

Informed (and Enriched) with In-Form Handicapping

I was brutally honest with Jim Clark.

“If I lose money betting horses from your In-Form sheets,” I told him, “That’s what I’ll write in the story.”

Jim laughed.

“That’s fine,” he replied, “Come join me for lunch at the Woodbine Club.”

Clark is the President of Colio EstateWines, but it’s obvious the horses are his passion. He’s the Director of the In-Form Handicapping System and claims profitable, more consistent results than the better known Ragazin sheets.

The arrangement was that I would bet my money on horses recommended by In-Form, daily sheets pumped out by Clark that rank the horses in each race according to a number of set criteria.

“Our five most important statistics in assembling the final In-Form number would be the speed figures, workouts before or after a race, jockey-trainer combinations, in-the-money finishes at the track and distance, and the scratch board is a very key angle,” says Clark.

The reference to the scratch board intrigued me because I’ve been playing the races since the Diefenbaker era and have never utilized that one.

“We’ve been following this for seven or eight years and it’s a huge handicapping angle,” insists Clark, “A scratch board horse is one who has been scratched from a race previous to today’s race. It may have been a trainer scratch, steward scratch, vet scratch or off the turf. The percentage of horses winning off a scratch board is less than 5%, so you can pretty well toss them.”

Clark, 48 has been playing the horses since the late ‘70s.

“My friend’s dad was trainer Red Miller,” he says, “He trained for the Regan family for years. I had many experiences going out in the morning, feeding the horses, watching them work out, walking them the odd time on the shedrow. I just grew into it from the handicapping side.”

I told Clark that I’ve never used anybody’s handicapping service. I stick stubbornly to my own horse playing principles, as unprofitable as they might be.

My skepticism would be quickly eroded. In the first race at Woodbine on that chilly Thursday afternoon, the In-Form numbers pointed emphatically at #4 Believer’s War.

“The jockey’s 2 for 40,” I cried out, “I don’t bet 2 for 40 jockeys.”

“We can throw out three horses because of the scratch board,” argued Clark and the 4-horse and the trainer is 21% coming in off a claim.”

I’d promised to bet In-Form horses, so I reluctantly wheeled Believer’s War with two horses in the second half of the double.

Believer’s War trailed for most of the six furlong race, but in deep stretch, jockey Matt Moore had his horse in top gear and Believer’s War scored by half a length at 4-1.

Unfortunately, selecting a good-priced winner is just half the game. When High Volt Jolt outlasted my horse Fuhrever Dancing in the second race, I got nothing.

“We’re not going to pick the winner of every race,” insists Clark, “But if you play our numbers, we can pretty well assure you at least one good payoff a day. Our record payoff was 57-1. It was at Churchill Downs, a 21 pointer, the high number in our field. It won by about 10 lengths. We’ve had many 60-70-80 dollar winners and we had a \$670 double picked cold. On the day that the Pick7 pool paid \$500,000 we had Bruno Schickendanz’ horse, Its in the Blood. It was 11-1 and Robbie King was the jockey.”

I figured if I wasn’t going to win any money, at least I would get fed. The rack of lamb in the Woodbine Club is wonderful.

Using Clark’s In-Form numbers, I bet races at Woodbine, Aqueduct, Hawthorne and Calder. I cashed a couple of tickets, but was losing more than I was making. With my initial allowance of \$40 down to less than \$20, I asked for his picks in the late double at Aqueduct.

Take 2 and 7 in the 8th with 4,5,7,9 in the ninth,” suggested Clark.

I did a little too much thinking. I didn’t want four horses in the second half of the double, so I tossed the 9 horse. I bought \$6 in doubles and took the 2 and 7 horse in the 8th race in exactors with two other horses.

The 2, Silver Prospector, got a great ride from C.C. Lopez to win at 6-2. The 7 came second at 5-2 and the exactor paid \$37 for my \$1 bet. I was alive on three horses in the last race, but the 9-horse (which I had eliminated) won and the other three In-Form horses came 2nd, 3rd and 4th. The In-Form double paid \$62, the In-Form exactor was \$29.60, the tri was \$124 and the superfecta, picked *cold* by In-Form paid \$804.

Clark told me his In-Form system owes much to probing conversations he has had for many years with trainer friends.

“Alex Fehr is a very good friend of mine. So is Layne Gilliforte,” he says, “Sandy McPherson and Roger Attfield are guys I talk to about process and trainer styles, getting a horse ready to win a race. I’m very interested in the spacing between workouts. I don’t believe that horses are machines. I like to see a horse working consistently.”

I like to see a horse win, and suddenly the 7th race at Woodbine was two minutes away. Problem was, the In-Form numbers were all over the 7 horse Southern Kitten. She was the 6-5 favorite with maiden two-year-old fillies. Not my kind of bet.

“This is our strongest horse of the day,” claimed Clarke.

“Ok,” I said, “I’ll take the 7, but give me the rest of the triactor. I’ve got \$10 to spend.

“Take the 3 and the 5 for second,” said Clark, staring at his sheets.

“I need six horses for third,” I panicked as I saw the field approach the gate.

Clark barked a few numbers out, then stopped for a moment.

“You have to take the 10 horse,” he called as I sprinted towards a machine, “It’s a beneficial jockey change and the stable is 40% off the second start.”

For a few furlongs, it looked dismal as the 4-horse raced to a six-length lead. At the top of the stretch, though, that one was done and Southern Kitten, ridden wisely by Michelle Rainford, came barreling down the stretch for a convincing win. The 5-horse, Faith’s Way, clung to second by a neck over a fast closing April Wishes. April Wishes was the 10-horse and was 25-1 under Emile Ramsammy.

Then the best part – the triactor paid \$147 for my \$1 bet and quite clearly, I would not have cashed that race if I hadn’t used the In-Form numbers.

A few minutes later, Clark experienced something that no computerized handicapping service could overcome. At Hawthorne, the 2-horse, So My Name’s Cart, won at 2-1 with the 5-horse, Battle Amour, second at 7-1, *exactly the way the In-Form sheet had predicted*. Clark had a satisfying grin on his face both for the effectiveness of his product and the \$5 ticket he held on the exactor. Then, the announcement all announcement-fearing horseplayers dread.

There was a steward’s inquiry. And sure enough, the winner was disqualified for bearing out and taking the action away from the third place horse. The In-Form exactor did not exist.

I lost a few bucks on the last race at Woodbine, but put \$140 of profit in my pocket before saying good-bye to my host.

“The website is www.in-formsheets.com,” Clark reminded me, “Log in as a member. It’s free to join. There is a fee to download the sheets - \$20 for one card, \$30 for two and you can take a day package where for \$50 you could download as many cards as you’d like to play day and night racing.”

As I left, Clark saw me clutching my winnings and called to me as I headed to the elevator.

“You’ll never go broke making a profit!”

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