

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

CHAPTER 5 -- Handicapping by Time

Quite a number of systematic handicappers take time as a basis for their calculations. I could never see where time was a positive criterion. Time enters into the argument under certain conditions, but if depended upon entirely for a deduction it will be found wanting. The atmospheric conditions will have much to do with the time of a race. The way a race is run will have much to do with the time of such race. I will give an illustration of this that is positive. The match race between *Admiration* and *May Hempstead* at *Sheepshead Bay* was run in 1.40 1-5.

Some days before the match race both fillies ran in two different races at a mile - *Admiration* carrying 111 lbs. and *May Hempstead* 107 lbs. *Admiration* ran in 1.41 and *May Hempstead* in 1.39 1-5. Making allowance for weight, those who handicapped the match race by time, might expect both horses to run under 1.40 when they met in their duel. What was the result? *Admiration* won the match race in 1.40 1-5, and *May Hempstead* was beaten by many lengths, yet she had covered the same course under almost identical conditions even as regards the atmosphere, in 1.39 15. The cause of this change in time was due entirely to the way the match race was run. It was the early pace that made the time slow, the first half mile being run in something less than 47 seconds, and it became a question of sheer gameness as to which mare would crack first. One of them had to wilt under the terrific pace, as is always the case in races where two or more horses are being driven to their limit of speed, in the early part of the race. No better illustration of the uncertainty of time as a basis for handicapping could be given than the *Admiration* and *May Hempstead* races.

Again it will be found on record frequently that a horse running in his own class, say a race for three-year-olds only, carrying 112 pounds, will run three quarters of a mile in 1.13, and possibly win with apparent ease. This same horse will come out three or four days later in a race for horses three years old and upward, meeting a horse like *Hermis*, or *Voter* - in fact any fast horse, and possibly he will carry but 95 pounds. A time handicapper would make the three-year-old run in 1.12 possibly if he carried out his calculations to a fraction. What would be the result of the race? Why, *Hermis* would beat such a horse in a gallop, and possibly would not have to run but six furlongs better than 1.14 to do it. This is accounted for by class. *Hermis* being a high class horse would take a three-year-old by the collar and he would run him into the ground in the first half mile, leaving him so leg weary at the end of this distance that he would simply stagger home. Time in such cases is absolutely useless and deceiving. There are instances, however, where it is possible to determine a good race from a bad race by time when two races are run on the same day. Time again is useful to the trainer who is watching for improvement in his horse; but it is not nearly as reliable in a trial as running one horse against another. For instance, I may have a maiden in my stable that cannot work a mile better than 1.45, yet if I start him off with *Belmar* for a mile trial he will run a mile in 1.41 or perhaps better. Such a horse is considered a poor work horse, one that will race much better than he works. On the other hand, there are

horses that will work exceedingly fast when alone and will not run up to form in races. Such horses are very bad betting propositions.

Returning to the fallacy of time as a criterion of what horses should do and should not do, there are horses that have created records on many occasions that have never lived up to their record afterward or anywhere near it. Take a straight course, for instance, like the Futurity Course in Sheepshead Bay. Time is absolutely no use there, for the reason that there may be a wind playing down the chute that is almost a gale. It will cause the time of the race to be exceedingly fast. Again the wind may be playing head on. It would make the time of the race very slow, for the resistance of the wind is very great in a horse race, and it is correspondingly great when acting as a propeller. There are no race going folks who can determine the velocity of the wind. Similar results follow, probably not so decided, on a circular course as on a straight stretch, for the wind sometimes blows across the track, sometimes aids the horses on the back stretch or may be against them coming home. Again it may be against them on the back stretch and aid them coming home; and a horse can run faster against the wind in the early stages of the race than he can when he becomes leg weary in the last quarter of a mile.

Then there is the sultry day with a great deal of humidity, and the hot bright day when the atmosphere is dry. All these things have an effect on the time of the race, and in fact on the condition of a horse. It is a common saying that such and such a horse is a hot weather horse, and that others will be better in the hot weather. Weather affects them as it does persons. It is almost unnecessary to go further into the details on the question of time as a handicapping basis, for I have given enough illustrations of the uncertainty of making time the foundation or basic calculation in handicapping. Horse against horse, weight against weight and accompanying conditions are the best lines to follow as to the superiority of one horse over another.

Some men will say that because a horse has run a mile in 1.40 one day and was beaten in 1.41 the next, that there was something crooked about the horse. Do not believe it. I am not saying that there is no crookedness in horse racing. There is crookedness, more or less, in every kind of business, at least in most kinds of business. The less one thinks of crookedness in horse racing the better will it be for him. There are some smart men, that is, men who consider themselves smart, because they cook up a race once in a while, but if you will look them over you will find that they possess money spasmodically, and generally wind up their careers poor.

Instead of looking for crookedness in a race, be conservative and try to find out in after study of the race where it was possible to show a defect in your own calculations, instead of jumping at the conclusion that because a horse did not run directly up to your own deductions the race was crooked. If you will place more confidence in the result of the race than you do in an exalted opinion of your own handicapping, you will find in the end that you will be much better off and considerably richer.

When I play a horse in a race and he is beaten on his merits, I know that I have made a mistake somewhere in my deductions, and before I go to sleep that night I try to find out where that

mistake is, and turn it to advantage in the future. If everybody speculating on horses, who depends upon his own opinion, will follow this advice he will find it very instructive, and in the end much more profitable than jumping at the conclusion that there was something crooked about the race.