

Five Step Approach to the Match-Up

By

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The Match-Up Process:

A horse race is a matchup of horses running against each other from the starting gate to the wire. In learning to handicap a race, it is necessary that you understand that the race does not start at the half-mile, it starts when the gate opens. The race does not end at the second call, but at the wire.

The winner of a race will be determined by how the horse distributes his energy throughout the race, not whether one fraction is greater than the other. That is the reason that horses with the best final time do not always win.

To win the race it is essential that you understand all phases of the Match-Up. Once you understand each phase you must link them together to decide the outcome of the race. Here are the phases in order:

1. Mark the Match-Up Tandems.
2. Select the running style of all horses in the race.
3. Project today's pace.
4. Match running lines based on projected pace.
5. Match each horse against each other.

Make sure you understand each phase before moving to the next phase.

Tandems:

Tandem races are where horses, in their past races, have run against each other. The Tandem concept is a good indicator of how the horses will perform in today's race. The Tandem concept works best if the Tandem race was at today's track, at today's distance, but is viable for any race, anywhere in the past performances.

These are handicapping questions that should be taken into consideration:

1. Why did a horse win the last Tandem race?
2. Why did a horse lose the last Tandem race?

The Tandem procedure is one of the best methods available for locating today's contenders, and their pace lines. Based on their performance in the Tandem race many horses can be eliminated.

Here are a few guidelines for determining when to use Tandems:

1. Look at the Tandem race. If the winner's time for the Tandem was five fifths (1 full second) slower than today's pace at both the second call and the finish, then eliminate all of the horses in that Tandem.
2. If the Tandem horse in today's race was beaten five or more lengths at the finish, and did not gain at least five lengths (or positions) from the second call to the finish, or he was not in contention at the second call (1st, 2nd, 3rd, or within 5 lengths), he may be eliminated.
3. Determine the running style of the Tandem horses in today's race.
4. Why did a particular running style win in the last Tandem?
5. Will the same running style win today's race, or will a horse with a different running style prevail?
6. How many repeat winners are there at the track you are playing?
7. A horse that did not win in a Tandem may be a "Need to Lead Horse", and was unable to get the lead, but he may be able to get the lead in today's race.

The Tandem concept is a valuable tool, and should be used to increase your handicapping skills.

Running Styles:

When handicapping a horse race, determine the running style of each individual horse. These styles help to answer the important question; how is this race going to run? A race is a "herd on the move" and all horses are characterized by one of the following four (4) designations; Early Horse, Early Presser, Presser and Sustained Presser.

There are three main running styles that figure in a horse race. In most instances these styles are determined by the position where the horse likes to run, rather than how fast the horse runs.

1. EARLY - Is a runner whose very best races are on or near the lead, or within a length, while attempting to get the lead. A winning effort is accomplished only in this manner, and is usually a wire to wire effort.
2. PRESSER - Is a tactical runner that lies just off the pace, and then comes on in the second and third fractions. These horses may force the early horses to exert their energy to maintain the lead. These horses are usually up close to the early runners, but are not affected by the early pace.
 - A. Early Presser is a horse that takes dead aim at the leader but prefers someone else lead. They sit next to the leader, and hope that at some point in the race the front runner will tire so that they may go by. These horses do not lead, and if they get the lead, will not win. Early Pressers may put pressure on the early horse, but most likely, will never go by. In a herd environment, these horses are observed positioning themselves close to the early horse, or the "Boss," but are never brave enough to lead, or become the Boss.
 - B. Sustained Pressers are the most exciting of the running styles. The Sustained Presser likes to stay way behind and hopes that there is a fast pace and all the

Early, Early Pressers and Pressers have expended all their energy, and tire, so that their stretch run gets them to the front in time. In a herd, these horses will be observed lagging behind and are fair game to whatever is chasing the herd. Sustained Pressers are the least reliable of the running styles and rarely win races.

3. LATE (Sustained) - Is a runner that comes on late in the race, often after the early runners, and pressers have exerted all their energy. They are habitually in the back of the pack, and win by catching the leaders in the third fraction (3F).

Projecting Pace:

Pace is the Match-Up and through pace analysis and projecting the probable pace of today's race you can find the pace a horse can win against and the pace they fail against. Each horse's running line and running style will be matched against the others, fraction by fraction, to find the line to use in today's race.

The fractional times used are the first call, the quarter mile in sprints, and the half mile time in routes. The second call is the half mile in sprints, and the six-furlongs in routes. The third fraction is the difference between the second call and final time.

