# Q&A With Craig Milkowski of TimeformUS

Craig Milkowski is the head figure maker for TimeformUS, the recently released past performance product partnered with TVG and Betfair. Craig has a long history in the space through his published figures at Pacefigures.com and we thought we'd sit down and ask him about the fine art and science of figure making, and handicapping in general.

**Q:** How long have you been making figures and would you describe it a continual work in progress, i.e. you are always learning something new, or are you completely comfortable in where you are at as a figure maker?

**A:** I've been making figures since the early 80s, so about 30 years. For better or worse, I'm always trying to learn something new. I am comfortable with the figures I make, but I always think they can evolve into something better.

**Q:** Your performance figures and pace figures at Pacefigures.com always had a great reputation for predictive value and ROI. Are the TimeformUS figures similar to your previously published performance figures, or have you changed them in any way?

**A:** I think they are actually better. I now have a team to work with and the capability to study the figures, both strengths and weaknesses. We will build on the strengths and work on the weaknesses.

**Q:** TimeformUS figs use pace to help construct them. Can you talk a little bit about this? Is this why sometimes we see a horse who beat another horse have a lower TimeformUS figure than the runner up in the same race?

**A:** Our figures are still largely based on final time, but we use what we like to call "pace infusion". We like to show how the pace part of the trip might have influenced final time. A frontrunner dueling through a fast pace will get some extra credit, while one on the lead in a slow paced route will not, and perhaps even get a slight penalty. Another example is that closers on turf can get some extra credit in turf routes when the pace is slow--as long as they are actually passing horses. All of the infusion is based on surface, distance, and the pace of the race in relation to final time.

**Q:** For past users of your program, your pace figures were published, and were quite good at deciphering a pace scenario and race contentiousness. Are there plans to publish those pace figures at Timeform? Does the "Pace Projector" currently reflect these pace figures?

**A:** The pace figures for both the races and each horse will be available in the Deluxe version of the past performances, which are coming soon. The TimeformUS Pace Projector reflects a rating from the old program, the overall early speed rating. It looks at the last five races each horse has run, both the speed they displayed and the position they held, and formulates one number. The adjusted fractions that are available in the regular PPs also show the speed each horse displayed.

**Q:** How do you create your "Spotlight Figures?"

**A:** Spotlight Figs are based on the Speed Figures and look for the race in each horse's last three that most closely matches today's surface/distance combination.

**Q:** Come the Breeders Cup, should we see many European invaders, one may think there may be an edge for players because the TimeformUS figs should match up with the Timeform UK figures, being made on the same scale.

Through your data mining and due diligence with both, are

you comfortable with the US versus European Timeform figures in terms of head to head match ups?

**A:** I am very comfortable using the figures of European invaders in comparison to ours. We've seen plenty of examples on a smaller scale already. Timeform is very protective of their brand, and they are comfortable with the numbers. Their numbers are made using different methods, but we think they accomplish the same goal-- measuring race performance accurately--and they can be used for comparison.

**Q:** Clearly a good speed figure has great predictive value, with an ROI boost when compared to betting a favorite or a top final time at today's distance and surface. However, as with anything we do as handicappers, there is more to the story – we need to find ROI. Can you take us through your selection process while using a top TimeformUS Fig, and how you may try to up your ROI on a top figure selection?

**A:** I personally am not a "bet the top fig" kind of guy. I am more of a pattern guy, looking for horses improving and declining in form. When I make figures, I don't concentrate on gearing them towards just a healthy ROI. I could probably approach break even or better if that was the goal, but the win percentage would decline at the same time. The goal of our figures is to tell the handicapper how fast a horse ran each time he stepped on the track, and for the handicapper to use that information to find good bets.

There are lots more tools available to our customers than just the figures. There are some innovative trainer and breeding ratings, lifetime PPs, and so much more. I bet I haven't even found everything myself!

**Q:** A great many handicappers and fans have lamented the lack of true talent at a distance nowadays. In your experience have horses gotten slower at 9 furlongs or more the last decade? Have there been any major changes in speed that you've seen in talent levels as foal crops get smaller, or as (is rumored) track superintendents try and make a safer surface, which might involve slowing the horses down? As well, with so few races on a given day at 9 furlongs or more, how tough is it to be confident of your final figure in those races in the first place? Easier or harder than years ago?

**A:** One goal of speed figures is to be able to equate performances at different distances. I think some other prominent figures I have seen have lost touch with that goal. I monitor how fast the best horses (G1, older males and females) run all the distances under G1 conditions. So, if horses are getting slower, I adjust the scale to bring them back in line. I do the same thing on different surfaces. To answer your questions, since I have made adjustments to

longer races, the horses are actually getting slower at longer distances in my opinion.

**Q:** Varying runup distances/times and less than stellar timing in general have been a concern for HANA and its members for a long while. How do you feel about the current state of timing in Thoroughbred racing and what can be done to improve it, in your opinion?

**A:** The mistiming of races is a lot more prevalent than people realize. Timing is better at some tracks than others. There are also plenty of times where the timer works, but the data is entered improperly into the system and winds up incorrect in the PPs. There are two things racing should do that would eliminate nearly all timing errors. The first one is to move to Trakus type timing systems. The technology in use today is woefully out of date and prone to errors. The second thing is to just get rid of run up. It is a terrible idea in racing, one that no other place I'm aware of is using There is no reason not to give the exact distance of a race and the time it takes to run from gate to wire. I could write a 10 page report on the pitfalls of run up, so I'll stop now. Look for something on our blog in the future.

