The Red Board
By Barry Meadow

"How could you miss that one?"

Who hasn't heard this at a racetrack—and who hasn't said this to themselves?

Redboarding probably began in ancient Rome. How could you not use Ben-Hur in the pick 3?

Yes, after a race is run, you can probably make a case for the winner. After all, he had the third-best power rating, he had a good Beyer four starts back, and the jockey-trainer win percentage was a strong 18%. So what? With just the slightest bit of effort, you can make a case for almost anyone in a race. Good back numbers? Trainer upgrade two back? Positive post switch? Fuel for the redboarder.

You'll find him front and center after every superfecta or pick 6. But here's the reality: You can't use every horse that has some positive angle, or you'll be going all in every leg. You have to make decisions. Sometimes you decide against using a horse because you just don't like him, sometimes because you think he'll be an underlay and destroy the value of the ticket, and sometimes because it would make your ticket too expensive.

For instance, let's say you have a ceiling of $500 for your pick 6 plays. To stay within your budget, you single the 6-5 favorite in one leg. He gets beat by the 5-2 second choice, which *of course* you would have used had you known he was going to win. You knew you were weak in that leg, and you also knew that the second choice was the most likely horse to beat you--yet you *still* couldn't use him.

Yes, sometimes you have to leave out Javier Castellano or Joel Rosario. Sometimes you have to leave out the horse with the best recent Beyer. Sometimes you have to leave out a horse even though he figures for a good trip.

Redboarders don't seem to understand this. Most of us who do this seriously assess the pluses and minuses of every horse in the race *before* the race, and we don't get surprised that much. If we use three horses in a pick 3 leg, it's not because we've forgotten about the other seven entrants. Maybe we've thrown out the favorite not because we thought he had no chance, but because he offered poor value. Maybe we singled a horse in the pick 4 because we wanted to go deep elsewhere, and why triple the cost by using the next two choices?

A typical comment of a redboarder after some big superfecta or pick 3 hits--"All you had to do was A and B, and you would have hit that giant payoff!" Thank you, Captain Obvious. Yes, sometimes you could have wheeled the favorite and cashed an $8,000 super, but that's not usually true. Every cockamamie idea is right every so often--but if you follow dopey strategies over a long period, you will eventually lose.

If a redboarder tells you something you *did* miss--the favorite had a poor workout pattern, his good races were at six furlongs but he had never done much at seven, the horse's regular jockey took off to ride someone else--the question is why did you miss it? You don't need to spend six hours handicapping a card, but you should certainly make some effort to answer the most important handicapping questions. Among them (and this is far from a complete list):

o What is the horse doing in this race? Is he in to win, for a prep, to get claimed, or for some other reason?

o Is he suited by the conditions? Is he eligible for easier spots? Is he being dropped suspiciously?

o Is he capable at this distance? If not, has he indicated he might like it? Or was there probably nothing in the condition book for what he likes?

o How does he do on this surface? If he hasn't tried it, is he bred for it? Has he worked over it?

o What numbers has he been running? If his numbers don't stack up, are there other indications (improved workouts, trainer changes, etc.) that might suggest he can improve, or can run back to good previous numbers?

o Is there reason to believe he's going to improve, or regress?   What's been his recent workout pattern, compared with usual? What about his time between races?

o Who's the trainer? Does he do well under these circumstances (layoff, first-time starter, etc.)? Is he using one of his regular go-to riders? Is his stable hot or cold?

o Who's riding the horse? Has the jockey had success with this horse in the past?

o What about the pace scenario? Have you considered everyone's running styles?

o Is there anything in his looks or demeanor on the track that suggest he's going to run better, or worse, than the form might indicate?

And those are just a few of the handicapping considerations, before you look at prices.

The main point--nothing should surprise you. When you make a bet, it should be based on your judgment about *everyone* in the race--and the odds. And if you do your work, you can safely ignore whatever the redboarders have to tell you, because you'll already know it.

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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, features a number of free handicapping articles.