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**JULY 2015**

## **HOW TO *HIT* — THE — *DAILY* DOUBLE**



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## How to Crush the Daily Double



By [Lenny Moon](#)

The Daily Double was the first exotic bet in horse racing. It was offered on the first two races of the day and to win you had to pick the winner in each race.

Now the Daily Double is the least exotic bet on the wagering menu. The [Exacta](#), Trifecta, Superfecta, Pick 3, [Pick 4](#), Pick 5 and Pick 6 are just a few of the bets that have been added to the wagering menu over the last couple of decades.

The glamour of bigger payouts and potential life-changing scores have driven most of the wagering handle away from the Daily Double and that is great news. Smaller pools mean the biggest bettors will ignore the Daily Double, which means the horses involved will most likely not be bet in regards to their true chances of winning and the potential for an overlaid return is much higher.

With that being said let's take a look at the pros and cons of betting the Daily Double and the best way to bet the Daily Double in order to maximize your return.

**Why Bet the Daily Double?**

The number one reason to bet the Daily Double is the cost to risk ratio is the lowest of any multi-race exotic bet. The Daily Double involves far fewer possible combinations than the Pick 3, 4, 5 or 6, which means the chances of picking the winning combination is much higher.

The second biggest reason to bet the Daily Double is it is usually offered several times each day at most tracks. The term "Rolling Daily Double" means the bet is offered in every race (or nearly every race) on the wagering menu. The exceptions are the last race of the day because it cannot be offered in that race and at some tracks the bet may not be offered at the start of the Pick 4, 5 or 6. On a typical ten race card there will be nine Daily Doubles to choose from. This is a huge advantage over the Pick 4, 5 and 6, which may contain one or more races that you either have no opinion in or would otherwise pass. Having nine options instead of one gives you the ability to be very selective, which is the only way to stay ahead in this game.

The third reason to bet the Daily Double is the probable payoffs are available so you can determine if the probable return is fair before betting.

This is not the case with other exotic bets, with the exception of the Exacta, meaning you are betting blindly into the pools.

### **Why Pass on the Daily Double?**

The number one reason players avoid the Daily Double is the returns are normally much lower than other multi-race exotic bets. The [Pick 4 routinely pays over a thousand dollars](#) at bigger tracks. The Pick 5 usually pays in the thousands and many times pays in the tens of thousands. The Pick 6 generally pays in the tens of thousands and occasionally pays in the hundreds of thousands. The Daily Double usually pays less than a hundred dollars, sometimes pays a few hundred dollars and rarely pays more than a thousand dollars.

The second reason players avoid the Daily Double is the probable payoffs are available. Wait, what? That was a reason to bet the Daily Double was it not? Knowing the probable payoffs can be beneficial but it can also be detrimental because many players look for combinations that are being over bet and bet them themselves. They believe "smart money" is being bet on the combination because someone knows something or the barn is betting.

### **To Bet or Not to Bet, That is the Question**

Those are a few of the pros and cons of betting the Daily Double. If you can think of any others feel free to share them in the comments below.

At this point you might be for or against betting the Daily Double or you may be on the fence. Before making your final decision let's take a few minutes to look at the best and worst ways to bet the Daily Double. They might change your mind or reaffirm your position.

### **How Not to Bet the Daily Double**

The two most common, and in my opinion worst ways, to bet the Daily Double are to spread in each race or to wheel a horse. "Spreading" means using two or more horses in each race, usually on one ticket. This is a bad approach for two reasons. First you are admitting that you have no strong opinion in either race, which means you should not be betting. Second you are giving equal weight to every horse when there is no way that each horse has the same chance of winning.

"Wheeling a horse" in the Daily Double means using one horse in one race and all of the horses in the other race. This is a bad strategy for the same reasons listed above. By using every horse in a race you are [banking on luck](#) and hoping for the longest shot in the race to win. You are also diluting your return by spreading

*(continued on next page)*



your bet across so many horses. A better strategy in this case would be to simply bet the horse you liked to win and pass on the Daily Double since you have no opinion in the other race. Both “spreading” and “wheeling” in the Daily Double are lazy approaches and there are almost no situations that justify either approach.

### How to Bet the Daily Double

There are two approaches to betting multi-race exotic bets, the first is to simply “have it” and the second is to “crush it.”

“Spreading” and “wheeling” fall under the “have it” approach because you are trying to have the winning combination once. “Crushing it” is the opposite approach and the goal is to have the winning combination many times. The Daily Double is perfect for this approach. Crushing the Daily Double can be done in two ways.

The first way is to use one horse in each race but instead of betting only a \$1 unit you bet \$5 or \$10 or whatever amount you feel comfortable with.

The second way is to use one horse in one race and two or three horses in the other race and betting each combination several times while giving different weights to each combination.



For example let’s say you like the 1 in the first race and the 3, 5 and 6 in the second race. You think the 3 has the best chance to win the second race and the 5 and 6 are half as likely to win.

The bet might look like this:

\$10 Daily Double 1 – 3

\$5 Daily Double 1 – 5

\$5 Daily Double 1 – 6

The total investment would be \$20.

Let’s assume the 1 wins the first race and the 3 wins the second race and the \$1 Daily Double pays \$25.

Using the “crush it” approach your \$20 investment would return \$250.

Had you instead spread or wheeled your horse you

would have only had the Daily Double once for \$25 and your opinion on the 3 in the second race would have been nullified. By weighting your bet based on your opinion you get the greatest reward when you are right.

### When to Bet the Daily Double

The best part about the Daily Double is the probable payoffs are available before the first race of the bet. This is very beneficial because it will allow you to determine if it is better to bet the Daily Double or to pass.

### Example #1

Let’s say you really like the 2 in the first race and the 4, 7 and 8 equally in the second race. The 2 in the first race is 10/1 and the probable \$1 Daily Double payoff to the 4 is \$25, to the 7 is \$30 and to the 8 is \$40.

Now let’s say you have \$30 to bet. You have three options.

**Option 1:** Bet the 2 to Win.

**Option 2:** Bet the 2 with the 4, 7 and 8 in the Daily Double.

**Option 3:** Bet the 2 to Win and the 2 with the 4, 7 and 8 in the Daily Double.

Let’s look at each option and how you might bet them.

### Option 1

Bet \$30 to Win on the 2

Using Option 1 you bet the full \$30 to Win on the 2 and if the horse wins your return would be \$330 (\$30 x 10/1 odds + \$30 bet).

### Option 2

Bet \$10 Daily Double 2 – 4, 2 – 7 and 2 – 8

Using Option 2 you bet the 2 with the 4, 7 and 8 in the Daily Double. If the 2 wins the first race and the:

4 wins the second race your return would be \$250 (\$10 x \$25).

7 wins the second race your return would be \$300 (\$10 x \$30).

8 wins the second race your return would be \$400 (\$10 x \$40).

### Option 3

Bet \$15 to Win on the 2 and \$5 Daily Double 2 – 4, 2 – 7 and 2 – 8.

Using Option 3 you bet half your money on the 2 to Win and the other half in the Daily Double using the 2 with the 4, 7 and 8.

If the 2 wins the first race you would get \$165 (\$15 x 10/1 odds + \$15 bet) and if the:

4 wins the second race your return would be \$125 (\$5 x \$25) plus the \$165 for a total return of \$290.

7 wins the second race your return would be \$150 (\$5 x \$30) plus the \$165 for a total return of \$315.

8 wins the second race your return would be \$200 (\$5 x \$40) plus the \$165 for a total return of \$365.

*(continued on next page)*

### **The Decision**

So which option is the best?

Option 1 is the best option because the probable return is higher than two of the three possibilities for Option 2 and Option 3.

The only way that Option 2 or Option 3 would pay more than Option 1 would be if the 8 wins the second race. Since you believe the 4 or 7 are equally likely to win the second race there is no benefit to betting the Daily Double. The choice is also made easy because the chance of winning Option 1 is higher than Option 2 or Option 3. To win with Option 1 you only need your horse (the 2) to win the first race. To win with Option 2 or Option 3 you would need the 2 to win and either the 4, 7 or 8 to win the second race.

In this case it is best to pass on the Daily Double.

### **Example #2**

Now let's assume the probable \$1 Daily Double payoff to the 4 are \$25, to the 7 is \$40 and to the 8 is \$45.

#### **Option 1**

No change from example #1 so the return of \$330 will be the same.

#### **Option 2**

For the Daily Double if the:

4 wins the second race your return would be \$250 (\$10 x \$25).

7 wins the second race your return would be \$400 (\$10 x \$40).

8 wins the second race your return would be \$450 (\$10 x \$45).

#### **Option 3**

For the Win bet and Daily Double if the:

4 wins the second race your return would be \$125 (\$5 x \$25) plus the \$165 from the Win bet on the 2 for a total return of \$290.

7 wins the second race your return would be \$200 (\$5 x \$40) plus the \$165 from the Win bet on the 2 for a total return of \$365.

8 wins the second race your return would be \$225 (\$5 x \$45) plus the \$165 from the Win bet on the 2 for a total return of \$390.

### **The Decision**

So which option is best now?

Option 2 is the best now because two of the three Daily Double returns are higher than the Win bet on the 2 and two out of the three Daily Double returns are higher than the Option 3 Daily Double returns.

As these examples point out there is not one right way to bet the Daily Double. Each situation needs to be looked at individually.

The best way to do that is to lay out your options and determine which will provide the best return versus the risk involved.

### **Crushing the Daily Double at Saratoga**

August 29, 2012 was a typical weekday card at Saratoga full of deep, competitive fields. Race seven was a Maiden Special Weight for 2-year-old fillies going 1 1/16 miles on the turf. There were ten horses in the race and none of the horses that had run were standouts. Of the first time starters one stood out to me because she was trained by Jonathan Sheppard, who was the only trainer that seemed capable of getting a first time starter to win in a route race.

Hedonemewrongsong was being ignored in the betting and was 21/1 at post time. I had \$40 to bet with and at first I considered betting \$20 to Win and Place on Hedonemewrongsong. Before I did so I looked at the next race, which was the P.G. Johnson Stakes for 2-year-old fillies going 1 1/16 miles on the turf. I did not like the morning line favorite and I thought one of two other horses were most likely to win. The \$1 Daily Double to Watsdachances was paying \$75 and the \$1 Daily Double to Da Mi Basia Mille was paying \$150.

I decided to bet \$10 to Win and Place on Hedonemewrongsong and \$10 Daily Doubles with her to the two horses I liked in the P.G. Johnson. The reason I bet to Win and Place was because I did not want a 21/1 horse to win or run second and not get anything back if one of my two horses failed to win the following race. Hedonemewrongsong got a dream trip under Rosie Napravnik and powered home to win by half a length. She returned \$44.40 to Win and \$15.20 to Place.

The P.G. Johnson proved to be a thriller as Watsdachances came from off the pace to get up and win by a neck. The \$1 Daily Double returned \$74.75. My \$40 investment returned \$1,045.50.

### **Final Thoughts**

The Daily Double is often overlooked by many but when bet right the returns can be fantastic.

With less risk involved and a much smaller investment required than other multi-race exotic bets the Daily Double should be on the radar of all horseplayers. The next time you are deciding how to bet your horses give the Daily Double a look, the potential returns might just surprise you.

*About the author - Lenny Moon is the founder of [Equinometry.com](http://Equinometry.com), a site dedicated to educating horseplayers of all levels about handicapping, betting and handicapping contest strategy and about issues within the horse racing industry that directly affect horseplayers such as takeout rates and lack of transparency by industry organizations. Lenny has been a serious horseplayer for the past 15 years and a serious handicapping contest player for the past five years.*

### **A Major Thank You**

All of us at HANA would like to thank our friends at [DerbyWars](http://DerbyWars) for their continued support and their help with the production of the front cover for Horseplayer Monthly.