**Q:** What does the future hold at TimeformUS? Are you working on anything you can share?

**A:** One thing I can promise is TimeformUS will not become complacent. We are embracing modern technology and using it to our advantage. As mentioned earlier, full pace figures are coming soon, as are additions to comments on days when front runners either dominated or struggled. We aren't going to get into declaring biases, but the info will be there for people wanting to dig deeper. There is a lot more to come, but I don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves.

**Q:** Not forgetting your loyal customer base at Pacefigures, especially since many of them are HANA members, what kind of feedback have you gotten from them now that you are at TimeformUS? Do you find they are comfortable with the switch and have they been supportive?

**A:** All of my customers have been very supportive of the move. That said, there are some reservations and some things people are used to having that they don't have now. Many have been involved as beta testers for some time and had some input before launch. We do listen to ALL customer feedback while at the same time keeping our goals in mind…making playing the races modernized, faster, and more fun.

# The Battle of the Aggregators

## Ten Questions With…

**Ray Paulick of the Paulick Report**

1.  Age you made your first bet (if worried about legalities we're okay with "18") - 23
2.  Favorite Racetrack to visit – Longchamp
3.  Favorite Racetrack to wager on - Del Mar
4.  What % are you a "fan" and what % "horseplayer" (must total 100) - 85% fan /15% horseplayer
5.  If you are down to your last $2 and you have to wager it on a grade one race, what trainer do you want your money on?  Christophe Clement
6.  Most quotable trainer you've ever encountered - Louis Roussel
7.  First word or words that come into your mind when I say "horse racing"- stimulating
8.  Exchange wagering, yay or nay?  Doubt I'll be a participant. I'm too slow to make decisions. I like 30 minutes between races.
9.  The Breeders Cup reversal on race day lasix for two year olds was _____?  extremely disappointing.
10.  8.5 furlongs, fast track, Secretariat or Spectacular Bid? Spectacular Bid

## Ten Questions With…

**Seth Merrow of Equidaily and Capital OTB**

1.  Age you made your first bet (if worried about legalities we're okay with "18") - Uh, yeah, "18".
2.  Favorite Racetrack to visit- Saratoga, but frankly I always have fun at the racetrack - any racetrack.
3.  Favorite Racetrack to wager on – Saratoga, but again, I enjoy the mind-puzzle of handicapping and wagering - so I enjoy it regardless of the venue. Heck, I enjoy betting at the dog tracks when I visit Florida!
4.  What % are you a "fan" and what % "horseplayer" (must total 100) - Tough question to answer - I'd say I'm more "horseplayer" than "fan" -- but it really depends on the situation. Watching Rachel Alexandra come down the stretch in the Woodward and feeling the Saratoga grandstand shake under the passionate screams of 31K+ fans - I was 100% "fan".  So - when there's a "story" involved - a horse or a personality that brings something extra to that particular race, I'm probably more of a "fan". But typically I would probably say I'm about 70/30 "horseplayer".
5.  If you are down to your last $2 and you have to wager it on a grade one race, what trainer do you want your money on?  Allen Jerkens. If it's my last $2 I want a guy who can get it done - but might float a little bit under the radar, so I can get a price.
6.  Most quotable trainer you've ever encountered Eric Guillot was certainly colorful at Saratoga this season (if Moreno had won the Travers would past performance providers have had to come up with a notation for "voodoo"?) - but I guess I'd go with Wayne Lukas as quotable - in his recent role as kind of an elder statesman for the sport.
7.  First word or words that come into your mind when I say "horse racing"- Fun.
8.  Exchange wagering, yay or nay?  Nay. I love the concept of fixed odds - but let's find some way of making that a reality without introducing the possibility of people making money when a horse loses.
9.  The Breeders Cup reversal on race day lasix for two year olds was _____? OK with me. I'll let the owners, trainer and breeders fight that one out.
10.  8.5 furlongs, fast track, Secretariat or Spectacular Bid? Dead-heat?

# Handicapping: Psychology

## Work, Life, Handicapping Balance

*By Jerod Dinkin*

As a father of two little ones, in a two person working household, with a job that requires a fair bit of travel; free time is at a premium. In my own experience, this game requires a huge time commitment to be effective. Even with the aid of a sophisticated handicapping software provider, time is the single most key ingredient to successful play. Perhaps this is not the case for others, but my best results have been in years where free time was abundant.

I'm sure many of you out there in Handicapping Land are in a similar situation in one form or another. I've found myself quite frustrated over my recent handicapping results, but only have myself to blame as no one is putting a gun to my head and placing these losing bets. No matter the reason for a losing run (time constraints or other distractions, bad handicapping, poor ticket construction, swings in short term luck, etc.), the bottom line is that the individual is in charge of their own destiny. If you blame any third party, it's unhealthy and will lead to more losing. A bad ride, a nose bob, a tough trip – these are all short term uncontrollable events. This tends to even out in the long run one way or another.

One of the most appealing aspects of handicapping is the thrill of hitting a big ticket as the financial rewards are coupled with the satisfaction of being right. Most handicappers I've come across have an inherent competitive streak, which is of paramount importance. While that drive is key, the rush associated with it can also lead to addictive behaviors and/or poor habits. We constantly must fight the urge to put money through the windows/ADWs arbitrarily, without thinking it through, and that's where I find myself. I'm so inherently competitive that I expect to win regardless of extemporaneous factors. In retrospect, in between taking the kids to gymnastics, soccer, and music class, putting down that bet on the second at Saratoga is a losing proposition, but my competitiveness hinders that poor short term decision to make a bet. The combination of less time, forcing too many bets, poor ticket construction, and countless other points are impeding good decision making.

