

Finding False Favorites

Let's get into the general horse handicapping factors that will point out weakness in bet crowd favorite. I'll group these factors under five headings:

- The ability of the trainer
- The ability of the jockey
- The ability of the horse
- The current form of the horse
- Miscellaneous factors

Trainer ability:

The obvious first "look" is to see if the trainer has any ability!

Trainers whose horses win at an over-all percentage of 6% or less are prime go-aga candidates. Winning across all odds at these low rates (assuming he has sent out r at least 20 races) means a bettor would really need about 14 or 15-1 on these guy's order to consider it a fair bet. How poor a wager then if his horse is going favored!

Don't use the horse handicapping factors in this article in isolation - any trainer can s horse capable of winning a given race - but let's set these low % trainers' runners as potential "false favorites."

Also, a trainer with more average looking over-all win figures - say 10-12% - can still weak in certain areas: turf races, 1st after a claim, 1st time starters, 1st after a lay-o You should look further into the trainers records - past just his cumulative totals.

Jockey ability:

I don't put as much emphasis here unless the jock is one of those so-called "no win" the circuit. If his or her record is extremely poor - say 4% or less (over 50 races), th demote any horse ridden by that jock.

Horse ability:

This handicapping category should, of course, get the most scrutiny. The BIG quest ask yourself is always: **Can this horse be expected to compete well enough to d favoritism in today's race?**

Very often the answer is "no" - from a resounding, "no way in hell" - to a not so sure not."

What should you look for in order to deftly place the horse somewhere in that range'

First - its par times / ability times / power, or pace ratings / etc.

If you use a computer program to crunch raw data into some type of final rating - and you have chosen a good and representative race from which to enter the data (that is, you've avoided the "garbage in - garbage out" problem) then any favorite that rates poorly in those numbers should be considered as a potentially weak favorite.

When a horse has shown that it can't or won't run to the pars, or pace demands of today's race - how could it possibly be considered for favoritism?

A response might be, "But what if they're all a bunch of nags and none of 'em can run?"

Okay - then you have what's been termed a "chaos" race - hard to figure, hard to handicap, and hard to predict. In that kind of race where every runner is weak, the favorite becomes a solid bet-against candidate if:

- It is inconsistent at today's level (very likely - if it can't run to par) - winning at a rate of 8 or 9% or less, or hasn't won in last 6 or 7 tries.
- It has a trainer or jockey of the type we've noted above.
- It just won its last race while not favored (and not running to par), and didn't then step up in class today.

Current Form:

A horse may have the potential ability, or back class to be able to trounce today's field - IF - it is at the point in its condition cycle that will allow a top performance.

Again, this is often not the case, yet maybe because it is a "high profile" horse with a top jock or trainer, and it has some sparkling performances in past races, it will go favored today regardless of its readiness.

A lot has been written and discussed - and used and abused - when it comes to identifying, and getting a handle on a horses' current form. Formerly, any kind of layoff of over a month for cheap to mid-level claimers was looked at in a negative way.

Racing has changed.

Horses can and are being given longer breaks away from racing - then coming back fresh and in condition to run well. William Scott published a couple of handicapping books in the early 80's that put forth some pretty good guidelines that still hold (more-or-less) today.

Here's a gross simplification of his extensive research . . .

A favorite (or any other horse) can be coming off a layoff - even one as long as 6 months - and still be legitimate if it has worked 5 furlongs within the last 14 days.

- If that workout is fast relative to the others recorded that day - even better.
- If the horse has had a string of evenly spaced works of whatever distance leading up to (or following) the 5f work within 14 days - even better.

Remember - none of these horse handicapping factors should be used in isolation. When looking at a favorite coming off a layoff, I'd also consider the trainer's record with layoffs. Some like to bring their horses back a bit slower - racing them into shape. Others just aren't adept at getting them ready to go at first asking.

Miscellaneous Factors:

Look with a skeptical eye at a horse that has done all his good racing at one track, and is at a different track today: If that track is on a lower circuit (with lower purses) the question becomes, "Why move to the lesser track if nothing is wrong?" If the new track is on a classier circuit, the question becomes, "Can he handle the new tougher company?"

Which isn't to say shippers can't win, and sometimes deserve to be favored - of course they can - but require "extra" evidence on these before considering them legit.

An older horse trying a higher class level for the first time should raise warning flags. Unless lightly raced, why hasn't this runner tried tougher company previously? Younger horses can blossom suddenly and climb rapidly up the class ladder, but older horses should have at least shown signs of being able to run competitively against the level of horses it's facing today.

Pace concerns are too complex to go into at any great length here - but here are a couple of thoughts:

- Consider for weak favorite status any horse that went wire-to-wire in its last against a slow early pace as a lone front runner - especially if it is likely to face a faster early pace and/or have pressure on the front today.
- Consider for weak favorite status any "deep closer" - those that like to dally through the first half of the race or longer, then try to mow them down in deep stretch. They most often fail.

They are at the mercy of the pace developments in the early part of the race. If a lone front runner scenario develops - and that lone f slows the pace down and has any ability at all, then the late runners' game is pretty much over. Lots of places and shows for this type.

So - work with these handicapping ideas, and any others you have about what makes a favorite vulnerable. Try to come up with a way of quantifying your approach. Turn it into a process - the results of which can be verified and then applied in a consistent way.

If you do this, and then only wager in races where you have identified a potentially false favorite - you'll put yourself squarely and firmly onto the path to race betting success.

As an example, here are the results from a recent 10 days of our own handicapping at the three highest purse value tracks we are currently betting; Gulfstream, Santa Anita, and Fairgrounds:

There were 86 bettable races (some were not bettable by the race elimination rules we use. In 45 of these races, our top-ranked horse was also favored - and of those 18 won for a 40% win rate.

In the 41 other races (where the favorite was ranked 2nd or worse), the favorite won only 7 times for a 17.1% win rate!

Overall then, the favorite won 25 times in the 86 races for a win rate of 29.1%. This is a little lower than average because we don't bet in straight Maiden races, most Graded Stakes races, races with fewer than 6 starters, nor any race where the low morning line horses are legitimate and look like stand outs.

I hope you can see the extremely advantageous position you will put yourself in when you only bet in races where you have handicapped the race favorite as being weaker than other contenders in the race.

The flat bet numbers on the top ranked horse in that series of false favorite races was delicious to say the least - as will be your betting results when you start to use this "secret" of race betting in a serious way.