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## Saratoga's First Week, Good & Bad

By [Jessica Chapel](#)

*This piece was originally published on Jessica's [blog](#) and is reprinted with her permission.*

Four days down, 36 to go, and Bill Mott has emerged as the early leader in the race for this year's trainer title. Hott Mott's won six races from 13 starts so far and only one of his winners — My Friend Keith in Monday's finale — was a favorite. His horses have finished second or third in four other races. [DRF Formulator calculates his ROI at \\$7.79](#). That can't last! Including the first days of Saratoga '15, Mott's win rate is 16% and his ROI \$1.44 for all starters over the past five years. His elevated numbers opening weekend partially come from an unexpected source — Mott won with two juvenile first-time starters, both in 1 1/16 mile Maiden Special Weights on the turf. Saturday's winner, Site Read, was 21-1. Sunday's winner, Sage Hall, 12-1. Mott's third debuting 2-year-old starter, Rebelle, finished second to Sage Hall, a \$258 exacta.

Who else is winning, at least in the meet's first few juvenile races? Trainer Todd Pletcher's tied with Mott for two wins, thanks to the disqualification of Magna Light from first in the Sanford Stakes after he veered out in deep stretch when rider Jose Ortiz struck him on the left and then veered back in when struck on the right. Magna Light was bumped to third, runner-up Uncle Vinny to first, and Percolator moved to second. I'm a little sore about the DQ, so instead of ranting, [I'll point to David Grening's quick \(and paywalled\) take](#):



Uncle Vinny was placed the winner of the Sanford Stakes - photo by [Penelope P. Miller, America's Best Racing](#)

In my opinion, this is a terrible call. Magna Light was well clear of the rest of the field and while he acted dramatically from the whip of Ortiz he did not bother anybody or cost them the race. He did come back over and got next to Percolator but I don't think he bothered him. Carmouche never stopped riding.

Carmouche didn't stop riding, Percolator didn't break stride ([the action begins in the replay at 1:03](#)). [The](#)

[stewards saw it differently](#):

Kendrick Carmouche, the rider of #10 Percolator, lodged an objection against the winner, #4 Magna Light, for alleged interference in stretch. #4 Magna Light racing on the lead shifts out several paths after passing the eighth pole. #10 steadies briefly though #4 is clear when crossing. #4 then drifts back down toward the #10 in the final strides causing #4 to steady. #4 finishes third, beaten a half-length for second.

[SIC] on the final two instances in the above paragraph where the stewards mistype #4 for #10. "More significantly," [writes Tom Noonan](#):

... is that there is no explanation for their decision. Was it the first move by Magna Light that was the problem, or was it the second? Did it affect the outcome of the race, or was he being penalized for interference even though it did not affect the final result?

Magna Light's owner, NYRA board member Michael Dubb, has filed an appeal of the disqualification, [which he suggested was due to prejudice](#):

"There is a different set of standards in racing for Rudy Rodriguez," Dubb ... said standing next to his trainer outside the winner's circle. "Maybe because he is Mexican. He is picked on. He is being held to a different set of standards in racing all together and is being treated unfairly. It's not good, but it's the world we live in."

[The New State Gaming Commission made Magna Light and Uncle Vinny co-winners of the Sanford on Monday while they consider Dubb's appeal](#). "I don't think he should be doing it — for the sport," said Don Lucarelli, co-managing partner of Uncle Vinny owner Starlight Racing. The two could meet again in the Hopeful Stakes, closing weekend at Saratoga.

Steve Asmussen, Roderick Rodriguez, Barclay Tagg, and Rick Violette were the other trainers to win juvenile races during the first four days. Chad Brown finished second with both of his 2-year-old starters. If you'd like to dig more into the first eight juveniles races this meet, [here's a spreadsheet](#) (XLS), which includes each starter and their trainer, jockey, sire, last race, etc.



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Watch: [Greenpointcrusader](#), second to Pletcher's Saratoga Mischief in the fifth race on Saturday. It was the first start for this Dominick Schettino-trained Bernardini colt who's a 1/2 to graded stakes winners Keyed Entry and Justin Phillip and a full brother to 2012 Holy Bull winner Algorithms. He seemed to figure out what he was being asked to do in the final sixteenth.

# Caught in the Switches

By Barry Meadow

One of the most difficult things to do in gambling is to stay consistent. All of us, big player and small, have had trouble with this from time to time.

We bet \$50 on one race. Then in the next race with a horse at the same odds and with the same perceived advantage, we bet \$200.

Or we play an exacta one way and it comes in reversed, so next time we box the exacta and we wind up halving our profit.

Or we bet to win and place, and the horse runs third. So next time we decide to bet win-place-show and the horse wins.

There are many reasons for getting caught in the switches, but usually it's about emotions. We're behind, so we start playing Longball or Bigbet to try to catch up. Or we've made a score, and now we try to take home the track (something no one as yet has done). Or we've had six losing days in a row so now we're afraid to bet our regular amounts. Or we've lost on three straight favorites and we're getting sick of them, so now we stab.

The likeliest switch time is when something bad has just happened, such as we narrowed a race to two horses, thought long about which one to play, then picked the wrong one. Or we were thinking about the 5-8 exacta but decided to pass, and it comes in for \$64. And sometimes the switch bug hits after we do cash but we didn't bet more or play in more pools to make a real score.

Hating ourselves is the natural outgrowth of switches. Compare the number of times you've heard a player say, "I won every dollar possible on that race," with the far more common "I would have won three times that amount if..."

All of this eventually comes down to asking why we're at the track in the first place. Wanting to win money was always my reason, though it's far from the only valid reason to attend (hang out with your friends, get out in the sunshine, have some excitement, enjoy a good restaurant, test your handicapping skills, love watching horses compete, etc.).

If you want to win long term, you need a plan which will carry you through bad times as well as good. Nobody wins every bet, or even most bets. Sometimes you'll lose for weeks or months. And usually, one bet has little to do with another.

The way to avoid getting caught in the switches is to have a specific plan for the card. And every race is a bit different. A few scenarios:

**\* You like one horse but have no clear idea about who might run second.** Best to concentrate on getting your win price but also check the place and show pools to see if

he's underbet there. Check the daily double prices as well.

**\* You like two horses only** but neither appears likely to go off at an overlaid price. Determine the exacta prices you need for each combination, and check your guys' daily double probables as well.

**\* You hate the favorite but have trouble separating your next four contenders.** You'll probably wind up in the exacta pool, so keep an eye on the possible payoffs. From time to time I've keyed the longest price of the four contenders with the other three up and back, playing various amounts.

**\* The race looks obvious with one strong favorite who's 4-5** and two logical contenders who are 7-2 and 4-1. This is probably *not* going to be a bettable race since the exactas figure to be short and there probably won't be any edge in the other pools.

**\* You've narrowed the race to the three favorites and a 20-1 shot.** You might look at the prices of the longshot to win, in both slots in the exacta with these three, and in the third spot in the trifecta with these three. You *don't* want to play place or show on your price horse because with the obvious horses coming in because your payoff will be nothing.

**\* You see a big pace battle with big pace casualties, and a good chance to find some plodder at the back doing damage late.** This might be a good time to box several closers in various pools, figuring that none of the front-runners will be around at the finish. I made decent money by betting proportionally in exactas (to smooth the results) in these types of races.

Before I would begin my racing day, I'd list my *possible* plays such as:

3:00 p.m. SA Race 5

#4 to win at 3-1 and 4-6 exacta if it's paying \$34 or more and 4-7 exacta if it's paying \$51 or more

By having a specific plan for each race, I avoided being tempted by desires to switch my plays or settle for bad prices.

The numbers were not set in concrete. Occasionally I'd change them due to late scratches, a perceived early-in-the-day bias, or a sudden downpour. But most of the time, if I needed 4-1 to play a particular horse in the morning, I still needed 4-1 to play him in the afternoon.

Many other players do not have specific numbers in mind when they go to the track. They handicap the card, know they've narrowed some race to four contenders, and then

*(continued on next page)*

decide what to do by checking the board. However, by having such numbers it's a lot easier to avoid the temptation of slight underlays (as in, "I need 4-1, he's 7-2, why not?"). Every underlay you bet is one more bad bet which, long-term, hurts you.

Occasionally you'll have a day where you have three possible plays but all of them are bet below the numbers you want. Here's where you're tested. Do you settle for bad numbers because hey, maybe they'll win? Or do are you able to pass races when you don't get the price you wanted? And what may happen to your outlook when you skip all three and they all win?

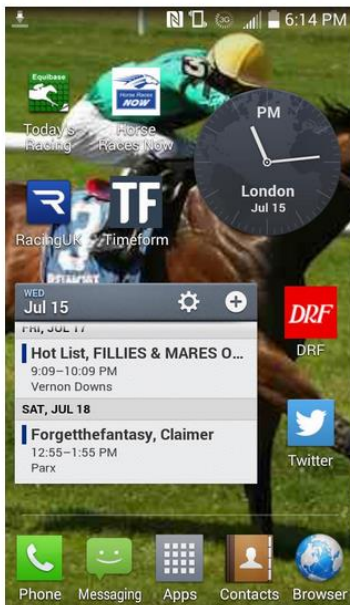
It's easy to pass races when you've got eight first-time starters, or five horses are dropping four levels and you can't tell who's still able to run and who does not have the requisite number of legs. Being able to pass races when you *do* have an opinion is much tougher.

But until you can master this skill, you always risk getting caught in the switches. By waiting for your spots and for the prices you demand, you won't suffer the psychological (and financial) problems that befall so many players. You might lose, but at least you're going down with the horses you liked at the prices you wanted—which makes it much easier to regroup for tomorrow's action.

*About the author—Barry Meadow is the author of Money Secrets at the Racetrack. For seven years, he published the newsletter Meadow's Racing Monthly. In 2014, he won the first-ever Ron Rippey Award for handicapping media. His newly revised website, [trpublishing.com](http://trpublishing.com), features a number of free handicapping articles.*



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## TimeformUS Looks at Del Mar's New Surfaces



By [Craig Milkowski](#), Chief Figure Maker, [TimeformUS](#)

Del Mar will host the Breeders' Cup on November 3-4, 2017. As part of the process, Del Mar has done work to both the main track and the turf course. The main course has returned to a dirt surface after racing on a synthetic surface for the previous eight years. The turf course was renovated prior to the 2014 race meet. The renovations included replacing the sod as well as widening the course. The turf course opening didn't go well. There were several breakdowns the first few weeks on the new course and turf racing was halted while more work was done. The course has been fine ever since. The dirt course opened this year and has been very safe. It uses material similar to that of sister track Santa Anita.

Horseplayers should be aware of how the tracks play compared to other tracks. Using a fairly simple method, each track and surface combination receives a rating on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the rating, the more friendly a track is considered to be towards early speed. Below are the ratings for all tracks and those of Del Mar's new tracks. All distances are combined since there isn't much data to use from Del Mar yet.

All Dirt	Dmr Dirt	All Turf	Dmr Turf
49	36	38	31

Perhaps an even more enlightening comparison is to the other major track on the Southern California circuit, Santa Anita. A majority of the horses running at Del Mar will have last raced there.

SA Dirt	Dmr Dirt	SA Turf	Dmr Turf
48	36	37	31

It is clear that on either surface, speed is not the asset at Del Mar at this point in time that is on other tracks in North America. How drastic? Of 78 dirt tracks, Del Mar's 36 places it 78th on the list when sorted from highest to lowest rating. There are 43 turf tracks in this study. Del Mar checks in 43<sup>rd</sup>, once again dead last.

Tracks can and do change. Handicapper's should pay close attention to the style used by winners in conjunction with the pace of the race. Shifting trends should be noted. But as of this writing, speed is not the way to bet at Del Mar on either of the new surfaces.



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### Strong Saratoga Numbers So Far



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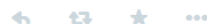


Total handle through the first 5 days at Saratoga is \$79,072,258, up 10.9% from the 2014 total same stretch of \$71,277,693. Good start.