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One of the biggest detriments to better results can be boiled down to our own psyche. Too many horseplayers fail to recognize their own limitations, whether by lack of knowledge, lack of introspective thought, or some combination of the two, and waste an incredible amount of time repeating mistakes. That is, we have too much ego to admit failings or not enough collective knowledge to overcome them. Even if we spend countless hours playing the game, we fail to learn about ourselves along the way, and in turn, allow certain personality traits to inhibit success. I've learned I need time and concentration to be successful, and without it, I'm a losing player. Each of us, with rare exception, fall victim to ourselves in one manner or another.

No matter what your specific situation might be, think about what factors outside of the actual fundamentals themselves lead you to handicapping success. I know I need time, time, and more time and will endeavor to only place a bet with ample legwork completed. Each player should objectively look in the mirror, study their carefully complied records, look at the bankroll, and truly assess what makes you successful. More importantly, understand what makes your life as complete as possible and where your handicapping fits into it.

Be honest with yourself, relish your life, and enjoy your handicapping.

Good luck and good racing.

# When's A Super Trainer Not So Super?

In this month's Super Trainer Spotlight, we'll have a look at super trainer Jamie Ness.

Jamie Ness is pretty super. He's won with over 26% of his starters and has over 150 wins. He's good with sprinters and with routers. He's good on turf and good on dirt. But in some instances he's not so good. When is Jamie Ness not so super?

Wheeling back a horse within 15 days in 2013 and leaving him or her in the same class Jamie is 7 for 40, for an ROI of 0.395. Out of those 40 starters, if his charge's odds are over 2-1, not so super Jamie Ness is 1 for 19 for a 0.261 ROI.

Not so super Jamie Ness does not seem to do too well in 2013 when he drops a horse and is not bet. For horses he sends out at over 9-2, dropping in class, he is 0 for 26 for an ROI of, well, zero.

If you'd like to make a Super Trainer suggestion for the next Horseplayer Monthly, please email us at info@hanaweb.org and we'll be happy to analyze your Super Trainer choice.

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## Handicapping: The Math Behind The Bet

*Brought to you by [Horseplayersbet.com](Horseplayersbet.com)*



Intuitively, if you make bets into a pool that offers a lower takeout, you would expect to do better in the long run. But when we are dealing with win bets versus multi-leg or other exotic bets, this is not the case.

I wanted to devise a way to prove without a doubt that a gambler should expect a better return on daily doubles over the parlaying of two consecutive winners. I think I've found the way using a very simple example.

In my example, there are four horses in 2 consecutive races and each horse has attracted the exact same money bet on them, and each daily double combination has also attracted the same exact money bet on them as well. Each pool has also attracted exactly $10,000 bet.

In the win pool, $2,500 has been bet on each horse.

The total amount the track will payout is $8,400 (taking the 16% or $1,600 the track takes out). 8,400 divided by 2,500 equals 3.36, which means the odds on each horse will show up as 2-1, but the payoff odds would be 2.35-1.

Without breakage it would be 2.36-1, and jurisdictions where they pay off to the dime instead of the nickel, the payoff would be 2.30-1.

So for a $20 win bet, you would get back $67.

Now if you parlayed the $67 onto the winner of the second race, you would get back $224.40 (actually $224.45 without breakage, but even if you could parlay without breakage, you would be parlaying $67.20 onto a horse that paid $6.72, you would get back $225.79)

Now for the Daily Double. There are 16 combinations, which means that there is $625 bet on each combination. The track will pay out only $8,000 ($10,000 minus the 20% takeout). 8,000 divided by 625 equals 12.8, which means that each daily double has a probable payoff of $25.60. So if you took a $20 daily double, you would get back $256.00. $256.00 is more than 13% higher what you would get by parlaying both horses breakage or no breakage.

It is like magic.

Let's see what would happen if you took a $20 wheel

versus an $80 straight be in the first race.

You would get back $256.00 for your daily double bet, but you would get back $268 if you bet the $80 to win (4.6% higher than the daily double return).

Confusing? You bet.

Regarding daily doubles, generally you can get better than the 13% overlay if you stay away from program picks or newspaper selected doubles. Another time you could expect an underlay is when one or more of the horses wins at over 20-1 and the pools are on the small side.

## Handicapping: Money Management

### Three Reasons to Play with a Proper Betting Bankroll

*By Dean Towers*

Many years ago when I started playing racing in a serious fashion, one of the most difficult things to do was manage a bankroll.

I remember as a student working the summer at a meat packing plant. I'd be in at 7AM and out at 3:30, head home on the subway (while reading the past performances); getting ready for an evening of racing. I was making okay money at the union job, but I was also using that to bet. I'd walk into the track with my $50 or so, and that was my bankroll, my food money, hell, it was my subway money for the next morning. Managing $50 and betting in any type of optimal way was impossible.

What would continually end up happening was me making a run to the ATM, when there was no money in the ATM. It made racing completely frustrating. I was picking great horses, but I was broke all the time.

One day I entered the track after a day of work and made a nice score. I got lucky on a horse I had been following and I made upwards of $6,000. At that point, after I paid debts, set aside $2,000 for tuition and books and another $2,000 for regular living, I had about a $1,500 bankroll specifically for horse racing. Playing with that bankroll was a blessing. It was the first time I ever had one, and betting properly (I knew how to bet properly, I just never could put it into practice), was something I knew needed to be done.

