

March 2015—Watching Replays

Have computer printouts made race-watching obsolete?

When I was playing full-time, I watched every replay from both northern and southern California, every day. I doubt I could have won without them. These days, though, many players handicap off printouts. A horse is simply a number, or a series of numbers.

Sure, these players can play more tracks, but does it mean they will make more money? For most bettors, I doubt it. They simply don't understand the nuances that old-school players who concentrated on just a track or two learned from dedicated replay-watching.

You can't watch the odd replay, or the partial replays shown on racing stations, and expect to learn much. To do it right requires time and attention. During each race, among your goals are to learn:

- o Who is in a surprising spot? To get to that spot, did the horse place himself or did it appear to be a deliberate choice by the jockey?
- o Are the horses in front dueling or relaxing? If two horses are battling into a 21.3 opening quarter, have they dueled from the outset or did one move to engage the other sometime during the quarter?
- o What are the fractions and have they helped or hurt certain horses?
- o Is anyone getting a particularly favorable trip (such as sitting behind three duelers, coasting on a lonely lead, saving ground while others go wide, etc.).
- o If horses are going wide, how wide are they? Are they wide for the entire turn or just a portion? Are they being gunned for a spot and being heavily whipped into a fast fraction, or are they simply being floated wide into a slow early fraction?
- o Are certain horses lugging out, drifting in, failing to change leads, or otherwise causing their own problems?
- o Which jocks are hard urging their horses, and for how long? Often you can find a first-time starter who's not asked to do anything until late.
- o Does there seem to be a track bias? If so, who has been on the good paths and who's been mired in the bad lanes?
- o In the stretch, does anyone lack a clear path? If so, for how long? When he gets out, does he show anything? Obvious trouble is often overbet and overrated.
- o What about the gallop-out? Are some horses full of run while others are fully spent?

Race watching is much more than noting who might have had a good or bad trip. Replay-watching will give you a sense of things—how the track is playing, which new jockeys look polished, whose second-place finish was much worse than looked, which horses seem game.

Do the work, and you just might reap the rewards.