

## ***Racing Maxims and Methods of Pittsburg Phil* -- by Edward Cole (1908)**

### **CHAPTER 2 -- One Day's Work at the Track**

There is no better way of making plain what a successful racing man is, than to tell of his day at the track. What he does and what he will not do. How he conducts himself. How he remains always master of the situation and of himself. It seems to me that will be the best kind of a lesson for the man who would like to share with him in his general prosperity.

Preparation for a day at the track begins the night before, of course, for then the entries of the day are studied, impossibilities are eliminated, and the contenders are decided upon. This is succeeded by an early retirement in a condition that will guarantee natural rest from the fatigue of the day at hand. Being of a philosophical frame of mind, as I have said, the excitement and nervous strain of the incidents of the previous day are to be dismissed from the mind, and sleep is to be wooed without a rival.

As a result, the racing man should arise in the morning, cool and clearheaded, and with the first opening of his eyes he should again take up the problem of the day. The horses come before him at once and they never leave until after the contest is decided. I think about them the very first thing when I awaken, weighing them in one light, and from one standpoint and another. As I dress and eat my breakfast, I am placing them here and there, giving each a chance until at last from all standpoints I decide which one, in a truly and perfectly run race, devoid of the hundred or more unlooked for incidents that can happen, should be the winner.

In this frame of mind I go to the track. Once I enter the gate it is all business with me, and my programme of one day does not change. I get the names of the jockeys and the positions of the horses at the post, if it is a race in which I believe there is a fair speculative opportunity. I know, of course, the kind of day it is, and the condition of the track. I next go up into the grand stand and watch the horses warming up. This is of the utmost importance, for although my mind may be centered on two, or possibly three horses, at the same time it is important that I watch the others for fear there may be an unexpected display of form in any of them. If I do not see any of the horses, I had in mind, warm up, I immediately go to the paddock, after having my agent bring me the betting quotations. Arriving there I devote my time and attention entirely to the contenders, as I have picked them, and to nothing else.

It is impossible to overestimate the value of this ability to tell the condition of a thoroughbred. It is the twin sister of handicapping and more important. In that respect the ordinary form handicapper is, so to say, handicapped. What may appear to be right on paper, very, very often is wrong in the paddock. This ability to tell whether a horse is at its best before a race is acquired only after years of the closest kind of study. The merest tyro can tell in a race whether a horse is doing its best, but when it comes to getting a knowledge of what he can be expected to do before a race from a blanketed animal walking about the paddock or standing in his stall, special knowledge is necessary. It is not a talent. A man is not born with it: he must acquire it by hard

work and close observation. He must be able to decide whether a horse is in good condition or not, whether he appears to feel like running a race or otherwise.

If a horse looks dull in the eye, dry, or moves and acts sluggishly, it is to me almost a sure sign in the majority of cases that he is not at his best. I say a majority of cases, because there are exceptions to every rule and some of the best horses we have ever bred had no more animation apparently than a "night hawk" cab horse before a contest. Some of these horses need only a warm up gallop on the way to the post to get out of their dull condition. You often see a jockey ride at top speed after the parade in front of the grand stand, to the starting judge, and you may usually depend upon it that it is for livening purposes. Frequently trainers want to deceive the public as to the condition of the horse, by having it appear dull and of little account in the paddock. This helps in the betting, and after all it is not an unfair strategy, because to them it is just as important to win a bet as it is to you and me. It is here that your knowledge of the disposition of a horse will stand you in good stead. If you have studied him properly you will know whether he needs the usual warm up, a preliminary gallop of a quarter of a mile, or a sprint of an eighth, or again simply a jog to the post.

An inspection of the horses in the paddock pays me for another reason. It tells of the nervous condition of a horse. Nerves are as important to a horse in training as to a person engaged in any physical contest. Poor nerves are indicated by "fretting," and a horse that frets is a very dangerous betting proposition. I can illustrate this by one particular instance in which a horse showed to me distinctly that he would not be able to repeat the high class race of a short time before. This was a horse called Pulsus. In my calculations, I became convinced that all other things being favorable he would have an excellent chance to win.