My betting life that year was much different. I knew I could bet $30 to win on something I liked, because $30 was not out of my rent money, it was 2% of my betting bankroll.

I could take a pick 4 for $24, because it made sense to.

Every handicapping book you'll ever read talks about playing with a bankroll that is not money in which you need to live. It's set aside money, entertainment money, money you don't need. Those books and authors were not blowing smoke; they were completely and unequivocally right on.

In this day and age (if you are a weekend warrior or thrice a week player) there is no excuse for not playing with a bankroll. ADW's are built for it and they are an amazing tool. They keep score for you, show you what bets you are good and bad at, and allow you to calculate bet sizing accordingly. Playing with a bankroll in them (or with a players rewards card on track) is welcome.

**Why is playing with a bankroll so important?**

**It Gives You a Starting Point**

Instead of walking into the track with $100 and hoping to hit something by betting $10 WP and $24 in supers in the first race (44% of your bankroll), then reloading at the ATM, think of how much better it is if one walks in with $1,000 you saved up to play. $44 out of $1,000 is 4.4% (still too high a bet size if you are betting anything longer than non-chalk) but it takes the pressure off. If you get beat, you have upwards of 96% of your bankroll left.

$1,000 might sound like a lot of money and for many people it is, but think to yourself how many times this meet you reloaded. I bet for a lot of people it totals way over $1,000. You're starting bankroll on a Tuesday is always bigger than it really is. You're much better off starting with $1,000 and working from it.

**It Changes Your Thinking About Gambling**

When you play with a proper bankroll, and bet size right, it allows you to think of your money not as money, but as a way of keeping score. Over time you will change from thinking this money is money that's lost (horse racing is hard, and most people think if they bring $100 to the track it's gone), to money that has some return. If you have $1,000 as a bankroll and roll it over 8 times, you bet $8,000 and you are (unless you are betting one trillion to one shots) going to get something back. In the long run, if you bet win only with any skill whatsoever, your $1,000 should

only lose the rake, or end up at $750 or so. It's not lost money and knowing this allows you to bet with more professionalism.

**If You Win, It Frees Your Mind**

When you play with a bankroll and win, say, 5% over a long period of time, you learn your edge. Knowing you have an edge's importance cannot be understated. Not only does it help you bet size better, when you lose by a jock strangling a speed horse, get knocked out in an inquiry, get beaten by three noses in a row, you know in the long run you are going to win. This frees your mind from the thoughts that befall 98% of horseplayers: The seeds of doubt, the frustration, the bad feelings, the overbetting, the going on tilt - those things get slowly put on the backburner. You start to care less about the instances, because you know in the long run things will work out.

Playing for a long time also makes you a better player. You bet better, you get better. You learn to maximize that edge and you put in the work needed to increase that edge. A consistent betting bankroll, even with a small edge, can mean the world to you as a horseplayer.

Horse racing is a brutally difficult game. If we do not set the table to be a good player, we will never become a good player. Making sure one has a proper bankroll, and managing that bankroll correctly can add to your enjoyment. And who knows, at the end of the year you might have more money than you started with.

# Looking Back on Arlington Million Day

*By Scott Raymond*
*Brought to you by Bonus4wager.com*

Scott Raymond is a writer, a researcher, and a loyal follower of Arlington Park. We find Scott's passion for the game as a younger fan and newer horseplayer quite infectious. We hope you enjoy his synopsis of his Arlington Million Day. Scott can be found on Twitter at @onehorsestable and online at www.onehorsestable.com

I'm just a young horseplayer who loves this industry and writes and tweets about it regularly. This article will be a reflection on my Arlington Million Day- and specifically how two handicapping tools- and some luck- came together to make for an enjoyable day.

Arlington Million day was the perfect combination of a great race card at my favorite track coupled with two handicapping tools that I found very helpful. For almost a decade Arlington has been my main focus as a horseplayer. Since the start of the calendar year, I made the switch from DRF past performances to Brisnet. Early this spring I also began experimenting with a new advanced deposit wagering platform called Bonus4wager. Last Saturday, while playing my favorite track on its biggest day, I had an experience that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi would describe as "flow" or being "in the zone" as others may say. But I don't want to write about the triumphs of this past Saturday but rather how I used a Brisnet product and Bonus4wager to have my most enjoyable day of the summer.

As a loyal follower of Arlington Park my focus and my bankroll are naturally geared toward Arlington Million Day. My preparation began once the past performances were released, and an e-mail from Brisnet made me aware of a product I was not familiar with. Mark Johnson's Spotlight Selections was a $10 purchase. For my biggest day of the year, I needed all the handicapping help I could get. The Churchill Downs race caller has the experience and the knowledge of handicapping European horses that would be vital for Million Day. I liked Johnson in the way that most people find him likable and informative. And who hasn't desired to have a British accent like his? But I didn't realize this would be one of the best handicapping products I had ever purchased.

I have happily purchased Bruno With The Works, Brisnet

Track Stats, and a variety of products Brisnet makes available. Let me state that the Mark Johnson product was the best product I have ever purchased from Brisnet or from any other handicapping site. If I had lost my entire bankroll on Million Day, I would still be writing the same thing. The insight and analysis were beneficial, and Johnson has a keen mind for how races will unfold. In fact, driving to the Canterbury Park simulcast center for Million Day, I reflected on how enjoyable the process had been of handicapping the card and formulating my all-stakes pick four ticket for races 7-10. While preparing, it felt as if I was sitting next to Mark Johnson in the booth breaking down the races with him- me with my iPad and my stylus and Johnson with his British accent and quirky sayings. Seeing how an experienced international handicapper was breaking down the races- through ten pages of detailed analysis- was beneficial for a young, eager horseplayer like me.

