

## **Caught In The Switches**

**By Barry Meadow**

One of the most difficult things to do in gambling is to stay consistent. All of us, big player and small, have had trouble with this from time to time.

We bet \$50 on one race. Then in the next race with a horse at the same odds and with the same perceived advantage, we bet \$200.

Or we play an exacta one way and it comes in reversed, so next time we box the exacta and we wind up halving our profit.

Or we bet to win and place, and the horse runs third. So next time we decide to bet win-place-show and the horse wins.

There are many reasons for getting caught in the switches, but usually it's about emotions. We're behind, so we start playing Longball or Bigbet to try to catch up. Or we've made a score, and now we try to take home the track (something no one as yet has done). Or we've had six losing days in a row so now we're afraid to bet our regular amounts. Or we've lost on three straight favorites and we're getting sick of them, so now we stab.

The likeliest switch time is when something bad has just happened, such as we narrowed a race to two horses, thought long about which one to play, then picked the wrong one. Or we were thinking about the 5-8 exacta but decided to pass, and it comes in for \$64. And sometimes the switch bug hits after we do cash but we didn't bet more or play in more pools to make a real score.

Hating ourselves is the natural outgrowth of switches. Compare the number of times you've heard a player say, "I won every dollar possible on that race," with the far more common "I would have won three times that amount if..."

All of this eventually comes down to asking why we're at the track in the first place. Wanting to win money was always my reason, though it's far from the only valid reason to attend (hang out with your friends, get out in the sunshine, have some excitement, enjoy a good restaurant, test your handicapping skills, love watching horses

compete, etc.).

If you want to win long term, you need a plan which will carry you through bad times as well as good. Nobody wins every bet, or even most bets. Sometimes you'll lose for weeks or months. And usually, one bet has little to do with another.

The way to avoid getting caught in the switches is to have a specific plan for the card. And every race is a bit different. A few scenarios:

**\* You like one horse but have no clear idea about who might run second.** Best to concentrate on getting your win price but also check the place and show pools to see if he's underbet there. Check the daily double prices as well.

**\* You like two horses only** but neither appears likely to go off at an overlaid price. Determine the exacta prices you need for each combination, and check your guys' daily double probables as well.

**\* You hate the favorite but have trouble separating your next four contenders.** You'll probably wind up in the exacta pool, so keep an eye on the possible payoffs. From time to time I've keyed the longest price of the four contenders with the other three up and back, playing various amounts.

**\* The race looks obvious with one strong favorite who's 4-5** and two logical contenders who are 7-2 and 4-1. This is probably *not* going to be a bettable race since the exactas figure to be short and there probably won't be any edge in the other pools.

**\* You've narrowed the race to the three favorites and a 20-1 shot.** You might look at the prices of the longshot to win, in both slots in the exacta with these three, and in the third spot in the trifecta with these three. You *don't* want to play place or show on your price horse because with the obvious horses coming in because your payoff will be nothing.

**\* You see a big pace battle with big pace casualties, and a good chance to find some plodder at the back doing damage late.** This might be a good time to box several closers in various pools, figuring that none of the front-runners will be around at the finish. I made decent money by betting proportionally in exactas (to smooth the results) in these types of races.

Before I would begin my racing day, I'd list my *possible* plays such as:

3:00 p.m. SA Race 5 #4 to win at 3-1 and

4-6 exacta if it's paying \$34 or more and

4-7 exacta if it's paying \$51 or more

By having a specific plan for each race, I avoided being tempted by desires to switch my plays or settle for bad prices.

The numbers were not set in concrete. Occasionally I'd change them due to late scratches, a perceived early-in-the-day bias, or a sudden downpour. But most of the time, if I needed 4-1 to play a particular horse in the morning, I still needed 4-1 to play him in the afternoon.

Many other players do not have specific numbers in mind when they go to the track. They handicap the card, know they've narrowed some race to four contenders, and then decide what to do by checking the board. However, by having such numbers it's a lot easier to avoid the temptation of slight underlays (as in, "I need 4-1, he's 7-2, why not?"). Every underlay you bet is one more bad bet which, long-term, hurts you.

Occasionally you'll have a day where you have three possible plays but all of them are bet below the numbers you want. Here's where you're tested. Do you settle for bad numbers because hey, maybe they'll win? Or do are you able to pass races when you don't get the price you wanted? And what may happen to your outlook when you skip all three and they all win?

It's easy to pass races when you've got eight first-time starters, or five horses are dropping four levels and you can't tell who's still able to run and who does not have the requisite number of legs. Being able to pass races when you *do* have an opinion is much tougher.

But until you can master this skill, you always risk getting caught in the switches. By waiting for your spots and for the prices you demand, you won't suffer the psychological (and financial) problems that befall so many players. You might lose, but at least you're going down with the horses you liked at the prices you wanted—which makes it much easier to regroup for tomorrow's action.