There are two ways to project pace:

1. First, decide the horse that is likely to take the lead. In picking the horse that is going to take the lead, find a horse that has truly been in the lead at the first call. In the event none of the horses definitely had the lead, use a time where a horse tried for the lead or was up close. Second, find a horse that was in the lead at the second call. Use the same procedure explained in finding the first call. Third, find a final time that matches the first two calls, and you have the projected pace of today's race. Never add beaten lengths to any of the fractional calls. Horses that do not match today's pace will have difficulty winning.
2. Find the horse that has run the best against the fastest pace in his last race, at today's track, and at today's distance. Tandem races are good races used in this procedure. If none of the horse has run at today's distance consider any fast sprint, or any fast route line. This horse is the pace horse that all the other horses will be matched against. This race from the pace horse will be used as the initial projected pace of today's race. All the other horses in the race must be able to run against this pace. Match every horse in the race, with the initial projected pace. Any horse that doesn't match today's pace will not be considered as a win contender.

Match Running Lines:

Pace line selection is one of the most important components in handicapping. If you can select the true running line, you can win most of your wagers. Remember, this is a horse race, and you must abnegate all prejudices to make the Match-Up work. The horses run the race, not the

jockeys or trainers. The track has very little influence on the outcome of the race. The winner of the race is how the contenders in today's race match up against the other horses in the race.

Sure, there are times that a horse may "wake up," and run better than he has ever run. A horse may take the lead that has never showed that he wants the lead. This is out of the blue behavior that can happen in horse racing, and will rarely be influenced by the trainer, jockey, or the track. In isolated cases these three components may decide the outcome of the race. If you insist on relying on these elements, it is impossible to learn the Match-Up.

In establishing the true contenders, and proper pace line, you need to make a complete analysis of all horses' past performances. The last race is very important and we should view this race in determining current form. We do not need to use this line, but do not readily forgive bad races. Learn to be flexible and decide what the horse can do against the other horses in this race. It is meaningless how a horse ran in his last good race, because it must face a totally new situation today. The horse has never faced this match up before, and will never run this race again. How is today's race going to run? How is this horse going to run?

Most of the time when you have found the true contenders you will have the winner in your top three or four horses. It is then necessary to eliminate horses that do not have a chance of being in the money. The more contenders you have, "picking" the winner will become more difficult.

The selection of the line that best predicts how the horse will run in today's race is the "key" in using the Match-Up. Look at the total past performance to decide the best line that matches the pace, and represents the running style of the horse in today's match up.

A unique way of picking running lines and contenders is to draw lines through races that do not represent the horse's ability. Draw the lines through the past performances of the horse. These lines are based on distance, surface condition and running style. In most instances the only lines left open are sprint lines, because today's distance is a sprint. We can use internal fractions in a route, but if we have a good sprint line we will use the sprint line. We want to know how the horse can perform in a sprint.

This gives us a clear picture of the horse's chances in the race. All horses are given lines, but we can readily see that very few are really contenders. Writing down the selected line is a good way to view the pace line match up and finding the winner. Later you will need to do this exercise mentally, so you can keep your form clean.

Match The Horses:

After you have learned the first four steps, it is now time for the “nitty gritty” of The Match-Up.

1. Apply the tandem concept and match each Tandem against today's pace. This procedure will eliminate slower horses and non-contenders. Pay close attention to Tandems at today's distance and today's track.
2. Apply today's projected pace and match each horse's running lines with each horse in the race. Horses that do not match up are eliminated. This procedure should get the field down to three or four true contenders. It is necessary to eliminate horses that do not have a chance of being in the money. The selection of the line that best predicts how the horse will run in today's race is the "key" in using the Match-Up. Look at the total past performance to decide the best line that matches the pace and represents the running style of the horses in today's match up. Match each horse's running style against each other: Early against Early, Presser against Presser, and Late (Sustained) against Late. Pick the best of the three styles. Now you have the fastest horses in today's race.
3. Now let's pick the winner of the race. Is the race going to run early, or other than early? This question is best answered by the running styles of the horses. Look at the early horses. Can the early horse go wire-to-wire? Can the early horse pass horses if they do not get the lead? To decide if an early horse can pass horses look at the position call before the first call. Remember, the race starts when the gate “pops.” If it is decided that the early horse cannot win; will a presser prevail? Check the pressers and see if they can run fast enough to pass tiring early horses; or did they exert their energy attempting to stay in the race? If the pressers have exerted their energy early: then and only then can the late horses win.

Until you feel comfortable in making the final decision use the computer program or try matching races after the fact.

That's All Folks