I toyed with the idea of playing a jackpot pick 9 ticket simply because the carryover was in the $140,000 range. Though I passed on the large carryover, it set the stage for my focus to be squarely on races 4-12 for the day. Remembering the advice of Steve Davidowitz, I arrived at the track early for the big day. I claimed my usual spot, noted the scratches, and watched the first three races to see how the track was handling that day.



One of the features I like the best about Bonus4wager is a rating score available on one of their VIP platforms. Bear in mind this is only one of their three specific wagering platforms but clearly my favorite, as I am primarily a win bettor. The rating score uses a number of factors to help highlight not the most likely winner, but the best wager- the best value play. It helps you understand the pools and see if a horse is being overbet, played heavily in exactas, or simply not taking much money. The top two horses have their rating score highlighted in red, and this of course

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fluctuates as money goes into the pools. Remember the words of CX Wong, "We are not seeking the horses with the best chances, but the horses with the highest expected values." And big days, like Arlington Million Day, are days to get great value for your betting dollar.

As race four approached, my focus sharpened, but my first serious play didn't come until race 6. I'm Already Sexy had run in a stakes races at Canterbury which I had watched live at Canterbury Park and lost money on. This horse had a nightmare trip last out, and I liked her in this spot at Arlington. Going from Scott Stevens at Canterbury Park to Florent Geroux was a big step up. The horse ran a bullet workout coming out of the Canterbury race for trainer Wayne Catalano.

Mark Johnson and many others were picking My Option, but I knew too much about the troubled trip to ignore I'm Already Sexy. Johnson's analysis mentioned that he thought I'm Already Sexy a better play than the other Catalano horse (Bold Kitten). Johnson wrote, "but in this scenario, I'm Already Sexy makes a little more appeal because arguably she has slightly better back class."

That gave me the added confidence I needed, and I placed a win bet on I'm Already Sexy. When the Bonus4wager platform highlighted Bold Kitten as a huge overlay in the race, I made an uncharacteristic exacta play of 5/3. The win paid $14.20 and the exacta paid $86.20 when I'm Already Sexy came in first followed by Bold Kitten. A good start heading into the all-stakes, guaranteed pool pick four.

Mark Johnson's analysis was key in helping me put together my pick four ticket. For the Festival mid-pick four, I started off with the obvious Dandino and Wigmore Hall. Johnson wrote about these two European horses in his analysis, and the only American horse Johnson liked was the one I wanted to take a shot on as well- Najjaar. Trainer Danny Pietz pulled off a nice win on Million Preview Day with Ausus, and I thought he could do the same with Najjaar. James Graham got the call, and I liked having a local horse and local jockey in my three deep. A Najjaar victory would have been better for the pick 4 results, but alas he was the third best horse despite a great run. But with the Dandino win, I survived the first leg.

Though I usually fall out of pick 4s in the third leg, I went deepest in the second leg on Million Day because of Johnson's advice. Referring to race 8 (the second leg), he wrote that "luck in running is likely to be more significant here than natural ability." Johnson was also the first to comment that the Euros were not a strong group in this race. I ended up being five deep with First Cornerstone, Admiral Kitten, Stormy Len, Draw Two, and Tattenham. Johnson thought Jack Milton was a bad favorite and he

went against Milton and Rydilluc. His selection, Admiral Kitten, didn't need much convincing from me. I won big on General Election in the Arlington Classic when jockey Joe Rocco skimmed the rail and won, but Admiral Kitten was a hard charging second that day. This horse also went wide but closed hard for another second place finish on Million Preview Day. And with Rosie Napravnik aboard, Admiral Kitten was my "A" pick.

Despite 13 horses in race eight, Bonus4wager consistently showed Admiral Kitten as the highest rated horse as the money poured in. So not only was this my selection and Mark Johnson's pick, but the rating score showed Admiral Kitten as the best betting value of the race. I made a nice win bet and cashed a $12.40 winning ticket thanks to Rosie's perfect ride. I am not an exacta player, but I had prepared so well for the pick 4 that I felt I had a good idea about how the race would play out. I put an exacta ticket together of the 5 (Admiral Kitten) with the four other horses I had in the pick 4 finishing second (5/4,10,12,13). When Stormy Len came in second, I had a $155.60 exacta which also matched Johnson's choice for the top two. And the pick four ticket was still alive.

I figured the fun would end in the third leg. In order to create some value, I had left Marketing Mix off my ticket. The total ticket cost was $45 for the 50 cent play and I went 3x5x2x3. Again giving credit to Mark Johnson's expert insight into the Euros, I thought Dank the better horse than Duntle. I left Marketing Mix out and liked Gifted Girl alot. So I was two deep with Euros Duntle and Gifted Girl, and I again placed a win bet once I saw Dank had the highest rating on the Bonus4wager VIP platform. Dank paid $8.40 and I was alive heading into the fourth leg of the pick four, but so was everyone else as the long shots were not winning thus far.