RETWEETS 3 FAVORITES 2



7:33 PM - 29 Jul 2015



### Things Going Well at Canterbury Park

Canterbury Park has been a notable success story so far in 2015. Not only are they getting a younger crowd in by having off-track activities, but they've also been able to attract horseplayers as well, leading to record handles and a crowd of 40,000-plus over the July 4 weekend. Horsemen have taken notice as well.

"It's not a racetrack that has things going on. It's an activities center that also has racing," said trainer Eric Heitzmann. "They come for the activities, which is fine. And while they're here, they bet a few dollars on horses. They do a great job. You go to the grandstand, there's always a lot of young people who enjoy the racing and enjoy whatever else is going on. You're constantly keeping a fan base growing, which is great."

For more on this story, please click [here](#).

### Free NHC Qualifiers Coming Up in August

If you have yet to qualify for the 2017 National Handicapping Championship, you'll have opportunities in August. There is a free qualifier on August 2 and there is also a rookie contest on August 16, which will give out two spots. There is also a free contest on August 8 on DerbyWars.com open exclusively to new Racetrack

Television Network (RTN) online subscribers. The 2017 NHC is slated for late January and will carry a record purse of over \$2.5 million.

For more details, please click [here](#).

### Turning \$675 into \$471,000

There was one winner in the Pick 5 on Saturday, July 25 at Saratoga, and that bettor turned a \$675 investment in various pick 5 plays into a hit for over \$471,000. The bettor was based in New Jersey.

For more information on this story, please click [here](#).



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### Hong Kong Continues to Show Amazing Numbers

The 2014-15 racing season at the Hong Kong Jockey Club came to an end on July 12, and the numbers were very strong. For the third straight year the HKJC posted a record wagering number, surging 5.8% to HK\$107.9 billion, which is about \$13.8 billion in US dollars.

Attendance was also up 2.6% with over 2 million people visiting Sha Tin and Happy Valley.

For more information, please click [here](#).

### NY Gaming Commission Changes Entry Rules for Bettors

The New York State Gaming Commission made a pair of bettor-friendly changes in early July, decoupling entries in stakes races with a purse of over \$50,000 and allowing superfecta wagering in races with coupled entries. Before the change, entries were only uncoupled in stakes events worth \$1 million or more.

"The New York Racing Association is very pleased with the Gaming Commission's decision to decouple entries in stakes races as it could increase field size, wagering opportunities and wagering revenue," said Christopher Kay, Chief Executive Officer and President. "

For more details, please click [here](#).

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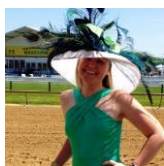
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## Handicapping Help in 2-year-old Races

### Freshman Crop Sires of 2-year-olds in 2015



By [Melissa Nolan](#)

One of the best parts of summer racing at Saratoga and Del Mar is stables unveiling their fanciest 2-year-olds. Handicapping maidens and first-time starters is difficult enough as it is but another layer of obfuscation is added when dealing with horses who hail from pedigrees where there is little information to go on in terms of siblings or first runners by a new sire.

While I can't help you with additional handicapping information on, for example, the first foal out of an unraced Florida-bred mare, I can share some of the nuggets I'll be utilizing to handicap 2-year-olds from the first crop of the some of the more notable sires who stood their first season in 2012.

We did well in our 2014 Freshman Sire Focus, giving readers insight into a few first year stallions we were bullish on last Spring, most notably the sires of your first through third finishers in the 2015 Kentucky Oaks, Majesticperfection and Munnings, respectively.

As such, for your consideration we'll discuss four stallions with first runners in 2015 who I think have fun angles to watch for going forward:

#### **GIO PONTI** (*Tale of the Cat – Chipeta Springs by Alydar*):

One of the real mysteries of this Freshman Sire Crop as he's proven to be an outlier his entire career based solely on pedigree. A top-class runner every year he raced from 2007-2011, Gio Ponti was as well-managed a racehorse as you'll see these days. Gio Ponti raced for and now stands at Castleton Lyons so he's a true "home team" horse for the farm and it's easy to root for his sporting owners.

Trained to perfection by Christophe Clement and ridden most often by Ramon Dominguez, Gio Ponti won seven Grade 1s in 29 lifetime starts as part of his overall resume boasting 12 wins, 10 seconds and was only off the board six times his whole career (two of those were by less than two lengths in the Dubai World Cup in 2010 and 2011). He is also one of the very few horses to have the talent to be competitive in more than one division in the Breeders' Cup, running second twice (Zenyatta, 2009 Classic and Goldikova, 2010 Mile) and fourth by 2 ½ lengths in the 2011 Mile behind Court Vision.

Gio Ponti is also a thrice Eclipse Award winner, garnering 2009 Champion Older Male and Champion Turf Male in

both 2009 and 2010. Retired at the end of 2011 with \$6,169,800 in earnings Gio Ponti returned home to Castleton Lyons where he stood his first season that following spring for \$20,000LF.

The competitively-priced fee is probably reflective of the American commercial market's apprehension to breed to turf horses. The sneaky part of Gio Ponti that has yet to reveal itself is how dominant the "dirt" influences up close in his pedigree will(not?) manifest themselves in his progeny. His sire Tale of the Cat is most known for dirt horses and precocious sprinter-type ones at that, though he has sired horses who can get a route of ground in addition to Gio Ponti such as Lion Heart, Tale of Ekati, and Stopcharginmaria. Furthermore, Gio Ponti's broodmare sire Alydar is about as dirt-inclined an influence as there is in the studbook. More ambiguity arises if you consider that Gio Ponti's two half-sisters each found their homes on different surfaces with Antonia Autumn preferring turf while Bon Jovi Girl found stakes success on dirt.



*Gio Point filly out of Best Lass – Melissa Nolan photo*

Truthfully, it is hard to have real conviction as to what surface/distance will best suit his progeny but *given the versatility of his pedigree I would not shy away from betting his 2yos on dirt, even if sprinting*. Pay particular attention to any of his get trained by Clement and/or owned by Castleton Lyons as surely they want to show off some of their sire's better foals. As of this writing, only one Gio Ponti 2yo has run and it was abroad. With 78 named 2yos though, including siblings to I'll Have Another and Smiling Tiger/She's a Tiger, it's only a matter of time before more are seen at a track near you.

#### **HAYNESFIELD** (*Speightstown – Nothing Special by Tejabo*):

This guy is one I'm *really* keeping an eye on as a "sleeper" stallion for similar reasons to why we fancied Majesticperfection and Munnings last year. In fact, Haynesfield is almost an amalgam of those two but save for he could route.

*(continued on next page)*



Best known for beating Blame in the Jockey Club Gold Cup before that one went on to defeat Zenyatta in the 2010 Classic, Haynesfield is one of four domestic ten furlong winners (Seek Again and Force the Pass on turf; Haynesfield and Golden Ticket on dirt) for his sire Speightstown.

Haynesfield possessed good speed and eight of his ten wins came on the lead and he only lost one time when he had the lead at the top of the stretch. A terrific product of the AQU inner dirt 3-year-old series, Haynesfield lost his first start (didn't get the lead!) at SAR then won his next four straight by no fewer than 3 ½ lengths. Beginning with a win in a NY-bred MSW he jumped right up to annex the Damon Runyon, Count Fleet, and Whirlaway Stakes. He then ran his worst career race when finishing eighth (didn't get the lead!) to I Want Revenge in the 2009 Gotham Stakes.

Given the summer off, he returned with a second place in a New York-bred sprint stakes in October before going on another four-race win streak that included the 2009 G3 Discovery and 2010 G2 Suburban. After a fourth in the Whitney, Haynesfield reappeared in the JCGC which would become his signature win. He led the entire ten lengths under 126lb in a dominant four length winning performance. After a considerable bounce in the BC Classic, he returned to New York in the G1 Cigar Mile where he was defeated a zop to Jersey Town. He tailed off a bit as a 5-year-old, winning once in four starts and was retired to Airdrie Stud in Kentucky for a \$10,000LF fee.

Although boasting a 10-for-19 record and \$1,319,481 in earnings, demand for Haynesfield was a little light, most likely due to his being a New York-bred with an unfamiliar female family. From a crop of 68 named 2-year-olds, 3 have started with no winners yet although they each showed a bit of run (note that after Melissa wrote this that Haynesfield did have a winner at Saratoga – Realm on 7/25).

I'm much more bullish on Haynesfield than I was a few seasons ago mostly due to the success of Speightstown as an emerging sire-of-sires and the alacrity with which Airdrie can "start" a stallion. Haynesfield is one of the rare horses who could carry their speed at the highest levels while running a classic distance and is an example of a clever breeding where brilliance (Speightstown) was introduced into a stoutly-bred mare's pedigree in the hopes the foal possesses stamina and speed, which is exactly what happened.

There are already a few successful stallions on both dirt and turf in the family with Touch Gold and With Approval appearing under Haynesfield's third dam. His sire Speightstown is equally adept at getting runners on any surface/distance though he himself was a Champion Sprinter. This versatility combined with astute management from Airdrie lead me to believe Haynesfield will have success with his 2-year-olds even from a smaller

crop and they should be at home going turf or dirt depending on the proclivities of their dams.

Pay particular attention to any runners that brought hefty money at the sales given his \$10,000 stud fee and/or are raced by Gov. Jones as he's known for successes with runners by his stallions such as Proud Spell and Lovely Maria. Haynesfield is my favorite prospect from this First Crop Sire class.



**PADDY O'PRADO** (*El Prado – Fun House by Prized*): This guy is my second favorite sire of the class based on the strength of his pedigree alone but I also believe he's going to be value in terms of being a "hidden dirt" influence. And that angle, my friends, is where we'll make some money on his babies.

Always a bit of a "snakebit" horse who was interestingly campaigned, Paddy O'Prado didn't break his maiden until his fifth start in March of his 3-year-old year, and that was in a G3 on turf at Gulfstream. Prior to that win in the Palm Beach S., Paddy had run off the board on dirt but showed his real ability when given the chance to route on turf, as evidenced by a third in the G3 With Anticipation at Saratoga in his third start as a maiden. He was then given the winter off and returned with a third at Gulfstream in a MSW before capturing that first win second off the layoff. Paddy was then entered in the G1 Blue Grass on polytrack where he ran second to Stately Victor, although earning enough in Graded Stakes money to make the Kentucky Derby field.

Paddy O'Prado went off at 12-1 in the Derby and ran on well over a drenched track to finish third behind Super Saver. Entered back in the Preakness on a fast track, Paddy was left wanting and ran sixth to Lookin at Lucky. Following that effort, the connections put him back on turf in the G2 Colonial Turf Cup a month later which he won by three lengths as the favorite. He followed that win with two more scores on turf, first in the G2 Virginia Derby and then the G1 Secretariat.

Given some time off, Paddy O'Prado returned in October  
(continued on next page)

against older horses for the first time in the G1 Hirsch Turf Classic where he was once again the favorite. He was a little rusty off the bench and finished second to Winchester. The decision was made to run him in the Breeders' Cup Classic rather than Turf based on his effort in the Derby earlier that year. He proved no match for Blame but managed to split the field at 33-1.

He reappeared in the G2 Dixie on the Preakness undercard the following May and dominated a small field at 6/5 but an injury followed that effort and he never raced again. Paddy O'Prado was retired to Spendthrift for 2012 and stood his first season for \$15,000LF.

He proved popular for a distance turf horse with little speed though his #s are no doubt bolstered by the Breeders' Incentives programs at Spendthrift. Regardless he has 82 named 2-year-olds in 2015 with already two winners (both first time out) from nine runners and two stakes horses to put him near the top of the Leading Freshman Sire list. Paddy's fast start should not be much of a surprise once we dive into his pedigree a bit.

