342	1.9232	0.7468	68	0.4304	0.8142
SAEZ LUIS	170	37	0.2176	1.7869	0.8547	71	0.4176	0.9953
VELAZQUEZ JOHN R	108	36	0.3333	2.737	0.9676	53	0.4907	0.9546
CASTELLANO JAVIER	177	36	0.2034	1.6703	0.6418	75	0.4237	0.8449
LOPEZ PACO	151	26	0.1722	1.4141	1.1132	47	0.3113	0.8298
PRADO EDGAR S	87	19	0.2184	1.7935	1.5885	24	0.2759	0.9253
TRUJILLO ELVIS	124	17	0.1371	1.1258	0.8637	33	0.2661	0.8081
ROCCO JR JOSEPH	141	15	0.1064	0.8737	0.5858	27	0.1915	0.5496
LEZCANO JOSE	87	15	0.1724	1.4157	0.9575	29	0.3333	0.8322
ZAYAS EDGARD J	164	14	0.0854	0.7013	0.8457	25	0.1524	0.5101
LANERIE COREY J	106	11	0.1038	0.8524	0.4519	25	0.2358	0.534
SANCHEZ HUGO	61	10	0.1639	1.3459	1.0459	15	0.2459	0.9082
BOCACHICA ORLANDO	105	10	0.0952	0.7818	0.559	27	0.2571	0.7752
CRUZ MANOEL R	74	10	0.1351	1.1094	1.0568	18	0.2432	0.7351
CHAMAFI JILVER	72	9	0.125	1.0265	1.2125	17	0.2361	1.2653
GONZALES JONATHAN J	61	8	0.1311	1.0766	1.3393	12	0.1967	1.077
GARCIA ALAN	45	7	0.1556	1.2778	0.9067	12	0.2667	0.7356
NUNEZ EDUARDO O	47	5	0.1064	0.8737	1.6957	9	0.1915	1.2021
CONTRERAS LUIS	49	5	0.102	0.8376	0.5286	10	0.2041	0.549
LEYVA JUAN C	70	5	0.0714	0.5863	0.5514	13	0.1857	0.8
CASTANON JESUS LOPEZ	45	5	0.1111	0.9123	1.1756	14	0.3111	0.8711



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## Turf, By Rider

UDM	PLAYS	WINS	WIN PCT	WIN IMPACT	WIN ROI	PLACES	PLACE PCT	PLACE ROI
*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
CASTELLANO JAVIER	203	43	0.2118	2.0382	0.7468	75	0.3695	0.7995
ROSARIO JOEL	172	34	0.1977	1.9025	0.7337	61	0.3547	0.834
LEZCANO JOSE	134	31	0.2313	2.2259	0.9351	46	0.3433	0.8881
VELAZQUEZ JOHN R	162	23	0.142	1.3665	0.5241	60	0.3704	0.9284
ROCCO JR JOSEPH	177	22	0.1243	1.1962	0.6955	45	0.2542	0.872
PRADO EDGAR S	124	19	0.1532	1.4743	1.1726	32	0.2581	0.9815
BRAVO JOE	126	18	0.1429	1.3752	1.2	30	0.2381	0.8333
SAEZ LUIS	135	13	0.0963	0.9267	0.5437	27	0.2	0.6422
TRUJILLO ELVIS	139	11	0.0791	0.7612	0.6101	23	0.1655	0.6
LOPEZ PACO	137	11	0.0803	0.7728	0.7511	22	0.1606	0.6131
GARCIA ALAN	75	10	0.1333	1.2828	1.252	13	0.1733	0.8813
LANERIE COREY J	103	7	0.068	0.6544	0.7359	19	0.1845	0.7777
BOCACHICA ORLANDO	47	6	0.1277	1.2289	1.4638	9	0.1915	1.0404
SANCHEZ JEFFREY	48	3	0.0625	0.6015	0.35	6	0.125	0.5583
BRIDGMOHAN JERMAINE	28	3	0.1071	1.0307	1.075	6	0.2143	1.125
CONTRERAS LUIS	62	3	0.0484	0.4658	0.3661	11	0.1774	0.7032
CRUZ MANOEL R	63	3	0.0476	0.4581	0.6175	8	0.127	0.4841
TORRES FRANCISCO C	59	3	0.0508	0.4889	0.2915	3	0.0508	0.1712
LEYVA JUAN C	71	3	0.0423	0.4071	0.7761	7	0.0986	0.8775
CHAMAFI JILVER	32	2	0.0625	0.6015	0.45	4	0.125	0.8875
ALVAREZ JOSE L	19	2	0.1053	1.0133	1.9947	4	0.2105	1.2895
DEMURO CRISTIAN	8	2	0.25	2.4058	9.2625	2	0.25	3.4125
SAEZ GABRIEL	49	2	0.0408	0.3926	0.2347	9	0.1837	1.2245
HUSBANDS PATRICK	46	2	0.0435	0.4186	0.1283	8	0.1739	0.6391
ARGUETA MARIO	23	2	0.087	0.8372	1.0304	2	0.087	0.4261
MADRID SEBASTIAN O	18	2	0.1111	1.0692	1.1056	3	0.1667	0.6667
SOLIS ALEX O	8	2	0.25	2.4058	0.925	3	0.375	1.0125
CASTANON JESUS LOPEZ53	2	2	0.0377	0.3628	0.3245	4	0.0755	0.2585

## Turf, By Pace Figure Rank

By: Pace Rank

Rank	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact
1	-57.60	594.00	0.9030	51	297	.1717	1.6525
2	-58.00	594.00	0.9024	42	297	.1414	1.3609
3	-71.40	594.00	0.8798	40	297	.1347	1.2961
4	-375.80	594.00	0.3673	17	297	.0572	0.5508
5	-292.20	588.00	0.5031	30	294	.1020	0.9820

## Dirt, By Pace Figure Rank

By: Pace Rank

Rank	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact
1	17.00	802.00	1.0212	87	401	.2170	1.7816
2	2.20	802.00	1.0027	87	401	.2170	1.7816
3	-342.80	802.00	0.5726	48	401	.1197	0.9830
4	-184.60	806.00	0.7710	47	403	.1166	0.9577

