



Handicapping 101

Special thanks to the United
States Trotting Association



Betting to win, playing for fun!

- Being a handicapper (that's what you are when you place a bet) is really trying to guess or figure out what will happen during a harness race, and who will finish the race in front.
- It's easy, it's exciting, and it's fun. So c'mon...read on and we'll explain how to pick your winners.

How easy is it?

- To select your first horse, you can do the following:
- · Number a slip of paper for each number horse in a race.
- · Place the numbers in a hat.
- · Close eyes and pick one.
- · Place your bet on that horse.
- Congratulations! You're a handicapper. You'd be surprised how many people use a method like this to pick winners. If you leave your bet entirely to chance, you're as likely to hit a winner as not, even without knowing anything about horses. Betting horses can be that simple.

You don't have to use these slips of paper. You can throw darts or draw straws. Try numerology or your lucky number. Bet the horse's name that appeals to you most, or your favorite color. Picking horses at random can be fun, and it can produce winners. Or you can try and improve your chances by using these tools:

INTUITION

- Sometimes you're feeling lucky. **Go for it!** There's no way to predict the odds of success by this method.
- It's up to you and your lucky stars. Want better odds? Move on.



PICK THE FAVORITES

- About one of every three races is won by 'the favorite.' This is the horse on which the crowd bets the most money. By simply betting on favorites, you increase your odds of picking winners. Eighty to 90 horses will race in nine or 10 races each night, and there's only one favorite per race.
- Just knowing this gives you an advantage and should help you to pick about three winners a night. This is the easy method. To single out the six or seven winning horses in an evening that are not favorites, you'll need further study, a hot tip, or a nod from Lady Luck.

ASK THE EXPERTS

- If you don't want to study the horses yourself, there are plenty of folks willing to give you a little advice-for a price. It's only natural that the more an expert studies the horses and drivers the truer the tips will run.
- Good books, such as Jerry Connor's *Handicapping Beyond the Basics*, and magazines on harness racing can be found through the [USTA's Publications Department](#), or hang out and listen to the locals.
- Obviously, the more you know and learn, the more success you might expect to have at the betting windows.

How do you handicap a race?

- Although it may seem difficult at first, handicapping does not need not be a long and involved process.
- The first step is to purchase a daily program and look at each horse's past performance record.
- All the information you'll need is right there: where they raced, their times, who drove them and how they finished.
- Of course, none of this information will make any sense unless you read the page of the program that explains "How to Read The Program." Soon the numbers and the symbols will be easy to understand.

THE DRIVER FACTOR

- Drivers, much as other athletes, possess varying amounts of ability. Anyone in the sport knows that John Campbell, is among harness racing's greatest drivers, and many people bet the horses he drives just for that reason. The top drivers are easy to spot. Besides being listed among the leaders in the standings in the program, these are the reinsmen who are in the winner's circle the most often.
- They know how to best plan out a race, and know how and when to get their horse to give it's all. Racetracks keep track of how a driver is doing for you. Right next to his name, they list his statistics at this track. For example, near a horse Campbell drives, you might see some thing like this:

JOHN CAMPBELL (150) (04/08/55) wht-mar-blue (548-100-84-59-.304)

- This says Campbell, who weighs 150 pounds and was born April 8, 1955, wears white, maroon and blue colors. He has driven in 548 races this year, winning 100 of them, finishing second 84 times and finishing third 59 times.
- His "Universal Driver Rating," a number calculated like a batting average, is .304. Any number over .300 is considered excellent.
- Check the drivers in the race you're handicapping; find the horses being driven by drivers whose average is .300 and make note of them.