First off, he's a son of proven legitimate sire-of-sires El Prado (Kitten's Joy, Medaglia D'Oro) and that line has been adept at producing plenty of winners on both dirt and turf, though they do tend to be more distance-inclined runners. Second, he's out of a prolific dam Fun House, though that wasn't apparent until two years after Paddy retired. Fun House was bred to Tapit in 2010 and the resulting foal was none other than Champion 3-Year-Old Filly Untapable! Fun House was named 2014 Broodmare of the Year due to the success of Paddy and his younger sister Untapable and is clearly one of the more active, classy families in the US at the moment.

Given that Paddy O'Prado was most at home on turf while Untapable excelled on fast dirt, it is reasonable to assume Paddy's foals will be very useful on all surfaces and given the prepotency of his family on both the sire and dam sides I expect them to hit at a high rate. I would though expect him to have the most success when his runners can go two-turns as he never won at less than nine furlongs and Untapable only sprinted once when winning first out at 5 ½ furlongs.

There is potential written all over this sire if you take a second look and I would be very interested in anything he sired that makes the gate going forward.

**UNCLE MO** (*Indian Charlie - Playa Maya by Arch*): The early leader atop the First Crop Sire list with much in his favor although he does have a few strikes to consider as well. A top class beast from the moment he popped the gate on Travers Day in 2010 in a six furlong MSW at Saratoga for Pletcher and Repole. Recognized as a good thing the colt went off at less than even-money that day and led "flag fall to that's all" winning by an astounding 14 ¾ lengths. Bolstered by that performance, Mo reappeared next in the G1 Champagne at 1/5 and once again never gave bettors

an anxious moment as he never trailed en route to dominating by 4 ¾ lengths in a smashing 1:34.51 for a mile.

Mo went into the Breeders' Cup Juvenile at Churchill Downs in start three as the overwhelming favorite and sealed his fate as the Champion 2-Year-Old Colt when he "bounded" (in the words of Tom Durkin) away from the field in his first two-turn race with ease. He was given the winter off following the Juvenile but the hype never dissipated as Uncle Mo was one of the more exciting 3-year-old prospects following a few lean years and many people hoped he could follow Street Sense and capture the Breeders' Cup Juvenile-Derby double.



*Uncle Mo before his pre-Breeders' Cup Juvenile breeze –  
Melissa Nolan photo*

Alas, it never works out so easy and clearly there was something amiss when he was scratched out of the G3 Tampa Bay Derby which was to be his first 3-year-old start in favor of the Timely Writer Stakes at Gulfstream, which was ostensibly written for Uncle Mo. Not surprisingly he was sent off at 1/9 and won easily by over three lengths. Shipped to New York following the race, Mo made his second 3-year-old start in the G1 Wood Memorial as heavy chalk, but it was there when he suffered his first defeat, running third to 7-1 Toby's Corner.

Sent on to Kentucky to prepare for the 2011 Derby following the Wood, Uncle Mo's issues could no longer be managed and the colt was scratched as the morning line favorite due to abnormal liver enzymes. Sent to the farm to convalesce, Mo reappeared in time to contest the G1 King's Bishop at SAR on the one-year anniversary of his maiden win. Once again sent off as the favorite, Uncle Mo ran a valiant race and actually made the lead only to get nailed on the line by a dirty nose to another terrific one-turn horse and future Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile winner Caleb's Posse.

Uncle Mo was shipped back to Belmont afterward and a month later faced older horses for the first time in the one mile G2 Kelso over a sloppy track. Once again he

*(continued on next page)*



absolutely dominated and led all the way to a final time of 1:33.82 over Jackson Bend and Jersey Town. In what was ultimately his final start, Mo shipped back to Churchill Downs to again contest the Breeders' Cup but the connections opted for the ten furlong Classic rather than Dirt Mile and the distance proved too much for the champ as he faded to 10<sup>th</sup> after setting the early pace.

Retired to Ashford Stud following the race, Uncle Mo stood his first season in 2012 as the first-year stallion with the highest stud fee of \$35,000LF. As is the Coolmore strategy, he was bred to a large book and as a result has 116 named 2-year-olds this year, and that doesn't include his Southern Hemisphere foals. Their strategy is working and Uncle Mo sits atop the Leading First Crop Sire list with already four winners (three won first time out) from 10 starters including one from early in the Keeneland Spring Meet.

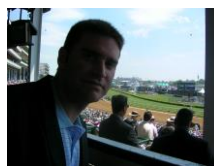
While he has started fast and his progeny should be fine on dirt up to a middle distance, I would be wary about betting his runners much beyond 8 ½ furlongs and especially if they show up on turf because given the overall precociousness his 2-year-olds are showing, it's likely the turf ones are duds who are too slow for dirt. Additionally, Uncle Mo is by Indian Charlie who was a terrific sire that died too young but was mostly known as a "filly sire". He's had few successful sons and none who have come close to duplicating his success in the shed. Furthermore, Uncle Mo's siblings have all been rather disappointing with none being of stakes quality besides him. With the talent he possessed though, anything is possible and I'll be glad to be proven wrong if he passes on his ability.

None of my analysis is iron clad but rather is my best estimate of where I can make money when runners by these stallions make the races because we've investigated where the potential lies. I hope this research has helped you as much as it's helped me and sometimes examining from a point of view of a breeder can yield significant handicapping insight on potential when we only have imperfect/limited information to go on. Good luck and Happy 'Capping!

*About the author-Melissa Nolan resides in Lexington, Kentucky, and has worked in all areas of the thoroughbred industry including Hagyard Equine Medical Institute, as Executive Assistant to Satish Sanan of Padua Stables, in the Marketing Departments of KTA/KTOB and TVG, and currently as Office Manager for Kenny McPeck's breeding and training facility Magdalena Farm.*

*The University of Kentucky graduate keeps an eye on the Kentucky racing circuit in between her primary pursuits betting progeny of underrated stallion Mizzen Mast and mastering the Super Hi 5*

## The Sarcastic Horseplayer



By [Jerod Dinkin](#)

### Triple Crown Top Ten

Disclaimer: Do not take this stuff seriously. It's all (well, mostly) in good fun.

**10.** You heard it here first: The real reason Steve Haskin briefly left the *Blood-Horse* was the, "consult-a-Doctor-if your-you-know-what-lasts-longer-than-four-hours" side-effect of a Bob Baffert horse winning the Triple Crown and it continues to linger. A medical oddity of epic proportions, his doctors are hopeful for a full recovery. On a side note, the race to find someone to like all potential 2016 Derby entrants equally is in full swing.

**9.** American Pharoah couldn't win the Belmont because [of]: (a) dosage (b) lack of training at Belmont (c) a pilot who hasn't been particularly successful at Big Sandy (d) as a Californian, his inability to pronounce "Aqueduct" properly (he says "Aqua-duct"; drives the locals insane – and yes, he can talk. He can do it all, except pay the bills for his owner) (e) fatigue of an aggressive three year old campaign (f) his general dislike of the Goo Goo Dolls (g) Johnny Weir borrowed his favorite hat and wouldn't give it back (h) 37 years of history

**8.** American Pharoah was actually retired six seconds after the wire in Elmont and will begin a career of endless parading, including the Haskell Parade with Mr. Z. as his lead pony.

**7.** Although not a part of the NBC broadcast, Mike Battaglia boxed American Pharoah with American Pharoah because the inclusion of Frosted as the 3:1 second choice was too much of a price underneath.

**6.** The NBC video game-esque graphic where they show exactly how the race will play out is as compelling as Jumbo Tron Dot Racing in between innings at a baseball game.

**5.** Chris Kay pulled off a truly brilliant marketing gimmick to grow the game: limit the number of customers. It's just the kind of out-of-the-box, inverse of reality thinking that will get horse racing back into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

*(continued on next page)*

4. It was such a momentous occasion, that even Joe Drape wrote something nice about it.

3. I really like Eddie Olczyk because just like me, his two favorite sports are really unpopular and misunderstood.

2. The final combined times of American Pharoah's three wins is equivalent to 1:1,000,000,000,000 of the time taken analyzing, listing, debating, studying, stat listing, pontificating, etc. the 2-year-old campaigns through the end of the Triple Crown season.

1 (serious commentary). Timing is everything in life and rarely can we actually predict when and how certain events will unfold. Along those lines, with no disrespect to Larry Collmus - an excellent top notch race caller, but I would have paid top dollar to listen to Tom Durkin call the Belmont. The fact that a Triple Crown winning race occurred shortly after his retirement is a victim of such quirks of history that are unpredictable.

*About the author*-Jerod Dinkin is a HANA Board Member, a former Canterbury Park Handicapper of the Year, 6'3" small forward with suspect lateral foot speed, in the Top 50 Lifetime at [publichandicapper.com](http://publichandicapper.com), and loves nothing more than a comfortable spot on the couch to listen to the soothing stylings of Richard Grunder on the weekends.

Another moment of levity -



Craig Bernick  
@craigb1818



Welcome to opening day at del mar. Yes, that girl has a prison ankle bracelet.



## Second is the First Loser

By [Jonathan Stettin](#)

This article originally appeared on [Pastthewire.com](http://Pastthewire.com)

Horse racing is the greatest skill betting game in the world. There is none better, and certainly none even close to as lucrative. Too many people forget that, or never even realize it. There are far too many players who play to survive, or just to cash a ticket now and then. Some even expect to lose. The game itself, and how it is marketed and viewed by those who don't really understand it, almost leads you into that complacency.

To be clear, it is a very tough game to beat. As tough as any I know. It can be done though. It takes a lot of work, as much as any full time job. It also takes dedication and ability. The club of those who beat this great game is small. If you truly want to join it, you have to understand some pre requisites. If you don't, no matter how emphatically you disagree with me, you are not likely to get into the club. I think the club should be the goal of everyone who plays. You should play to win, however those of us that do should also be grateful that there are in fact those who don't.

Yes, there are elements of luck involved. Poker is a skill game with elements of luck. A run of bad cards is tough to overcome at a table with players of equal skill. What makes our game different than the others is value.

Mastering the odds. You can't do that in poker, black jack, or even sports wagering where you are happy to get even money. Sure you can increase your odds of winning with certain plays, but you can't increase your value.

I've written about these things before. It's usually the same result. I'll get some insisting I am wrong and don't know what I am talking about. They are usually the most adamant. I'd wager few if any of them are in the club. Then I will get some examples of winning tickets and bets following the structure advice. There are always many more of them and that's why we are here. Again my philosophy and techniques are designed for those who play to win and want in the club.

This is a game where we will almost always be wrong more than right. We also have takeout to overcome. Then there are the abundance of sharks in the water all armed with the same information overload we have. Last but not least we have the syndicates with unlimited bankrolls, armed with computers using algorithms to calculate every profitable bet possible right up until post time.

How do we equalize all this and show a profit let alone earn a good living. First you have to learn to go against your nature. It is ok to win less to win more. What I mean is to cash fewer tickets perhaps, but win more on the ones

*(continued on next page)*



you do. This goes against our nature to want to cash as many tickets as possible. You have to learn to maximize your profits. Increase that plus column as much as you can. In the end, that's what counts.

In the past I've discussed some bets I think hurt your overall profitability. Hedging for one is generally a big no-no if you are playing for keeps. You don't bet against yourself unless you are alive for a significant amount of money and realistically fear a horse you left out. If you are in that position however, why did you leave out the horse you are now compelled to bet in the first place? I've discussed the alternative as in going for the kill. In the long run how does keying your top choice or biggest return in the triple and superfecta sound. Cash less but win more. We have also explored taking supers and triples as opposed to pick 4's on certain days. The super can be more lucrative and with the right ticket structuring easier to hit. Today I'll talk about what I think is another bad bet. The place bet.

I've bet to place maybe five times in my life if that. Show even less. I've never grasped the benefit of either bet. Let's stick to place today. A lot of people bet win and place. If you are going to bet say \$20 to win and place for a total of \$40 the \$20 in place money isn't maximizing your return. Remember this is a pre requisite.