Pulsus did not warm up for the race I have in mind, so I went into the paddock to see him. I was surprised at his appearance. He was as nervous as a horse could possibly be. He had "broken out," so that the perspiration was literally running off his skin in a stream. My eyes told me that he had lost at least one hundred pounds in weight since his last race, and was certainly not within twenty-five pounds of his previous form, simply through nervous strain in his stall and the excitement in the paddock. Pulsus was one of the favorites that day. I forget just what price they were taking, but I know that it was less than two to one. I made up my mind that I would not play him straight, or place, at a thousand to one, so I looked elsewhere for the winner, and I instructed a bookmaker to lay against Pulsus for me straight and place for a considerable sum of money. The result was a fair winning as Pulsus was nowhere. His energy and stamina gone, he finished back in the ruck.

Now having inspected the three horses, or whatever number I have in mind, as possible contenders, I discover perhaps that one or two of them, in my opinion, are not in the most promising condition to run a winning race. The scene of my operations shifts immediately from the paddock to the betting ring. I find there that the favorite is one of the horses whose looks did not impress me in the paddock and it is here that the first exercise of will power begins. There is something about a favorite that seems to sway players to bet upon him. Their own judgment in

many cases tells them that the horse in question is in a false position, but they become afraid of themselves. A majority of players will fancy that particular horse, and the individual will begin to wonder if his judgment is right. Just as the evening newspapers publish a consensus of the opinions of the newspaper handicappers, so the prices in the ring is publishing the consensus of the best handicappers at the track. It takes a strong man to disregard this, but I have always done so without any hesitation.

No matter what the class, the previous performances, or the prestige of the horse which has been played into favoritism, or the stable to which it belongs, or of the jockey that is to ride, or of the money bet upon it, I look elsewhere for the winner if he does not suit me. Mechanically I take up the second choice and subject it to as severe a handicapping test as was the winner, and if the second choice fails to come up to the standard I pass it by just as willingly as I did the first. Prices and public opinion have absolutely no influence upon me at this time. I have gone down a list of entries until I have reached a horse that was possibly a rank outsider in the opinion of experts. Upon that horse I pin my faith and upon that horse I bet my money if other circumstances justify me. Men have often wondered how I could play a third or fourth choice in the race. It was simply because my judgment commanded me to do it. I may have been wrong, but after the race I knew why I was wrong. It was costly knowledge, but it was not useless, because it would serve me some other day.

The race is run, let us say. The shouts of the winners and the groans of the losers die away. From the grand stand there comes a rush of men on their way to the betting ring. Some to cash their wagers and others to make wagers on the next race. The horses which have been the object of all their hopes a minute before, are forgotten by the multitude. They are pulled up on the back stretch, turn and canter back to the stewards, the jockeys dismount by permission and the animals are turned over to their handlers with no more than a little perfunctory applause from the grand stand.

I say the multitude has forgotten, the multitude generally, but there are some men at the track to whom this period is of the utmost importance. You will see these men along the rail close to the judges' stand, or up in the big stand with their eyes glued to their field glasses. I have heard the uninformed say, when observing this: "That man is still running the race." It is not necessary to reply to such remarks for time is too precious. I want to know how a horse pulls up after a race, how the effort has affected him, whether he won easily without calling upon his reserve power, or whether he was distressed and all out. Many a time one horse has beaten another by a length or two, but with an expenditure of effort that told, while the beaten horse was not palpably distressed. It will take considerable time for the winner to recover from his effort. The second horse will be improved by the race. The physical make up of horses has much to do with this. There are some light barreled horses, mares particularly, which feel the effects of a race more than others. Suppose such a mare were entered in a race two or three days later, against practically the same field, being convinced that the strain had told I might bet, other conditions being favorable, on the horse that ran second, or even third. When I have won after such procedure, I have been accused by some of having what they term "an ace in the hole;" that is,

they have accused me of having had jockeys pull a horse in one race to make a killing in the next, when it is nothing in the world but my close observation after the previous race had been run.

During the running of the race my glasses never leave the horses engaged. I see every move they make. I can see that this one is not in his stride, or is running unnaturally, or is being ridden poorly. I can see if a horse is sulking, what horse is fit, what horse is unfit. After the race is run, it is sometimes said a horse has had a bad ride, or that the trainer has sent him to the post in an unfit condition, or anything and everything, except the truth.