THE CONSISTENCY FACTOR

- Consistency is perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of the harness horse. Good horses are able to perform well week after week. Here in our program, we keep track of that, too. In the upper right-hand portion of each horse's past performances, we list the track where he won his the fastest mile of the year (and its size-5/8 of a mile, 1/2-mile etc.), the time of the fastest winning mile of the year, number of starts, wins, seconds, thirds, and money won for this year and last.
- If a horse has been 1-2-3 at least half of the time this year, that is the mark of a consistently strong horse. Take a note of that horse. Also take note if he's won at least one-third of his races this year.
- Remember, picking a horse that breaks stride often could be risky. Breaks are noted in the program with an "X" in the section marking the horse's position during the race.

THE CLASS FACTOR

- Class as the term is applied to horses, comes from one thing and one thing only: horses who can go faster and earn more money are said to be "classy." Better horses race for more money. That's why some races have higher purses. Thus, the purse will be our key to class. The purse for each race is shown on each past performance line.
- If tonight's purse is less than what a horse raced for last time, he's "dropping" in class; conversely, if the purse tonight is greater than he raced for last time, he's "moving up" in class. Horses dropping in class have an advantage, so find those horses in the program and add them to your list of one's to watch.

THE POST POSITION FACTOR

- While it's true that "It's not where you start, but where you finish" applies to harness racing, post position is of great importance.
- Horses starting from the inside simply have less distance to travel. The key to post positions is identifying the horses who will benefit from being inside. Pay attention to horses in posts one through five.
- Pay special attention to the horses in posts one through five (inside post positions) who had been in higher post positions (six, seven, etc.) in their last start-they're going to have an easier time of it!

THE TIME FACTOR

- Since almost all harness races are conducted at a distance of one mile, Standardbreds can be compared by time. However, it is important to remember that there are many other factors involved, such as post position, the particular track and its condition, and whether the horse stayed on stride for the entire trip.
- Just because a horse won in 1:58 last week, he may have raced against classier (and thus faster) horses. In general, though, a horse who recently won a mile race in 1:58 should post a similar time tonight.
- It will help your handicapping to identify the three horses that posted the fastest final times in their most recent races.

THE FORM FACTOR

- Sharpness or current form is a term used to describe how well a horse has been performing. Watch the past performance records for trends. A horse that once was a star on the local circuit may show a series of poor outings. He may be worn out. On the other hand, a horse on the rise may be able to handle competition that was once far out of his reach.
- Sharpness can also be spotted on the track. Signs that a horse is indeed one to keep an eye on including his ability to overcome racing on the outside (a "parked out" trip), the skill to survive a tough battle on the lead, and the making up of much ground in the stretch.
- The park-out symbol (°), which appears in the program when a horse raced "outside" (with other horse between him and the rail), might tell us even more. Such park-out symbols, especially where they appear in winning or close efforts, are mighty signs of fitness. Horses who were parked-out in their last race, if they won or were within a length of the winner at the finish, may put forth a better showing next time

SUMMING UP

- It's that simple. After identifying these factors, it should be obvious that we'll want to bet on the horse who passes the majority of these "tests." After devoting a few moments to the most important handicapping factors, we've learned a lot.

Soon, you'll become more familiar with the horses and drivers; come to know more about the importance of the factors at your track; and be able to better figure times and class.

How are the races classified?

- **Conditioned Race:** A race where eligibility is based on age, sex, money won or races won
- **Claiming Race:** A race where any of the entrants may be claimed (purchased) for a specified amount.
- **Invitational, Preferred or Open:** A race for the fastest horses on the grounds. In Invitational and Preferred events, the racing secretary invites the top horses he wants for a particular race.
- **Breeders and Sires Stakes:** A race where horses are nominated to compete a year before the year of racing. The owners pay a nominating fee, along with a series of regular payments, to keep the horse eligible.

What to say at the betting window

- After you make your selection, go to any betting window to place your wager. Our friendly tellers will be glad to assist you if you have a question, but here's the usual method of stating your bet:
- Give the AMOUNT of the wager (\$2 minimum)
- The TYPE of bet, and the NUMBER or numbers (never the names) of your selections.
- For example:
- \$3 to win on number 5
- \$6 to show on number 7
- \$4 exacta, 3-2
- Remember, if you are betting a race simulcasted to your track, start off your wager by saying which track you are playing! And **ALWAYS** check your tickets before leaving the window. Even the best mutuel clerk can make a mistake.