My suggestion would be to take that \$20 in place money and play four or five exactas for \$4 or \$5 apiece with your horse in the second slot. Odds are, no pun intended, this will yield a bigger return than the \$20 place bet. If your horse is a nice price, and you happen to catch a nice price, you'll be glad you didn't bet place. Yes you run the risk of your horse running second but another key to this game is being right. You have to be right often enough to have that confidence. Also the percentages on the higher returns of exactas should easily offset the ones you miss just going for a place bet.

I'd suggest considering the same approach on the win end but that's a whole different conversation. It all comes down to why you play and how you keep the win column flush. In the present pari-mutual system this against your nature philosophy is necessary. Once exchange wagering is introduced the landscape is going to change considerably. I for one can't wait.

The Fourth of July weekend has historically been a great weekend of racing to kick off the summer. This year is no exception. We have Stars and Stripes day at Belmont on Saturday, and Kentuckian in the Los Alamitos Derby. On Sunday we have the Queen's Plate at Woodbine, the Summit of Speed at Gulfstream and the United Nations at Monmouth. That's a lot of opportunity and a lot of reasons not to bet to place. Second place is the first loser.

#### Horseplayer Alert!

**Laurel Has Lowered Some Takeouts!** Check the updated stats at the [Horseplayers Association takeout, handle and betting menu page right here!](#)

## Show Me the Races!

When we turn on network TV coverage of a horse racing event we see and hear a lot of talk about hats, fashion, horses who like eating cookies, and a lot of other things. But a lot of the time we don't hear much handicapping. And that angers a lot of you. But, if it makes you feel better, horse racing is not the only sport this happens in.

[In an article published at Awfulannouncing.com](#), columnist Matt Zemek tore the hide off ESPN for their tennis coverage. ESPN leans on showing star matches, even if they're 6-0, 6-0 blowouts, and spends a lot of time at the sports desk talking about the tournament.

"Casual sports fans and TV viewers might not be able to appreciate this, which is perfectly understandable, but let it be known: The serious tennis fan wants to see the close, competitive match between journeymen or second-tier players over the lopsided (or just-beginning) match involving a superstar in week one of a tournament. Similarly, the serious tennis fan would much rather see live tennis — if live tennis is going on — instead of anchor-desk commentary."



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Zemek believes that if you don't talk down to audiences, you can grow appreciation for a sport.

"A discussion of the televised coverage of tennis, or any other niche-sport product in the marketplace, is best advanced by pointing to the rapid growth and improvement in the coverage of soccer in the United States.

"Soccer coverage — not just availability of matches, but discussion and intelligent treatment — has increased over the past decade because TV networks have taken soccer seriously. To be more precise, they have covered soccer the way soccer fans would want the sport to be covered.

And:

"In the coverage of any sport, any outlet should strive for nothing other than treating the subject matter intelligently, the way fans expect their sport to be treated. It's that simple."

I think Matt would see a lot of nodding heads here at the *Horseplayer Monthly*.

## Promoting the Sport from Within

### American Pharoah's Connections Have Exceeded any Reasonable Expectations

Originally published in the [Thoroughbred Daily News](#)

*On Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, a strapping colt raced across the finish line in the Belmont Stakes with ridiculous ease to become the 12<sup>th</sup> Triple Crown Champion. The sport rejoiced as we would expect it to, however, so did just about everyone else. American Pharoah did what the general public thought was impossible and it was embraced, on front pages of Sunday papers, with google searches, on twitter and other social media outlets.*

*How did American Pharoah feel about his accomplishment? Was he proud? Was he worried when Frosted popped out and made a run? Was he ever nervous?*

Mark Lazarus, the Chairman of NBC Sports, caused quite a stir a couple of weeks ago. He wants pro hockey players to shave off their playoff beards. This did not go over well, because, well, the playoff beard is like the Fenway Park Green Monster, or the Yankees pinstripes. What could he be thinking?

"I know it's a tradition and superstition, but I think (the beards do) hurt recognition. They have a great opportunity with more endorsements. Or simply more recognition with fans saying, 'That guy looks like the kid next door,' which many of these guys do. I think that would be a nice thing." Lazarus told the *Chicago Tribune*.

I think he's absolutely right. Professional hockey players rarely get into trouble, are pretty savvy with the media, and are great representatives for the sport of hockey. Fans, potential fans, or young kids who fill the pipeline as players, need to be able to relate to players, and when they're under helmets and behind a bushy beard it makes things more difficult. Growing a sport can come from hard dollars (advertising), TV time, or events, but the carburetor in that engine is the player himself.

This weekend the US Open takes place at Chambers Bay, just outside Seattle, and pro golf, just like hockey and other sports is pushing their stars. And the stars are cooperating by being an engine of their own.

Jordan Spieth, the 21-year-old Texan who recently won the Masters, is well-schooled in building his brand, how to act on the golf course and how to carry himself. Inside the business some are calling him the 'Golden Child' and he's a marketers dream. Across the pond (and in America for that matter) World number one Rory McIlroy is not much different. Everyone likes him, and his appeal across the globe is second to none for the sport. A month ago, Rickie Fowler, another American, won the Players Championship

in swashbuckling style. He has endorsements popping left and right out of his golf bag, and with his presence on social media, his clothes and straight-billed caps, he has become a favorite with fans, both young and old. If you've ever seen a five-year-old boy behind the ropes dressed like Rickie (and getting a handshake from Rickie himself when he sees him), you know what I am talking about.

Recently there was a feature about the three, young, exciting players, comparing them to the "Big Three" of the 1960's – Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player. And I don't think that's far off. These young men are embracing what they can do for their careers, yes, but it's clearly more than that. The game of golf needs them, and these stars have gone out of their way to please fans and the media. Arnold, Jack and Gary did that 50 years ago and propelled a little-known sport into the nation's consciousness, and the same thing could be happening today.

*How did American Pharoah feel about his accomplishment? Was he proud? Was he ever nervous? Was there any point during the three races he felt he would not be able to handle the pressure?*

While pro sports need bright-eyed and non-bearded hockey players to answer questions, or three good faces for a sport of golf to do the same, horses can't talk. We'll never know how they feel or what they went through. For that we need the horse's human connections, and sometimes that's a problem.

Trainers can be finicky when it comes to access to a horse, because we all know how finicky a Thoroughbred can be. They never want to say the wrong thing either – for example, if they say something about a little malady it can get blown out of proportion (especially by the animal rights activists) – so perhaps it's better to say nothing at all. In general, we see a lot of stock answers to questions about a horse that's covered in protective bubble wrap.

"How's the colt doing?"

"Worked good. Cleaned up the feed tub. Didn't leave an oat. Good."

"Can we see him today?"

"He's over there, behind that rope. Might get him out for a bath later."

I don't blame this exchange on the trainer, but really. Ugh.

You'd think, with a Triple Crown winner, the bubble wrap would be infinitesimally tighter, the access more and more restricted, the quotes shorter and shorter. Not this horse. Not with these people.

*(continued on next page)*



Todd Schrupp  
@ToddTVG



Remarkable moment as Bob Baffert invites ALL of the media to pet American Pharoah. Bob said, 'He just loves people.'



I don't know how one person in the sport of horse racing who could not be unimpressed, or ungrateful towards what Bob Baffert, the Zayat's and rider Victor Espinoza have done since the Belmont. It's been a whirlwind of interviews, talk shows, and post parades, and I don't know how many people would take this challenge up like they have.

American Pharoah is a 1,200 pound horse so he can't answer every media request, he can't hop a plane to be somewhere today and somewhere else tomorrow. The owners, trainer and jockey can, and they've answered the bell. I think it's been fantastic.

When I contacted Bob's wife Jill to ask how it's been going lately, she relayed how most of the scheduling and requests have taken place, and, frankly, I was exhausted just reading it.

One of her statements summed it up: "It's been non-stop around here."

I can only imagine.

Madison Avenue and TV executives often use the (overused) term "moved the needle." I don't know if American Pharoah is moving the needle for the sport of horse racing; I have no idea if in today's twitter world if a horse can do that. I don't know if he's Jordan Spieth or Rickie Fowler.

What I do know is that whatever happens, his human connections, by being so open, so willing – by bending over backwards for fans and the media when they do not have to - have given it their best shot. If this fine horse does move that needle, they're the reason why and I, for one, tip my cap to them.

## Insiders Should Embrace Fans

I remember being on a chat board many years ago now. A fan was voicing his opinion on a harness race, talking about what he thought was a bad drive. An insider (I think it was a trainer) came on, admonished the new fan with, "have you ever sat behind a horse? No? Then shut up."

Silly, yes, because that same trainer might be going to a sports bar that night to watch a hockey game. When a player missed an open net, he might say "what a goof. How did he miss that? It was an easy bury.". Unless the trainer was a high draft pick with NHL hockey experience, he should admonish himself.



Racing, heavily insider-based, has a lot of trouble with fans. And it doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

California Chrome will hopefully be racing next year, and we all think that's great. There are many fans who hope he doesn't do a Dubai-Ascot double next year, there are some who want him in dirt classics, not turf. There are some who want turf, or Dubai, or hell, maybe even the Melbourne Cup. Maybe someone on facebook (those folks are a little crazy, mind you) wants him to race on Pluto.

The response from some quarters: "Stop trying to manage this horse. He's not yours." Or, "if you want to manage a horse, go buy one."

Nonsense.

Sure, some criticism of rides, or trainer moves, or a hundred other things might be wrong. The Facebook stuff regarding Chrome is borderline delusional. Fans might not know a certain horse was sick last race, or has a sore suspensory, or whatever; this is an insular sport, where keeping things a secret is a method of operation. But who cares? If it's a sport, it's a part of sports.

Sports radio, fantasy sports, calling [insert name here] a "choker", are all about fans "managing" their teams. It's all about being a fan. It's an intrinsic element of all sports around the globe. The manager of the Yankees would never say "go buy your own team if you want to manage it." There would be a revolt.

If you want to be big league, embrace it, educate, discuss and be a part of it. But for goodness sakes, don't tell them to put a sock in it. Horse racing needs more fans, not less of them.



## Q & A With...



**Brian DiDonato - Racing Editor at the  
[Thoroughbred Daily News](#)**

**1 - How long have you been playing the horses? What gave you the bug?**

I'd gone to Saratoga with my family when I was younger, but I didn't really get interested in playing the horses seriously until freshman year of college--2005. My friends and I were looking for stuff to do between or after classes, and frequently found ourselves at the Sports Haven teletheater in New Haven, Connecticut. It was mostly just playing numbers then, but the intellectual aspect of it really intrigued me, and I read everything I could, frequented message boards, etc. until I had some semblance of a clue as to what I was doing.

**2- What are your favorite racetracks, and types of races to play?**

I focus mostly on the New York circuit, and then the high-quality meets like Keeneland or Gulfstream in the winter. I also love Woodbine; they've always got full fields, good turf racing and I actually enjoy betting races run on synthetic. I'll look at graded stakes from anywhere, especially on the grass--and their one of my main focuses. I also love maiden races, especially for 2-year-olds and/or on turf.

**3- What are your tools of the trade? Past performances, replays, software etc?**

I certainly look at the usual stuff--speed figures, trainer stats, etc., but I think I get more of an edge from focusing on pedigree in maiden races. Breeding just isn't as well understood by the wagering public, and good pedigree information is somewhat less accessible and also more difficult to decipher, so it's less factored into the market. Extended pedigree and sibling reports are key for me, as I tend to give more weight to the dam's influence. I also put a lot of emphasis on 2-year-old sales breezes. I'd say my biggest strength as a handicapper is gauging European imports making their North American debuts, so I also watch a lot of foreign replays. We at the *TDN* probably publish more free European replays than anyone else, and they can be a great resource that more people should be

taking advantage of.

**4 - What are your impressions so far of the Saratoga meet? Is the dirt and turf playing fair? Anything standing out at this early stage?**

I generally like to reserve judgment for longer than most in terms of bias. Maybe that means I'll always be late to the party, but biases aren't generally a huge factor in my handicapping. I do always keep an eye on how the Saratoga turf is playing, though, because it can be very speed friendly when it's dry.