I had been radical in the last leg leaving off several choices because I thought their morning lines would drop too low. No Indy Point, no Grandeur (though that was Johnson's horse), no Little Mike, and no The Apache. I loved MDK and The Apache second off the layoff, but everyone was going on air and selecting The Apache so I thought it better to go in another direction. Guest of Honour, Hunter's Light, and Real Solution gave me three options to win the pick four. Mark Johnson liked Real Solution third in the form cycle for Chad Brown, and Johnson wrote, "it would be dangerous to leave this horse off your ticket." Thank you Mark. A winning ticket would be small, but I'll still take it for the $45 investment. I hedged my bets a little by placing win bets on The Apache and Grandeur. After all, I did like those horses, I just wanted to leave them off the ticket to keep the cost down and not go with the obvious horses.

*(continued on next page)*

8

Bonus4wager showed The Apache as the highest rated horse so not only did I place my win bet, but also copied my race 8 strategy and played an exacta with The Apache winning and the 1,3, or 9 coming in for second.

In the aftermath of the objection and the eventual DQ, I was in an enviable position. If The Apache stayed the winner, I had a nice win bet to cash and the 10/1 exacta. But if they reverse the finish, I win the world's smallest pick 4 at $206, but a win nonetheless. We all know how that ended up, and I was happy with either outcome.

Race 12 gave me one last winner. I liked Next Speaker having watched this horse on replay. Bonus4wager again showed this horse as the best value pick of the race as the money came in. And Rose Napravnik, one of the best jockeys in the business, was aboard. I closed the day with a confident win wager on Rosie and she obliged with another textbook ride and an $8.40 winner.

It certainly wasn't my biggest day as a horseplayer, but it was definitely the most enjoyable. With so many handicapping tools available in 2013, it felt great to have two excellent tools at my disposal- and to know how to use them. It's never one factor or one angle that will make you a winner. Rather it is the combination of your handicapping and your ability to discern information that will determine your success. On Million Day, at my favorite track, I saw the Mark Johnson product and the Bonus4wager VIP platform provide me with great handicapping information and help me sift through all the data to make plays of my own. And on this day, with a little racing luck, those plays turned out ok.

# 6 Things Every Slots Track Should Have

*Courtesy of the [Pullthepocket blog](#)*

Slots have been called the golden goose. The bandits have supplied racing with billions of dollars over the years; for purses, for profits, for just about anything. They are the Holy Grail. They turn "b" tracks worth practically nothing into real estate that's hotter than in Hong Kong. They're what every track strives for.

Over the years this cash has not been used as wisely as it should've been. In my opinion, the end user (bettor) was usually the one with the short end of the stick.

With that, here are a few items that would make that short end of the stick a little longer.

**1.** "The Mansion" - Each track should have a VIP area, with a dedicated gladhander for bettors who qualify and horse owners. Some tracks like Woodbine do this fairly well, but it should be a no-brainer and part of the budget for all slots customers on track and making sure they're taken care of can pay it back in a hurry.

**2.** Player Rewards Cards - I remember going to a casino in Vegas to play the races. I hate casino games, so it's all I did. Within one day my card had enough volume on it whereby the casino sent a racing form to my room in the morning without me asking. In the end my points ended up paying for my stay. I saw an ad for the Motor City Casino in Detroit last evening where they were giving out a free night's stay if you join and play for only one hour at the tables. Some slots tracks do this fairly well, but all have to.

**3.** Professional TV Pictures - If you turn on your simo screen sometimes you see grainy, ugly pictures. You think to yourself - this place must be a dump. When you visit the track the casino side looks like the Taj Mahal. 90% of handle comes from simulcast customers. Show them HD pictures, show them a professional cutting edge look. If you opened up a slot parlor you'd spend big money on your sign, do the same with the horse racing product.

**4.** Takeout - Some Kentucky tracks have 16% rakes in the win pool and 19% rakes for all other as a ceiling. There is no way in hell you, with slots, should have some rakes that can be close to a double of those non-slot tracks. In Australia it was mandated that no track could have a blended takeout of more than 16%. That did not mean they could not charge 25% on some hard to hit bets, which might be optimal, but in the end they could not go over 16%. To give players money back they had 0% takeout bets as a promo which generated millions in handle. Slot tracks need the same. It can grow the bet.

**5.** Trakus and Other Horseplayer Friendly Technology - Yep, Trakus is expensive, but with billions rolling in it's not that expensive. I'm sure your state could get some sort of package deal for it, and save some money. Things like this help you stand out, and gives the at home player an edge when enjoying your product. If you can afford an Abba cover band at the casino, you can afford Trakus.

**6.** A Portion of Slot Revenue From Purses and Profits are Held Back For Big Event Marketing - Right now slots deals are written like there are two customers, horsemen and tracks. There's an important third leg of that stool (which Ontario is learning about now): The customer. Bingo's spend upwards of 25% of their revenue on marketing, casino's about 20%. Horse racing spends less than 3%. (source HLN Advisors). Instead of 10% of total slot revenue going to horsemen and 10% to tracks like slot deals are written like everywhere, 9.5% go to each and 1% goes to the marketing of horse racing.

9

# The Reality of Fantasy Horse Racing

*By Mike Dorr*

Fantasy sports have been an enormously successful means of increasing fan engagement for the Big 3 professional sports organizations in the US: the NFL, the NBA and MLB. Fantasy baseball started the trend with the popularity of "Rotisserie" baseball, which has been around since 1980 (with a few predecessors), and I can remember playing a modified version as early as 1992 (I was 14). Fantasy football was the game that exploded the phenomenon, as its 4-month season with a weekly cadence, book-ended by a draft and playoffs, expanded its audience, being less time-intensive than its baseball counterpart.