Here is a quick look at types of bets.

- **Win:** You collect if your horse finishes first.
- **Place:** You collect if your horse finishes first or second.
- **Show:** You collect if your horse finishes first, second or third.

- **Daily Double:** You collect if you successfully select the winners of two consecutive specified races.

- **Exacta:** You collect if you successfully select the first two finishers in exact order.

- **Trifecta:** You collect if you successfully select the first three finishers in exact order.

- **Pick Three:** You collect if you successfully pick the winners of the three designated races included in the "Pick Three" program.

The best part: CASHING IN!

- If your horses came in--if you're a **WINNER**--you can take your ticket to any mutuel window. You can collect all of your winnings, and you can even bet some of your money back on the next race or future races.
- Simply hand your ticket back to the cashier and he or she will provide the payout.

Understanding the odds

- On the infield tote board, you will see the "win" odds for each horse in the race. These are updated frequently--every 45 seconds--to reflect the amount of money wagered on each horse in relation to all money wagered in the entire win pool.
- So, for a \$2 winning ticket on a 5 to 1 horse, you would receive about \$12. (\$5 + \$5 + your \$2 bet teach = \$12.)
- Actually, on a 5 to 1 horse, the minimum payoff would be \$12 and the maximum payoff would be \$13.80.
- When a horse is under 2-1, you will most likely see a further refinement in odds--examples are 9-5 and 8-5, among others. Using 8-5 as an example, this means that, for every \$5 bet, one would win about \$8 and get \$13 back. For a \$2 bet on a horse that is 8-5, the winner would receive about \$5.20. The only times you'll see such a refinement in odds is when a horse is 9-5, 8-5, 7-5, 6-5, 4-5, 3-5, 2-5 or 1-5.
- Once in a great while, you will see odds of 1-9 on the odds board. That is the lowest price a horse can appear on the tote board, although in actuality his price may be even lower.
- Similarly, when you see a horse at odds of "99," it means that the odds are 99 to 1 OR HIGHER. There aren't enough spaces on the tote board to go higher than "99."

Here are the payoff for the odds you're likely to see on the tote board:

- Payoffs for a \$2 Wager

ODDS	PAYOFF	ODDS	PAYOFF	ODDS	PAYOFFS
1-5	\$2.40	6-5	\$4.40	5-2	\$7.00
2-5	\$2.80	7-5	\$4.80	3-1	\$8.00
1-2	\$3.00	3-2	\$5.00	7-2	\$9.00
3-5	\$3.40	8-5	\$5.20	4-1	\$10.00
4-5	\$3.80	9-5	\$5.60	9-2	\$11.00
1-1	\$4.00	2-1	\$6.00	5-1	\$12.00

How the payoffs are figured

- One of the most often asked questions concerns how the payoffs are calculated. Here's how:
- The bettor calls his wager to a seller, who "punches" the numbers into an electronically controlled computerized tote machine. The bettor receives a ticket proving his wager and the "bet" is recorded and shown along with other bets on the tote board approximately every 45 seconds.
- When "they're off," the computer tote machines are locked by the State Steward so no additional bets can be made after the race has started. (Frequently, the tote board will change after the race has started, merely completing the final 45 second cycle and update of bets.)

What Now?

- Remember, picking a winner in each race is like solving a puzzle. What's the reward for all the hard work leading to our solution? A visit to the cashier!
- So now there's only one thing left to do: Head out to the tracks and start picking winners! **TIOGA DOWNS** and the **USTA** wish you the best of luck!

Good Luck!

Tioga Downs



Show up! Place Bets! WIN BIG!