

## **Race Shapes and Pace Designations**

When reviewing each horse's recent races, a simple method of analyzing a race is to compare the second call with the finish. Using a set of par times for your own track at each class, you might note that a certain class typically runs a mile in 1:36.1 off a half-mile time of 46.4. A 1:36.1 race in which the leader goes 45.4 would be a fast-early race, while a 1:36.1 race off a 47.4 half would be a slow-early race.

All races can be looked at this way. Each of the two segments (first part and second part) can be considered slow, average, or fast. Thus we have nine possible race shapes:

<b>1st Segment</b>	<b>2nd Segment</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
slow	slow	bad race, neutral
slow	average	helps frontrunners
slow	fast	helps frontrunners
average	slow	neutral
average	average	neutral
average	fast	neutral
fast	slow	helps closers
fast	average	helps closers
fast	fast	good race, neutral

When looking at each entrant's recent races, breaking down the shape of each race can tell you several things, of which two are most important:

1. Has the horse been benefitting from helpful shapes?
2. Has the horse been forced to run against unfavorable shapes?

Let's say he's a front-running sprinter at a track where the average clockings for his class are 45 - 1:10.2. The last two times out he's been forced into duels at 44.3 and 44.2 and faded badly. If he's able to get away with a 45.3 next time, he might completely reverse his form at a good price.

Conversely, take a closing sprinter in a group that usually goes 45.2 - 1:11.4. The last two times out, the frontrunners were able to get away with 45.4 and 46 halves, taking

him out of his game. If he's entered with a bunch of speedballs who figure to go 44.3 to the half, he might be able to pick up the tiring speed at a hefty payoff.

My ideal bet is in a race where one horse has the opposite style from everyone else, has competitive final-time figures, and is not favored. Maybe he's a closer who needs help up front, hasn't gotten it the last four times, but today figures to benefit. Or he's a frontrunner who's been unable to get to the lead for various reasons lately, but today may get it all his own way.

Trainers and jockeys can read the Form too, and sometimes a race won't go according to plan because some of the entrants don't run their usual race. However, horses are creatures of habit. If a horse has had 17 lifetime starts and in 15 of them he's been first or second at the quarter, chances are he's not suddenly going to try his luck from eighth. Or if a horse has consistently found himself a dozen lengths off the lead at the half, don't look for him to turn into a speedball.

There are many ways to determine horse's typical styles, most of which are based not on a horse's speed figures or velocity ratings, but simply on his propensity for finding himself in particular spots during a race. Among them:

• ***Designate each horse with a running style based on his best performance in the pp's.*** Use a horse's wins first. If a horse shows no wins, pick a race where he finished second, and so on down the line. A possible set of designations:

***E (Early):*** A win in wire-to-wire fashion. The horse was on the lead the whole way and won.

***EP (Early Presser):*** A win in which the horse did not lead at the first quarter mile, but was within one length of the lead at that point (note that in routes, the first quarter mile takes place before the first call in the past performances).

***P (Presser):*** A win in which the horse was not within one length of the lead at the first quarter mile, but was within a length of the lead at the half mile.

***PS (Presser Sustained):*** A win in which the horse was not within one length of the lead at either the first quarter mile or the first half mile, but was within one length of the lead at the stretch call.

***S (Sustained):*** A win in which the horse was not within one length of the lead at the first quarter mile, the first half mile, or the stretch call.

• *Compare each horse's first-call positions with its finish positions.*

Does he normally gain ground or position (*G*), which marks him as a closer, or does he usually lose ground or position (*L*), which stamps him as a frontrunner? Total the results for some (six, eight, etc.) or all the horses' running lines (excluding any start in which a horse wound up in the same position at both the first call and the finish). Use running positions only, not lengths behind. Ignore fractional times, since a frontrunner will dart out for the lead whether anybody else is going out fast or not, and a closer will head for the rear no matter what's happening up front.

Considering their last eight races, some horses will show 8*G* and 0*L*, others 4*G* and 4*L*, and still others 0*G* and 8*L*. What you're looking for are races in which most entrants display a defined, always-followed strategy.

You should also count the number of times the horse was in the top three at the first call, since if a horse shows five races where he simply falls from sixth to seventh it's hard to think of him as a frontrunner. For illustrative purposes, here are the scores from a sample race, using each horse's last eight appearances:

<b>#1</b>	<b>G8, L0 (0)</b>
<b>#2</b>	<b>G3, L5 (5)</b>
<b>#3</b>	<b>G6, L2 (0)</b>
<b>#4</b>	<b>G5, L2 (0)</b>
<b>#5</b>	<b>G7, L1 (0)</b>
<b>#6</b>	<b>G7, L0 (1)</b>
<b>#7</b>	<b>G8, L0 (2)</b>

*G* indicates the number of starts in which the horse gained position from the first call to the final call

*L* indicates the number of starts in which the horse lost position from the first call to the final call

Number in parentheses indicates the number of times the horse reached the top three by the first call.

It appears likely that #2 will enjoy a tremendous early advantage. Only two other entrants show as many as a single race anywhere in their pp's in which they were in the top three at the first call—and both of those horses are strictly closers

(note the 7-0 and 8-0 totals of races in which they've gained positions from the first call to those in which they've lost positions).

The beauty of this method is that it's simple—all you have to do is tally the totals without any advanced math skills or interpretation or guesswork. At a glance, you can see who's likely to head for the front and who's likely to head for the back.

- ***Circle the first and/or second-call positions of each horse to see who's got a bunch of 1's and 2's and who's got mostly 7's and 8's.*** This quick, at-a-glance method is often sufficient to figure out who's going to the front. This is more effective than looking at the times of the quarters, because front-speed types have a way of getting to the front no matter what the fractions. And these fractions themselves vary tremendously depending on such factors as wind, moisture, track maintenance, amount of pressure from the other entrants, and other elements.

- ***Use the Quirin Speed Points system.*** First published in William Quirin's 1979 book *Winning At The Races*, the method involves selecting up to three races from the horse's most recent five races, then giving points for horses' positions at the first call, the number depending on the distance of today's race. Each horse winds up with a number from 0 to 8, with a 0-pointer extremely unlikely to be close to the early lead, while an 8-pointer projects to be the leader. Google "Quirin Speed Points system" for websites that show how to do the exact calculations.

- ***Use a style designation from a computer program or racing publication.*** Several of them have a column devoting to pace-preference projections, or assign a style to each entrant.

How much time you choose to spend on pace designations is up to you—but certainly you should spend *some* of your handicapping time trying to figure how a race might set up.