Knowing the disposition of all the good horses, I am able to say pretty clearly that the failure of a horse to do better was due to chance, or unintelligent handling, perfectly innocent in themselves. Possibly the jockey had given him a cut of the whip at the post, which made him sour; possibly the track did not suit him. His post position, the size of the field or a bump in a jam may have taken away his courage. He may have been bumped on the start, shut off, pocketed, roughed, or interfered with in a dozen ways. Whatever it was I tried to locate the trouble and record it for the future. Take an illustration of this - Eugenia Burch was a mare that would run an exceptionally good race if she could have an outside position and was not bothered in any way. It was this fact that made her somewhat erratic, as they say, in her running. In a small field, with an outside position she could be expected to show her best form. She could run around her field very impressively. She was naturally a slow beginner and she always had to go around her field. Now if she were in a big field and had an inside position, where she would be bumped and knocked about in the early stages, she would never extend herself until the coast was clear, and then it was usually too late. Thus she had been beaten often by horses inferior to her, and there had been some comment on that fact by persons who did not understand the mare. I think she was timid and in that particular she was like some jockeys I have known. They will ride much better on the outside than they will in the middle of a bunch. Such riders, I am glad to say, are in a minority, but they exist just the same, and it is for you to find out who they are, and to classify them for future consideration. On the other hand, the majority of the horses and riders are game, and will fight for victory no matter where they are placed.

While speaking about this I can recall seeing horses fight their way through a field irrespective of conditions, ridden at the same time by a timid boy. The spectacle was disheartening to me as it must have been to the horse itself. I have seen a good game horse striving with all his heart, fighting his rider to allow him to push into a space that only his trained eye told him gave him a chance for victory. I have seen these horses plough between two other horses and spread them apart as a giant football rusher will do with only the goal in his mind. Gold Heels was that kind of a horse. He was always fighting. No matter where he was, or what were the surrounding conditions, he was doing his work like a bulldog. He was never daunted and he never stopped until his physical powers failed. Gold Heels was the "bear," Eugenia Burch was the other extreme. This calls to mind another horse who may be said to illustrate another phase of the case. Previous belonged to M. F. Dwyer, and he was good and game as a horse could be, but there were times when nothing could induce him to extend himself, and those times were when Willie

Simms was on his back. Simms was one of the best jockeys this country ever knew, but somehow or other he and Previous could not agree. The rider could use every art he knew, every wile and stratagem, but Previous would not get away at the post, would not run, and would not extend himself. Put a stable boy on the same horse and Previous could be depended upon to run a good race, and when Tod Sloan rode him he would always do his best.

I mention Tod Sloan. In my opinion he was possibly the greatest rider the world ever knew on a sulking horse. I have seen him mount the sourest, sulkiest, most intractable horses in training and have seen them run kindly from beginning to end. He had a happy knack of getting acquainted with a horse as soon as he got on its back. He has always told me that he catered to the disposition of his mount, by allowing it to do as it pleased so long as it was in a good position. His maxim was to hold a horse well together, reserving as much speed as possible for the last moment. On the subject of jockeys I have discovered that there are some who excel on heavy tracks. This may appear strange to the average reader, but it is credible when we remember that there are riders so chicken hearted that if they get hit in the face by a lump of mud they give up all hope of winning. The other boys go on just as determined as ever.

"Skeets" Martin was and is a good mud rider, and it was this knowledge that caused me to put him up on Howard Mann, which won the Brooklyn Handicap, beating my other two entries, Belmar and The Winner. "Tod" Sloan was riding for me then and he knew that Howard Mann could beat good horses in the mud, but he did not think he could outstep Belmar. I believed that Howard Mann could beat Belmar under certain conditions and told Martin so. I believed Martin was better than Sloan in the mud, and when Sloan chose the mount on Belmar I was secretly pleased. The only orders I gave in the race were to Martin to get up on Howard Mann, get off, and go on about his business. I added in a joking way that if "Tod" were within hearing distance of him at the head of the stretch to tell him to hurry home or he would be too late. Whether "Skeets" ever said it I do not know, but if he did "Tod" never heard him; Howard Mann was half way home before Belmar hit the quarter pole.