**5 - You selected Sage Hall, a Mott firster going a mile and a sixteenth on turf, on Sunday, and she clicked paying \$25. What did you like about this filly? Do you often go against trainer numbers when click at low rates with firsters if something stands out?**

It actually all started the day before with Mott's other winning firster, 21-1 Site Read. I thought he had a very sneaky pedigree for turf and precocity, and I was very intrigued by the fact that Bill Mott was listed as owner--especially because, based on the horse's sales report, it seemed like he had purchased him privately some time after Site Read went through the ring. Trainer stats are obviously a reflection of training skill, but also trainer intent. Mott might not be a high-percentage first-out trainer in general, but he's one of the greatest horsemen of all time--if he wants to win with a firster, he can win with a firster. And I figured since he was paying all the horse's bills, he might have added motivation to pick up a check first out. So after Site Read won very impressively, it was a lot easier to land on Sage Hall. Her works were very similar looking, and her pedigree was similarly strong. In recent years, I've come to the conclusion that pedigree trumps all in maiden turf routes, and that tote action means almost nothing.

**6- Thoughts on the so called "watered down" stakes schedule at Saratoga and the big day phenomenon in general. Is Travers Day better or worse with more graded stakes?**

In general, I'd say I'm a fan of the big day phenomenon, though perhaps at other tracks it can be more detrimental when the quality isn't always there day in and day out. There's just nothing like the anticipation and excitement that comes from a "big day." In terms of Saratoga specifically, I'm probably in the minority in liking the new stakes schedule--even though it may take some getting used to. The quality of racing at Saratoga is always there, so it's not like days that now have less stakes aren't going to still feature great betting cards. If anything, Grade I races might have the lowest average field size of any category of race run at the meet, so those days that are "losing" big races are probably gaining better betting races.

# Crossword or Jumble?

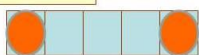
By [Neal Benoit](#)

This piece appeared on Neal's website [gettingoutofthegate.com](http://gettingoutofthegate.com), and it is reprinted with his permission.

If you check the puzzle section of the newspaper you're likely to find these two types of puzzles. Many horseplayers can be divided into these two broad categories. One is not necessarily better than the other, but understanding the Pros and Cons of both might help you decide which one fits your style.

A crossword player isn't finished until they've finished filling in *all* of the words in the puzzle. A "crossword horseplayer" likes to evaluate all of the horses and angles before making his selections in a race. He sizes up every horse in categories of distance, class, pace, and form. He looks at result charts and watches video replays. Depending on the type of race he might sprinkle in some trainer statistics, age angles, jockey changes, etc. This describes me, I'm a "crossword horseplayer."

R O S H E



N A R T I E



R E A W G



O R G U F L N



What every horseplayer wants?



A jumble player considers the clue (e.g. What every horseplayer wants?) to the puzzle first, and then starts unscrambling the words. He might have to unscramble all the words before solving the puzzle, or only a couple before the answer becomes obvious to him. A "jumble horseplayer" looks for clues in each race, searching for tried and proven angles, and frequently identifies "the solution" before unscrambling all of the parts. This describes my wife, Deb, a "jumble horseplayer."

In a recent day of racing, I was alive to three horses in the third leg of a Pick-3. Five minutes before post time, Deb asked me, "Do you have #8 covered?" I replied, "No, why?" She said, "He showed some early speed in his last race off a layoff (one of her favorite angles) and he's on his

toes today." I looked at the odds board and he was 19-1. I was suspect of the added distance he was taking on, but then I looked back at my pace notes and realized there weren't many horses with early speed in today's race. This horse could wire the field if left alone on the front end. Well, you guessed it, the jumble player was right! While my Pick-3 ticket went down in flames, 19-1 was a good consolation for a Saver ticket.

The jumble player usually requires less time to prepare for each race. And, when the winner can be gleaned from a couple of unscrambled clues, the jumble player is rewarded. The crossword player needs more time to ready himself for a day of racing. But, when the winner(s) are visible through the prism of a holistic review, the crossword horseplayer is rewarded.

So, which way is best? It really depends on the individual. How much time (and patience) do you have to prepare? Do you have enough reliable "angles" to identify when searching for clues? While horse racing can be a complicated sport to learn, it doesn't have to be a complicated game to play. After you learn the fundamentals, tailor your own handicapping style to the puzzle type that fits you.

Even if you're limited on time, you can be a crossword horseplayer. There's no law that says you have to play every race. Play fewer races. That's exactly what my son does. He refuses to look at certain types of races (e.g. 2-year old maiden races). On a typical 10-race card, he will usually handicap only five to seven races. In another example, a friend of mine arrives at the racetrack around the fourth or fifth race, and limits his handicapping to the last five or six races.

Whether you're inclined to be a crossword or jumble player, you can be effective with either style as a horseplayer.

**The Jumble solution is available [here](#).**

*About the author- Neal Benoit grew up and still resides in the Saratoga area and became a fan of horse racing during in 1977 when watching Affirmed and Alydar square off as two-year-olds.*

*Neal doesn't consider himself a "professional gambler." He says on his website, "I don't really consider myself a true "gambler." I don't go to casinos, I've never bought a lottery ticket, and I'm not very fond of losing money. I'm a fan of horse racing and I'm a horseplayer. I see each race as a riddle. And for me, the thrill is in solving it.*

*"For me, there is so much more about being a fan of this sport than the wagering opportunities. A byproduct of being a horseplayer is the opportunity to witness majestic animals and amazing people putting on one of the greatest shows on earth. I have the utmost respect for the hard working people involved in the daily grind of this business. Their hard work enables people like me to thoroughly enjoy my time spent at the racetrack."*

# Take Note, Horse Racing

## Racing Can Learn From Fox's US Open Coverage

The critique of Fox's coverage of the US Open at Chambers Bay reminded me a whole lot of horse racing. From insiders, the laments centered on the [lack of information given](#) (what irons were being hit to what greens, what the break is on putts, what the yardages were), and what many thought were commentators not experienced enough to talk about what was happening. The features, like the one about the talking tree, made people ugh.



However, there was some good with that bad. The good happened in two main areas.

First, the use of technology to show the play was lauded. The "protracer", which shows the ball's flight off the tee was used on many holes, and allowed the viewer to see where the ball was headed, was fantastic. The split screen tracer was brilliant - this showed where the ball was headed, in real time, super imposed on diagram of the hole - and any one of us who have played golf on a video game, from Sega Genesis in 1989 to the PS4, knew what we were watching. Yardages, widths and other overlays on the screen were also given high marks.

Second, they showed us the money; the game. the match, the competitors; the drama. [They let the event speak for itself.](#)

"Fox found its best moments in the final 40 minutes of Sunday's play thanks to a thrilling finish between winner Jordan Spieth and Dustin Johnson. The production thankfully let natural sound carry the broadcast over the final minutes. The coverage was also commercial free, which kept the tension and drama high. Of note: The on-course audio with Spieth and his caddy on No. 18 was great."

Fox's use of technology, and letting the event and its participants speak for it were completely solid. I, like most, was enthralled and could follow the action as good, or better, than any golf event I have watched. On course mics were perfectly placed, and in a sport where not being able to see a white little ball traveling at 178 mph off a clubface, for this event I could.

Racing, in my view, can learn from the above.

I watched Ascot last week. And for the life of me I could not find my horse in any race with a field size over 8. The saddle pads are all the same color sure, but it was more than that. In the turf sprints especially, I had absolutely no idea where my horse was. None. After being frustrated about the whole thing, I called a friend who bets UK racing for a living. He told me "in 20 horse fields in short sprints I don't have a clue how the announcer gets through the race. For the most part I'm totally lost."

Here across the pond it's not a lot better. Watching the Derby on NBC I often see a blob of 20 brown horses. Watch the Orb win in the soup a couple of years ago; I couldn't find Orb and I've watched hundreds of thousands of races. Tom Durkin didn't even pick up Mine that Bird until late in his win, and Tom is a god, legend; use any word you want. Every year I watch the Derby at my ADW. Trakus, angles, I can actually see the race better.

Top TV production can't do the job, for the most part, and with racing paying to get onto television this is troublesome. On Saturday I watched the North America Cup on TSN (Canada's ESPN for those who are wondering). Close ups on horses heads, some sort of lights getting in the way? Odd angles? I was lost and I can only imagine what newbies thought. [\(watch it from 1:30 onwards here\).](#)

Racing, like golf, is hard to telecast. But like Fox's coverage, it can do better with some imagination.

For huge events like the Derby I want a protracer. I want to see bubbles, or arrows or *somethings* showing me where the top four choices are in the betting, while the race is being run. I want to see an alert when a horse, like Frosted this year, makes a move that's worthy of paying attention to (think how that would work in a bar with the sound down). I want to see more.

As for the participants, I want more of that too. I want to hear strategy and chatter, just like we all wanted to hear Jordan Spieth and his caddy talk about what they wanted to do with a 279-yard three wood on 18, or Dustin Johnson asking his caddy what the break is to send the match into a Monday playoff. Bob Baffert talking to his owners or jockey before a race isn't a national secret. It's a big part of the sport.

I think that's exemplified with my, and probably your favorite Derby TV memory. [Carl Nafzger living the Derby moment with his owner, who was unable to see what's happening was awesome.](#) It was the participants speaking for themselves. It was the filter free, pure, unbridled joy of

*(continued on next page)*



horse racing; the culmination of years or more of work, all to attain a goal that one owner, one horse, one trainer shoots for every year.



*"You couldn't get that with fifty takes," said Al Michaels.*

Horse racing and golf are niche sports. The US Open, the Kentucky Derby and Ascot are jewels that need to be shined up, and presented with both us - the everyday racewatcher - and the general public in mind. They need to showcase the game and grow the game. Fox, with its use of technology and letting the event play itself out over the last hour, gets it. Horse racing, in my view, needs to take that same lesson and apply it to its telecasts.

**LOWEST**  
**Average Takeout**  
**of ANY Contest Site**  
**HORSE TOURNEYS**  
**Online Handicapping Contests**

#### **Another Horseplayer Alert!**

The 20-cent super high 5 in race five at the Meadowlands is now 8% takeout period (no jackpot) and when you look at the payoffs, that reduced rake shows...

10c SPR	20c Jackpot5
4/6/8/7	4/6/8/7/9
21.50	284.70

## **Now Is the Time**

### **American Pharoah & the Bond among Father, Daughter and Son-in-law**

*By Art Parker*

It started on Friday, May 1st. My daughter, Catherine, showed up at the door to surprise me for my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. We don't get to see each other much since she lives in the D.C. area and I live in the Deep South. It was a great surprise and after I hugged her I said, "You came to see me on Derby weekend!" Of course her presence made my Derby weekend that much better.

She learned to read The Racing Form when she was eight years old. That's when she first went to the track with her old man. Today, whenever I visit her we either go to a Baltimore track or we zip up to Delaware Park. When she visits me we open up the computers and play together via ADW or we may go to an OTB location 25 miles away.

Many weekends we play long distance together and stay on the phone discussing races. The day she told me about my future son-in-law, Michael, the first thing she said was that he was a horseplayer, that he grew up in Maryland and his dad taught him the game. Even though I had yet to meet Michael, I told her to keep him. After all, how many horseplayers get a son-in-law that fits the same label?

You can only imagine what it was like Derby weekend. We had the computers going and televisions on in every room in the house. We had racing information all over my (home) office and in the kitchen. I was tickled beyond belief to have Catherine and Michael with me.

It got a little late Friday afternoon and we were discussing where we were going to dinner. I told everyone we had one more race and reminded them it was the Oaks. All of us got busy and, before long, my daughter and I both agreed on Lovely Maria. Catherine said she didn't quite remember the rider, Kerwin Clark. I suspected that to be the case since she has never played Louisiana or Chicago racing very much, if any. I told her that "Boo Boo" had plenty of experience and his filly was a good one. She looked at me and asked, "What did you call him?" I explained that Clark's nickname was "Boo Boo," and that he was almost as old as me. Catherine shook her head and just laughed.