Several racing industry organizations (the NTRA, Churchill Downs, the Breeders Cup, WinStar Farms, among others) have all launched and promoted "fantasy racing" games with the intention of attracting a new audience to the sport. I am not going out on a limb by saying that all these efforts that have thus far mostly failed to garner significant engagement from existing fans and have utterly failed in bringing fans of other fantasy sports to fantasy racing. This post's title buries the lede - the reality of fantasy horse racing is that it sucks.

## Successful fantasy sports games put the player in place of the owner.

For the most part, fantasy racing games fail because they replicate some other element of the sport, usually the handicapping and betting aspect. The current fantasy racing game being promoted is the Breeders Cup Fantasy Challenge; if you follow the link, you'll see that the BC challenge is basically a weeks-long handicapping contest that is free to enter. It utilizes a few successful elements of fantasy football - weeks-long competition, free to enter, form up leagues - but the basic premise remains "pick a winner".

The Churchill Down Road to the Roses contest tries to replicate the ownership experience somewhat by picking a stable of Derby contenders then earning points for their placing in Derby preps. The contest, however, almost infamously, spectacularly failed when one entrant picked Verrazano for all 6 spots in his stable, having an easy lead going into the Derby. Orb's win prevented any major egg on CDI's face, but still...

## Successful fantasy sports games put the player in place of the owner by recreating situations that owners face.

In my estimation, good fantasy sports games do three things well: create scarcity, create differential value, and create interactions between players. These are all constraints faced by, say, an NFL owner. Bud Adams (a Nashville resident, I'm a Titans' fan) can only employ 53 players, pay them a total of $123M, and can't try to offer a player under contract with another team more money to play for him. A good QB is worth more than a good kicker, and The Blind Side taught us the value of left tackles. Still, players can be released, picked up, and traded and NFL general managers are constantly on the phones with their colleagues as they assemble their team.

## Successful fantasy games create scarcity

In fantasy football, a player can play for only one team. A team can only have so many roster spots. A team can only start 1 or 2 players at each position.

I'm unaware of any fantasy racing game that actually prevents someone from picking a horse if it's already been picked. It's not really ownership if multiple people can "own" the same horse for purposes of a game.

## Successful fantasy games create differential value

In most fantasy sports, differential value is created via draft - the players that are drafted earlier have greater value than those drafted later. In a draft format, luck has a big role - if there are, say, three clear-cut top picks, whoever gets the top 3 draft slots has a huge advantage. The innovation in response to that is the auction draft, where each team has a fixed pool of funds out of which to bid on players. Draft order doesn't matter - if you want the top pick, you'll pay for him but at the expense of filling out the rest of your roster.

Again, most fantasy racing games make little attempt to make one horse more "expensive" to own than another, largely because there is no scarcity in the first place Successful fantasy games create interactions between players

The absolute best parts of fantasy football are, in order: the draft, the mid-week deals, the trash talk. Trying to improve your team is the essential element of the game, trying to win by acting as your own GM. A typical deal in FF might be a top wide-receiver and back-up running back for a top running back - the success or failure of a trade depends on the difference in opinion of value.

Have you ever traded/bought/sold/claimed a horse in a fantasy league? I think not.

Fantasy racing games simply do not capture the essential elements that make other fantasy sports compelling and fun. This is because they do not attempt to replicate, in any serious manner, the experience of owning and managing a racing stable.

But here's the great thing: They could. That'll be in next month's edition.

# Quick Hits

**Changes Proposed to Make California Racing Better, by You the Horseplayer**
Horseplayer Andy Asaro and others have released recommendations for California racing to grow.
They propose reducing breakage for the horseplayer, increasing payments from breakage to horse retirement and disabled jockey associations (to take care of the athletes we watch and bet on each day), and experimenting with lower takeouts. To read all the recommendations, please click here.

**Indulto Looks at Cary Fotias**
"Indulto," a long-time supporter of horseplayers, has been writing for John Pricci's Horse Race Insider. His "Players Up" column is a good weekly read, and he took a look at the career of Cary Fotias, who passed away recently. To read the article, please click here.

**Ontario judge rules public not defrauded in horse doping case**
Ontario tried to convict Standardbred horse trainer Derek Riesberry of fraud and cheating at play after he was found entering Windsor Raceway with a number of injectables. However, Ontario Superior Court Judge Steve Rogin found Riesberry not guilty and said, among other things, that "bettors are observers, not participants in horse races". To read more about this ruling, click here.
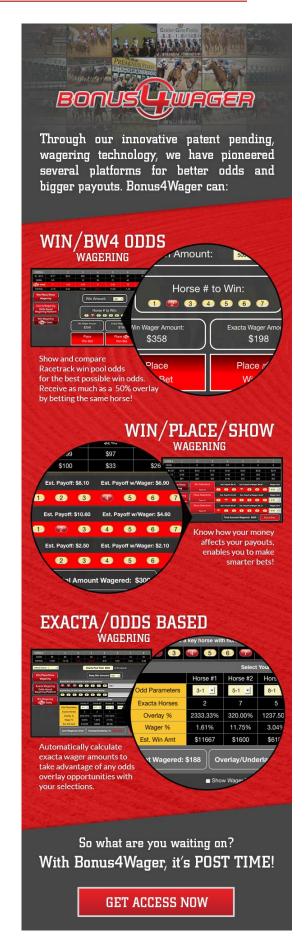
**DRF Story on New York 5-cent bet hike**
The *Daily Racing Form* reported on August 23 that "A law set to go into effect Jan. 1 in New York will require out-of-state account-wagering operators to pay a 5-cent fee for every dollar wagered through their operations by a New York resident, with the brunt of those fees going to their New York competitors." This news prompted reaction from HANA and Pullthepocket.