In his day at the track, the observing player should give a good deal of attention to jockeys. It can be seen that it is not a bad idea to do this. It was worth something to know the capabilities of Martin in the Brooklyn Handicap over a muddy track as well as it is to know the capabilities of a horse. Howard Mann might have won with a less resolute rider, but with Martin up, his chances for winning were vastly better, and consequently there was greater assurance of winning a much larger wager than otherwise. A good rider, a good horse, a good bet, was one of my mottoes.

A good mud rider will frequently bring a bad horse home, because the riders of the good horses are not as game as they might be. Weak boys are always handicapped on a heavy track. At such a time a horse needs help to keep him from sprawling and from wasting the energy which will be usefu4 later. It is the same way with a horse that needs to be hard driven. A strong rider must be given the preference in such cases. I have frequently bet on an inferior horse with a strong boy up. Many times an even money favorite has a weak boy up-a boy unable, say, to hold him together. At such a time it is a good opportunity for a strong and strenuous interview with our

sworn enemies, the bookmakers. It is a good time to look for long shots, and if you are fortunate enough to be in a position to do so get a bookmaker to lay against the favorite for you. It is sure money nineteen times out of twenty.

It is different, of course, in a free running horse. There, the jockey has comparatively little to do and the disposition of the boy does not help so much. All a rider has to do is to sit still and hold his mount together.

There is one other thing that a man should take into consideration in his day in the track, and that is the disposition of the trainers. We have talked about the disposition of the horse and of the jockey, but now about the man who has to do with preparing the horse to race. Of course, you must know who the trainer is, what his connections are, learn his habits and his practices. Even that is not good enough. You must know what his methods are with reference to jockeys. It is a remarkable fact that honest horses ridden by honest boys are oftentimes beaten by honest trainers. I mean by that, there are hundreds of occasions that trainers and owners give instructions to their riders that mean sure defeat, although the instructions are given with the best intention in the world. I have seen scores of horses beaten because their riders were told, for example, to keep up with the leaders at any cost. I have seen others choked to death because the jockeys have been instructed to lay away a length or two from the pacemakers. Such incidents are of everyday occurrence, and add another element of uncertainty to a most uncertain game at best.

One thing must never be forgotten, that a jockey of brains and understanding, while he will ride to orders as far as possible, will exercise his own judgment in case things are not turning out exactly as the owner or trainer anticipated. It is a poor owner or trainer who feels resentment when this is done by a capable boy. This is what helps to make up a high class jockey. Isaac Murphy, "Jimmy" McLaughlin, Garrison, "Skeets" Martin, "Tod" Sloan, Willie Shaw and boys of their class needed, or need, few instructions. They required to be told the disposition of the horse only, whether sluggish, a sulker, a free runner and how the whip should be used. Loading them down with further orders was like putting on more weight, for in their efforts to follow instructions they were bound to jeopardize their chances of winning.

I once heard a jockey say to a trainer who had dealt out a spasm of orders that would have filled an almanac: "Say, boss, don't you think you had better have those instruction printed in big type so I can read them as the race is being run? I could not remember what you have said to me if I sat up all night to study them, and this race is going to be over in less than two minutes." The trainer got a little angry at this and proceeded to call the boy down until the boy suggested that if he were told to do the best he could to win, the stable would have a better chance of taking down the purse. The trainer thought for a minute and peevishly remarked: "Oh, do what you like." Then he walked away.

"Them is the best orders any rider with a good horse under him could get," commented the boy, as the line formed for the parade.

It is almost unnecessary to tell what happened in that particular race. The boy was a good boy and he used his judgment. He won in a drive by a neck and he was on the third best horse in the race at that. Had he been hampered by the instructions originally given, I do not believe that he would have finished in the money. It pays you to know the trainers, as I said before, for their habits will sometimes put you on a "good thing" at a good price.

Your day at the track, it can be seen, has been a busy day. There has been no idle moment; there has been no time for friendly conversation, good stories, refreshment at the bar or social meetings. When the last race is over, if you have speculated on two or more events, you will be as tired as if you had been engaged in manual labor for many hours. You will need rest and time for your nerves to become normal. As I stated at the outset, that rest cannot be gained by late hours or dissipation of any kind, but by a sane, temperate, normal course of living.