And then she laughed even louder when I stood up and started screaming at the TV when Boo Boo and Maria took the lead in the stretch. "Win this one for us old guys," I yelled as a determined Lovely Maria hit the sixteenth pole running like a champ. The whole family was laughing at me and that was okay, because the laughter was accompanied with high fives of victory.

The next day we watched American Pharoah win the  
*(continued on next page)*

Derby. I must admit that I was not a Pharoah fan and the Derby left more doubts. When Catherine and Michael left, we agreed to a day of long distance racing comradery when the Preakness rolled around.



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When American Pharoah got a quick lead in the sloppy Preakness, I knew he had a big advantage so the result was no surprise. While on the phone with Catherine she said that he looked awful good, but we both agreed that it would probably be a different world at "Big Sandy" (Belmont) in New York.

Like many of you, I've seen the scenario too many times. A horse wins the Derby and the Preakness and then can't win at Belmont. The first one my daughter remembers is her all-time favorite horse, Alysheba. She reminded me on Belmont day that I have seen three Triple Crown winners: Secretariat, Seattle Slew and Affirmed. How could I forget? I've seen the replays a thousand times.

Catherine and I agreed to play Frosted with the hopes of spoiling the day and cashing a ticket. When American Pharoah got another easy lead and no one pressured him before the first turn it spelled doom for the field. I told my wife that unless "something is wrong with this colt he was winning the Triple Crown." Too bad you can't bet when they get to the first turn.

When Pharoah crossed the line the phone rang and Catherine said, "Well, dad, I finally got to see a horse win the Triple Crown." At that moment I accepted American Pharoah for the great horse he is. It may have been 37 years since I saw a Triple Crown winner but it had been an entire lifetime for my daughter. That made it all worthwhile.

It's been a couple of weeks since the Belmont and I have thought more about the last month or so. Our sport has a way of taking you back in history, getting you involved in present day, and always makes you think about the future. It affords us the opportunity to have a lot of fun, often with our friends and the people we love.

***This year we have an even greater opportunity to share this sport and reap the benefits that come with being a participant. We have a Triple Crown winner, a real hero. Now is the time to ask someone else to go to the track, or do something to promote the sport.***

Now is the time. We may not can wait again. Some of us have waited 37 years, others a complete lifetime.

About the author-Art Parker is a newspaper editor from Millsbrook, Alabama. He regularly pens articles for [BetPTCBlog.com](http://BetPTCBlog.com) and [AGameofSkill.com](http://AGameofSkill.com).



1926 - 2016  
**90**

**HAMBLETONIAN**  
at the  
**MEADOWLANDS**

**AUG. 8**  
**THE \$1 MILLION HAMBLETONIAN**  
First Race 12 Noon

**INFO ►**

# The Big Score

By Vin Rogers

When I was 21 or so I was madly in love with a vivacious blonde I'll but after several dates she had resisted my efforts to make our relationship a bit more intimate.

One lovely May day, when Belmont's spring meeting had just begun and the promise of hope blew through the air, I suggested we spend a day at the track. She'd been a rider as a girl and still had that female thing about horses so she enthusiastically agreed.



*Belmont Park, the site of Vin's big score*

It was a weekday at Belmont - the crowd was light and made up of the usual everyday punters. My gate might have been the only female in the place, and I wanted to impress her. I brought her a program and a Daily Racing Form and began to explain a little about how the game is played. She listened intently, as if I were giving her the secret key to unlock the code to untold riches. I could sense her excitement as I explained the basics of handicapping and wagering. Things were going well.

After a Nathan's hot dog and a Coke we headed to the paddock for the third race. The horses were being saddled, and as they paraded around Belmont's beautiful walking ring, amidst the shade of the tall trees, I made what I hope seemed like informed comments about the horses and their riders; things like, "Look at the way this one is on his toes," and, "That jockey is terrific out of the gate."

Up to that point in the day, we had simply been absorbing the racetrack atmosphere - I wanted her to get a feel for the track; the way one race flows nicely into the next, the camaraderie of the diehard racegoer, the grace and beauty of these amazing animals - so I had yet to place a bet. Finally, she said what I'd hope she'd say, "Okay, Mr. Big-Time Handicapper, let's see how good you are. Pick a winner in this race."

"Sure," I replied with all the confidence of a movie star.

"But I'll tell you what, I'm going to bet something very, very special - a bet just for you."

"Really? who is it? Which horse?"

"I'll tell you when the time is right," I said. I'm going to let you wonder about it for a while. Try guessing."

I told my date to wait for me at the finish line, as I quickly headed for the windows. It was an eight-horse field in that third race. I bought a \$10 win ticket on every horse in the race. I put one ticket in my upper-left jacket pocket, another in my inside breast pocket, a third in my right-side pocket, etc. until I had hiding places for each one of my \$10 wagers.

Sure enough Susan was waiting for me at the finish line as planned, filled with anticipation.

"Who is it? Who are we rooting for?" she asked.

"I'm not going to tell you just yet - but trust me, I think you're gonna like your horse. I feel really good about this race."

As we stood at the rail, I exuded mysterious confidence, which both puzzled and intrigued her. The horses loaded without incident, and suddenly they were off. I watched intently as the horses settled in position on the backstretch and started to mutter noncommittal comments like, "Come on, baby! That's it. Keep it going."

Then I grew more animated. As they hit the far turn I started to yell, "Go! Go! Go!"

At the sixteenth pole the winner was obvious. "There he is - there's your horse," I exclaimed. It's the gray, number four!"

She jumped up and down, clapping her hands, squealing with delight as our horse crossed the finish line a comfortable two lengths in front.

She gave me a big hug and kissed me on the cheek. I smiled as I reached into my right-side jacket pocket where I knew I had placed the number four ticket. I fished her the ticket and gallantly handed it over.

Remarkably, the horse went off at 21-1. I insisted that she cash the ticket herself and collect the \$225 or so.

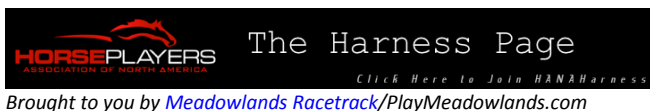
She gratefully offered to share the winnings, but I reminded her that this was supposed to be a very special bet on a very special horse - just for her.

Susan was mightily impressed by this gesture.

Later, I scored.

*About the author - Vin Rogers is a retired UCONN professor of Education, a jazz trumpeter, an ex-equestrian and Thoroughbred owner. He finds handicapping endlessly fascinating and hopes someday to learn how to do it.*





## Track Bias in Harness Racing



By [Garnet Barnsdale](#)

### Track Bias.

Two words that get tossed around liberally in both the harness and Thoroughbred racing. How easy is it to detect a bias, though? At just about every harness track in North America, speed is the universal perfect trip. Take Mohawk Racetrack, for example - a track that I handicap daily and post public selections for in the DRF Harness Eye. Typically, more than 60% of all races are won by horses that are racing first or second at the three-quarter pole, and 70% are racing in the top three at that point. There is a common misconception that "closers" win more often at Mohawk than its sister track, Woodbine; a theory refuted by statistics.

So that brings us back to the "track bias" argument and trying to judge if speed horses or "quick leavers" are being helped by a speed bias isn't always the easiest thing to do because on many nights, well, many of the best horses are raced aggressively and put into position to win by the three-quarter pole which mostly explains the statistics mentioned above.

So how does one go about judging if there is a bias, specifically if the condition of the track and other factors (weather conditions, wind) are helping or hindering horses that race on or near the front? I'm glad you ask, because there was recently a card raced at Mohawk Racetrack - on Saturday July 18 to be exact - that is perfect for a case study that shows how to identify a bias and show what to do with it once have become aware of it.

I'm going to digress a bit here in order to paint the whole picture from that night. Every week on Saturday nights I participate in a live feed on the Daily Racing Form's website called "DRF Harness Live", providing information intended to help the audience to make winning wagers. One of the things I have taken it upon myself to do is compile a list of weekly stats that I present to the audience before the races begin. Typically these stats include a "who's hot/who's not" list based on drivers and trainers strike rates the previous week, post position stats and winners pace profile stats. On June 18 following race one - which was won in wire-to-wire fashion in a new life's mark by 11-year-old mare That'll Be Franny - I noted that closers

had been winning more regularly than is typical with this post:

### Winners Pace Profiles This Week:

In the four cards preceding this one, only 47% of the winning horses were either leading or racing second at the half and 58% in the same positions at the three-quarter mark. These numbers are down decidedly from earlier in the meet where both were closer to 66%.

It seems as though the track has been a bit dead this week, although with That'll Be Franny ripping off a 1:50.2 wire job in the first it's hard to say how things will play tonight. There is very little wind and the air is muggy which has traditionally favored speed horses in the past. Let's see how race two - which we have no strong opinion on - plays out.

That'll Be Franny was 6/5 and figured. So her wiring a weak conditioned field was no big shock. The new life's mark could partially be attributed to perfect conditions to "make speed"; it was a warm, muggy night and there was no wind. So we move on and the jury's still out regarding a bias.

Race two turns out very interesting in that the expected early leader, P L Idaho, was forced to tuck in 4th when three others all left hard for the front. What seemed unusual about this was that two noted closers, Moonwriter and Aramblin Hanover, fought for the front in a rapid :26.2 first quarter. P L Idaho powered to the front at the half, opened a huge gap and won easily and he set a new life's mark (1:50.2) doing it. What really caught my eye though was the closers firing off the gate for all they were worth. Do the drivers know this early in the card that they have to be up near the front to have any chance? Let's see what happens in the third race, I thought.

Race three was won by Shamballa, one of the top horses on the grounds who took over at the half and powered away to a 1:48 flat life's-best clocking. I am now strongly suspecting that closers are doomed on this track, mostly because I haven't seen a horse close much ground at all on the leaders in the stretch. Here is my DRF Live post:

### Three races, three chalks, three life marks.

#4 SHAMBALLA, the 3/2 race favorite, goes to the front just past the half then fires off :26.2 and :26.4 quarters coming home to keep second choice #6 EVENIN OF PLEASURE at bay. He takes a new life mark of 1:48 flat in the process despite missing a week's action. In all three races so far, there has been very little in the way of horses closing ground in the stretch on the leaders. *I would be leery of using horses that don't figure to be near the front by the three-quarters at this point.*

Race four was another interesting study as several horses left as hard as they could in a wild skirmish for the front

*(continued on next page)*

leading track announcer Ken Middleton to exclaim: "The first quarter was like the Calgary Stampede!" When the dust finally settled, Regal Son - who was three-wide at the first quarter split while searching for the lead - won out of the pocket. Again it seemed very apparent that most of the drivers were intent on getting position near the front early, which to me is a "tell" that they know the track is playing to speed.

Races five and six were again won easily by horses that led before the half with few horses closing any ground. Race seven was won by Ellis Park who ground it first-over and wore down the early leader who held safe for second. Race eight was the absolute proof that it was virtually impossible to chase a leader down in the final eighth of a mile on this night. Precocious Beauty, the race winner, endured a long, tough first-over trip and despite looking winded in the last eighth, she easily held Bet Ya - one of few who actually closed hard late - safe. Watching the final strides you couldn't help but think that on a fair track Precocious Beauty would have gotten beat.

Races nine, 10 and 11 were unsurprisingly won by horses that led at both the half and three-quarters, but race 11 was also a big piece of evidence of the severe track bias. Nirvana Seelster - who on paper figured to be on the lead or close to it - wired the field which wasn't a shock based on how the previous 10 races had played out. How he did it, though, was interesting. Nirvana Seelster sped unchallenged to a :54 flat first half then didn't slow down, pacing his back half in :54.1 en route to a sparkling new life's mark of 1:48.1. To put that mile in a bit of perspective, that clocking in a non-winners of \$13,500 Last Five Starts was only a fifth of a second slower than the winning time clocked in the North America Cup this summer by Wakizashi Hanover. Again there was little in the way of horses closing ground as the winning triactor raced 1-2-3 from the outset and remained in those positions throughout the mile.