**Kentucky Downs Opens Meet with Some of the Lowest Takeouts Anywhere**
With low takeout rates and full fields of horses expected to compete in its lucrative races, Kentucky Downs will present enticing wagering opportunities during its 21st season of racing on Sept. 7, 11, 14, 18 and 25.

The $18.25% takeout on Exacta wagers on Kentucky Downs' races is the lowest in North America. The track will have a low 14% takeout on its new Pick 5 bet. The takeout on Win, Place and Show wagering is 16% and is 19% on the remaining exotic wagers. To read more about Kentucky Downs, including comments from HANA President Jeff Platt, click here.

# The Back Page

## Top Trainers With Favorites 2013

|  | PLAYS | WINS | PCT | IMPACT | ROI | PLACES | PCT | ROI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ASMUSSEN STEVEN M | 299 | 126 | 0.4214 | 1.1427 | 0.9527 | 181 | 0.6054 | 0.9239 |
| NESS JAMIE | 267 | 107 | 0.4007 | 1.0866 | 0.8693 | 145 | 0.5431 | 0.8047 |
| BROBERG KARL | 280 | 102 | 0.3643 | 0.9879 | 0.7971 | 162 | 0.5786 | 0.8657 |
| HOLLENDORFER JERRY | 226 | 99 | 0.4381 | 1.188 | 0.985 | 148 | 0.6549 | 0.9768 |
| MAKER MICHAEL J | 242 | 94 | 0.3884 | 1.0532 | 0.8936 | 143 | 0.5909 | 0.9143 |
| PLETCHER TODD A | 206 | 89 | 0.432 | 1.1715 | 0.9277 | 130 | 0.6311 | 0.9483 |
| AMOSS THOMAS M | 191 | 79 | 0.4136 | 1.1216 | 0.8492 | 120 | 0.6283 | 0.9178 |
| RICHARD CHRIS | 142 | 66 | 0.4648 | 1.2604 | 0.9387 | 101 | 0.7113 | 0.988 |
| BECKER SCOTT | 140 | 62 | 0.4429 | 1.201 | 0.9293 | 89 | 0.6357 | 0.9464 |
| MCMAHON HUGH I | 143 | 59 | 0.4126 | 1.1189 | 0.8944 | 94 | 0.6573 | 0.942 |
| JACOBSON DAVID | 147 | 58 | 0.3946 | 1.07 | 0.819 | 83 | 0.5646 | 0.7847 |
| RUNCO JEFF C | 135 | 57 | 0.4222 | 1.1449 | 0.8296 | 85 | 0.6296 | 0.8593 |
| BAFFERT BOB | 124 | 54 | 0.4355 | 1.1809 | 0.8944 | 84 | 0.6774 | 1.0097 |
| ENGLEHART CHRIS J | 129 | 53 | 0.4109 | 1.1142 | 0.7589 | 87 | 0.6744 | 0.9248 |
| EVANS JUSTIN R | 145 | 53 | 0.3655 | 0.9911 | 0.7621 | 87 | 0.6 | 0.8903 |

## Top Trainers With Longshots > 10-1 in 2013

|  | PLAYS | WINS | PCT | IMPACT | ROI | PLACES | PCT | ROI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KRAVETS BRUCE M | 123 | 10 | 0.0813 | 2.3838 | 1.5797 | 19 | 0.1545 | 0.9919 |
| BROBERG KARL | 72 | 8 | 0.1111 | 3.2576 | 1.4653 | 11 | 0.1528 | 1.0056 |
| LUKAS D WAYNE | 106 | 8 | 0.0755 | 2.2138 | 1.4858 | 15 | 0.1415 | 0.967 |
| MARTIN JOSEPH R | 101 | 8 | 0.0792 | 2.3223 | 1.5485 | 17 | 0.1683 | 1.2267 |
| LUCARELLI FRANK | 88 | 8 | 0.0909 | 2.6653 | 1.6034 | 17 | 0.1932 | 1.3239 |
| CHLEBORAD LYNN | 135 | 8 | 0.0593 | 1.7388 | 0.9081 | 18 | 0.1333 | 0.7015 |
| VANCE TERRY W | 89 | 7 | 0.0787 | 2.3076 | 1.3607 | 13 | 0.1461 | 1.0404 |
| RETANA GABE | 83 | 7 | 0.0843 | 2.4718 | 1.3386 | 12 | 0.1446 | 1.0313 |
| LAKE SCOTT A | 100 | 7 | 0.07 | 2.0525 | 1.001 | 13 | 0.13 | 0.597 |
| DORRIS CHRIS | 114 | 7 | 0.0614 | 1.8003 | 1.1842 | 14 | 0.1228 | 0.7982 |
| HOLLENDORFER JERRY | 97 | 7 | 0.0722 | 2.117 | 1.0804 | 10 | 0.1031 | 0.5433 |
| THOMAS LEE | 85 | 7 | 0.0824 | 2.4161 | 1.8471 | 13 | 0.1529 | 1.4529 |
| DELANY SARAH | 60 | 7 | 0.1167 | 3.4218 | 2.19 | 10 | 0.1667 | 1.1617 |
| MARR JOEL H | 51 | 7 | 0.1373 | 4.0258 | 2.2039 | 9 | 0.1765 | 1.0725 |
| TRACY JR RAY E | 116 | 7 | 0.0603 | 1.7681 | 1.2888 | 19 | 0.1638 | 0.9664 |