Clearly, noted speedster Star Cover was close to a lock in the 12th and final race wasn't he? I thought so: *Once again, no one, and I mean NO one closed an inch down the lane. You have to think Star Cover has a big shot to wire the 12th if he can stay flat.* " Indeed, Star Cover - who even at 7/5 seemed like a good play - made front in a couple of steps and despite being pushed to a :53.4 first half roared away to a 1:49.4 lifetime-best while increasing his lead in the much slower second half.

I note in my closing post on DRF Harness Live what the bias can mean going forward:

**As expected...Star Cover in a jog...and Final Thoughts**

Despite getting pushed to a :53.4 first half, Star Cover EASILY drives away to a new life's mark in 1:49.4. The back half is more than two seconds slower than the first and the gap between the leader, the pocket horse and the field grew. It's not supposed to work this way, but on this track, tonight, it was the only way it worked.

Here are some of the notes - some written, some mental - for myself related to this perceived bias:

- Keep this track condition in mind next week and downgrade some of these monster front-end miles - especially if the track is fair next week.
- Also keep some of the very good closers on your watch list - namely: Buckeroo, Bet Ya and Semi Automatic. These three are very sharp and just need the conditions to be fairer.
- For sure many of these speedy winners will take lots of money at the windows based on their blowout wins in fast time. Some of them might be good play-againsts as huge chalks.

I discovered that the closers that were noted above all had races coming up: Both Bet Ya and Buckeroo were racing last weekend at Mohawk, although Buckeroo drew the 10-hole, which would make his assignment very tough. Semi Automatic was racing Monday night at Grand River in the Battle Of Waterloo eliminations, and I thought he was set up perfectly for this somewhat prestigious stake based on what I observed on July 18.

So you are probably wondering how these horses fared? Well firstly, Bet Ya came up against a field that consisted of mostly younger (3-year-old) stakes fillies - including Fan Hanover Stakes winner Wrangler Magic - many of whom had missed some time. That made me like her even more because I had serious doubts that the sophomores would be pushed all-out for the \$25,000 purse with much bigger fish to fry on the horizon this summer. That analysis turned out to be on the mark because Bet Ya was allowed to stroll past the half in :57 flat and was never seriously threatened as she motored home in :54.4 en route to a 1:51.4 score. All factors considered, the \$9.80 mutuel on Bet Ya was a gift.

Buckeroo didn't fare as well after starting seventh from the 10-hole, but he did come on for fourth and paced his mile in a respectable 1:50 .2. Buckeroo is one to keep an eye on in the next few weeks because he is very sharp.

What about Semi-Automatic? Well, he broke his maiden in style, cutting out a rapid :55.2 half on his way to an easy 1:53.4 win in his Battle of Waterloo elimination. The \$3.70 mutuel won't make you rich, but then, when you feel as though you're betting a cinch, is 85% profit in under two minutes such a bad thing?

As always it pays to put some of these horses that were noted as closing well against the bias (as well as some you might downgrade and try to beat) in your Virtual Stables in cases like these.

Track Bias; it's not always easy to detect early in the card but on nights when it's quite obvious such as it was to anyone paying close attention on July 18, it can certainly pay off not only for the remainder that card but also going forward.

You can catch my daily Woodbine/Mohawk selections here: <http://www.drf.com/news/garnet-barnsdale>

And; currently you can follow my live feed from Mohawk Racetrack every Saturday night here: <http://live.drf.com/events/harness>



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# THE CANE PAGE

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# The Back Page

## California's Under-Performing Exacta Pools: Del Mar vs. Saratoga

By Jeff Platt

Last year, after the conclusion of the Del Mar and Saratoga meets, I ran the following handle analysis comparing Del Mar 2014 vs. Saratoga 2014 and submitted it to the CHRB.

The analysis shows a side by side handle comparison by wager type along with takeout rate for each wager.

Overall, Del Mar handled about 78% as much as Saratoga did.

On WIN-PLACE-SHOW wagers, where both tracks have approximate level takeout rates, Del Mar handled 82.76% as much as Saratoga did.

But on EXACTA wagers, where Del Mar has a takeout rate of 22.86% and Saratoga has a takeout rate of 18.50%, Del Mar handled just 54.79% as much as Saratoga did.

I found that number stunning and upon learning that an open to the public CHRB Parimutuel Wagering Committee meeting was scheduled to be held at Los Alamitos where the topic of discussion was whether or not the CHRB should consider undertaking a formal economic study of takeout rates and their effect on handle and revenue, made the drive up to Los Alamitos and presented my analysis:

HANDLE PER RACE ANALYSIS DMR 2014 vs. SAR 2014					
COL-A	COL-B	COL-C	COL-D	COL-E	
WAGER	DMR 2014	SAR 2014	% RATIO DMR/SAR	TAKEOUT DMR	PCT SAR
WPS	357,191.42	431,591.93	0.8276	15.43	16.00
EXA	191,623.58	349,769.78	0.5479	22.68	18.50
QUIN	9,616.63	17,509.86	0.5492	22.68	18.50
DD	51,382.56	109,866.97	0.4677	20.00	18.50
TRI	128,401.10	200,302.83	0.6410	23.68	24.00
P3	90,587.11	96,380.09	0.9399	23.68	24.00
SUPER	90,214.33	104,983.19	0.8593	23.68	24.00
P4	309,936.53	428,709.63	0.7230	23.68	24.00
High5	54,307.78	-NA-	-NA-	23.68	24.00
P5	542,446.00	334,177.73	1.6232	14.00	15.00
P6	363,049.75	165,065.08	2.1994	23.68	24.00
OTHER	24,337.28	35,594.83	0.6837	23.68	24.00
FLDSIZE	8.78	7.97	1.1020		

Notes:

1. The above handle summary compares DMR 2014 against SAR 2014 and handle numbers are expressed as handle per race.

2. Column B lists average handle and field size per race for DMR 2014.

3. Column C lists average handle and field size per race for SAR 2014.

4. Column D lists DMR numbers expressed as a percentage of SAR numbers.

5. Column E lists a side by side comparison of takeout rates for DMR and SAR.

6. For WIN-PLACE-SHOW wagers, Del Mar and Saratoga have approximate level takeout rates, with Del Mar at 15.43% and Dime Breakage vs. Saratoga at 16.00% with Nickel Breakage.

Here, DMR handled 82.76% as much as SAR did. (Use this as your baseline.)

7. For EXACTA wagers, Del Mar handled just 55% as much as Saratoga did.

This number is stunning when you consider the differential in takeout rates: Del Mar at 22.68% vs. SAR at 18.50%.

8. For DOUBLE wagers, Del Mar handled just 47% as much as Saratoga did.

This number is stunning when you consider the "logic" used to justify abandoning Santa Anita's 18% rolling double experiment where DD handle per race was up 24%.

9. I submitted the argument that had EXACTA takeout at DMR been 18.50% like SAR, EXACTA handle at DMR would have likely been in line with the WPS baseline of 82.76%.

I also submitted the argument that if this were true EXA handle for the DMR 2014 meet could be estimated as follows:

(EST DMR EXA HANDLE PER RACE) = (SAR EXA HANDLE) x (Baseline)

or (EST DMR EXA HANDLE PER RACE) = (349,769.78) x (0.8276)

or (EST DMR EXA HANDLE PER RACE) = 289,469.47

10. Based on the above handle estimate assuming an 18.5% takeout rate, I submitted the further argument that revenue on Exacta wagers for the DMR 2014 meet could be estimated as follows:

(continued on next page)

(Revenue Per Race on EST DMR EXA HANDLE PER RACE) =  
(289,469.47) x (0.185)

or (Revenue Per Race on EST DMR EXA HANDLE PER RACE)  
= 53,551.85

11. (Revenue Per Race on ACTUAL DMR EXA HANDLE PER  
RACE) = (191,623.58) x (0.2268)

or (Revenue Per Race on ACTUAL DMR EXA HANDLE PER  
RACE) = 43,460.23

12. I then submitted the further argument that as a result  
of their 22.68% exacta takeout, total revenue generated by  
Del Mar's Exacta pools had suffered a SHORTFALL of just  
over \$10k per race calculated as follows:

EXACTA REVENUE SHORTFALL PER RACE AT DMR =  
10,091.62

(or 53,551.62 - 43,460.23)

13. I then submitted the further argument that as a result  
of their 22.68% exacta takeout, if you multiply the above  
exacta revenue shortfall per race times the number of  
exacta races offered:

DEL MAR'S EXACTA REVENUE SHORTFALL for the 2014  
MEET was approximately \$3.279 MILLION calculated as  
follows:

Exacta REVENUE SHORTFALL for DMR 2014 MEET = \$3.279  
MILLION

(or 10,091.62 x 325 exacta races)

Put another way, by insisting on an exacta takeout of  
22.68% Del Mar and their horsemen left approximately  
\$3.279 million on the table! In California, takeout money  
scooped from the pools is split as follows: 48% track and  
52% purses.

The \$3.279 MILLION they left on the table last summer is  
money that could have been split between Del Mar and  
their horsemen as follows:

48% to Del Mar: \$1.574 million

52% to Purses: \$1.71 million

14. This same trend, underperforming handle and revenue  
in California's exacta pools as a result of high takeout, has  
also negatively impacted funding for California alphabet  
groups such as the CHRB, TOC, CTT, CARMA, Disabled  
Jockeys Fund, etc. (Their funding is generated by handle.)

When I was done presenting, the CHRB Commissioners  
politely thanked me - as did track management and  
representatives of the TOC.

I found it interesting that I was the only member of the  
general public who showed up and took the podium that  
day who spoke up in favor of the meeting agenda item:  
Whether or not the CHRB should consider undertaking an  
economic study on takeout rates and their effect on  
handle and revenue.

I also found it interesting that many members of track  
management in California racing, management at  
California brick and mortar OTBs, representatives from the  
TOC, and Labor Unions also took the podium that day - and  
almost all who spoke publicly bemoaned declines in handle  
and revenue and the resulting layoffs and cutbacks in  
hours for parimutuel clerks over the past few years  
(following the takeout increase they insisted on  
implementing Jan 01, 2011.)

A promotional banner for Derby Wars. The banner features the Derby Wars logo on the left, followed by three contest cards: '\$25,000 SATURDAY GAME' (Every Saturday), '\$100,000 2-DAY GAME AUGUST 7&8' (Qualifier Daily), and '\$25,000 HEAD-TO-HEAD' (64-Player Bracket, 1 Champ). On the right is a blue box for 'NHC SPOTS EVERY FRIDAY BEGINNING JULY 31'. At the bottom, a black bar contains the text 'Start WINNING Today at DerbyWars.com!'.

But to the best of my recollection, only one individual  
other than myself took the podium to speak up in favor of  
the meeting agenda item: Whether or not the CHRB  
should consider undertaking an economic study on  
takeout rates and their effect on handle and revenue.

Many from track management and the TOC voiced  
opposition to even the idea of an economic study of  
takeout and revenue.

This trend, underperforming handle and revenue in  
California's exacta pools as a result of high takeout, is not  
limited to Del Mar.

A similar trend is easy to spot when 2014 handle  
numbers for the Santa Anita and Los Al Thoroughbred  
meets are compared to 2014 handle numbers at Belmont  
and Aqueduct.

These numbers suggest that insisting on 22.68% takeout  
for two-horse bets is costing California tracks and  
horsemen tens of millions in revenue and lost purse  
money each year.

Something is clearly causing bettors to shun California's  
exacta pools.

If it isn't the takeout, what do you think it might be?