

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

### **CHAPTER 6 -- Class and Weight**

Class and weight are two of the most important subjects to be considered under the general division of handicapping. Although the first is not so closely related to the actual mechanical work of bookkeeping as the latter, it cannot be overlooked. When it comes to handicapping, all your mechanical work will go for naught if you have no knowledge of class.

"Show me the man who can class horses correctly and I will show you the man who can win all the money he wants, and he only needs a dollar to start."

"Mike" Dwyer said that to me years ago, and time has shown it to be one of the greatest truths ever uttered about horseracing. Class, that intangible thing that almost defies definition, controls almost positively the running of thoroughbreds! Class enables one horse to beat another no matter what the physical odds imposed may be, what the conditions or what the distance. You may say it is that which enables a light bull terrier to whip a big dog of another breed. It enables sometimes one fighter to whip another. As I said before, it is hard to define, but everybody discerns it, when it is there.

In trying to define class in horse racing, the best I can do is to say that class in a horse is the ability possessed by it to carry its stipulated stake weight, take the track, and go the distance that nature intended it to go. It is heart, nerve and ability combined, which ignores all ordinary rules and ordinary obstacles.

There is no law by which you determine class or classify horses. An intimate knowledge of a horse alone tells. What he has done, and how he has done it, places him, and nothing else. Birth and breeding do not appear to count so much. Many great stallions, themselves of high class, with great turf records, have never sired good horses, not even when the nick has been with mares of equally high class. On the other hand, stallions that have not been so great, have produced magnificent colts, and it is the same way with the mares.

One of the mysterious rules of class that I cannot understand is that a real high class horse and a positively common horse cannot be brought together by weights within the handicapper's reason. You could put 140 pounds on Hamburg, which is a really high class horse, and 80 pounds on Alsike, and Hamburg would run him into the ground. He could take the track and outrun Alsike at every stage and the weight would not make any difference. You have seen what Reliable, a high class sprinter, had done and what Kinley Mack, Gold Heels, Ethelbert, all high class horses, can do.

Out of all the horses foaled during the year, there is hardly one-tenth of one per cent, that can be termed positively high class. After that stage comes the first class handicap horse and the

proportion grows larger; then follows the moderate handicap horse, still more; then comes the lowest form of handicap horses, which dovetail into the selling plater class of the first flight, and from there they grade down to the "dogs," the poorest horses running.

Now, between the really high class horse like Hamburg and the "dog" like Alsike, there is such a wide gulf that the blindest man on the track can detect it. If that were all there is to it, racing would be easy. But then you start to go down from the top and come up from the bottom and your trouble begins. Between the first class handicap horses, and the horses a notch above the "dogs," you have not so much trouble. After that it grows harder until finally the classes dovetail, and then only the shrewdest of observers can hope to make a successful classification. As there are more horses in the dovetailing classes than anywhere else, there are more races in those divisions, and hence one of the great uncertainties of racing. But the mysterious rule applies just the same, the better class horse has a "shade" always on the one below him-only very often we cannot fathom it.

Right here I may say that I consider Gold Heels a real high class horse, for he did in the Brighton handicap what only such horses can do. During the running of that race he stood off three challenges, one horse after another coming up to him in an effort to get the track away from him. You will remember how he stood them off one by one, taking them by the neck and beating them until Blues came up. Blues he beat from the eighth pole home in one of the greatest struggles we have ever seen on the race track. Gold Heels is to me a grand race horse.

By observation, class can be detected and tabulated in horses of a lower grade. For instance, there are many horses that will run an exceedingly good race with 90 pounds up, while 103 or 104 pounds will cause them to make a very disappointing showing. Every pound seems to send them down the scale of class, and a knowledge of this fact is very valuable to you.

It is this class that is most frequently manipulated by trainers and owners. Entered, say, at 108 pounds, this kind of a horse will show nothing. There will be two or three races just like it until the general public will classify that particular horse as a hound. Then will come a race in which the impost will be 95 pounds. The public, which does not study or observe closely, will pass him over again. They will not have noticed that his races with heavier weights have improved the horse, that he is fit and everything is propitious. He improves alarmingly, and immediately a cry goes up. Now strictly speaking there was no cheating by those concerned in the horse. He ran as far as he could with 108 pounds up in his prior races, but nature had not made him a 108 pound horse. You will find this kind in the moderate and fairly good class of horses. There was Imp for instance. She could always be depended upon to do the best she could under any and all conditions. With 112 pounds on her she could beat first class horses at a mile and a quarter, but every pound more than that would send her down the scale. With 118 pounds she could beat high class horses for one and one-eighth miles, but if asked to go one and one-quarter miles, with the same weight, she would die away in the last furlong. She could carry 121 pounds one mile and a sixteenth and beat good horses but after that distance the weight would be fatal. I use Imp as an example-there are many in her division, running every year, of a similar disposition and class.

In regard to horses carrying weight, I figure that two-year-olds can give considerably more weight away successfully than horses in other divisions. A real high class two-year-old will carry a lot of weight, and it is hard to stop him until he is asked to carry 130 pounds or more and sometimes not even then. I have found it in my experience that a high class two-year-old will race fast with 130 pounds on him, practically as fast as he can with 120 pounds. In saying this I merely infer that the difference in a race a horse will run is so slight that it is hardly discernible. This refers to real first class two-year-olds. In the lower division of two-year-olds a few pounds make a very material difference to their racing; in fact, a difference of five pounds, say from 100 to 105 pounds on a common horse will make him run a very inferior race; and when a common horse is asked to carry 112 pounds or 115 pounds it seems to take his speed away altogether. Go back over any records of high class two-year-olds and you will find that this assertion is absolutely correct.

Hamburg was an extraordinary weight carrying two-year-old, and he is only one of many that could be mentioned. A good trainer will know just about what weight his horse can carry and run a good race. He knows that if his horse is at his best with 95 pounds up he will run a very bad race if he puts 107 pounds on him. Frequently a trainer will enter a cheap selling plater in a race with the selling price so high that the horse will have to carry 110 pounds or thereabouts. He knows at the time that his horse will run poorly and has probably entered him for work only, preparing him for a race in the very near future when he will be entered to carry 95 pounds. These little tricks are well worth watching, for by close observation it is easily seen what a trainer is doing with his horses and what his intentions are. In other words, when you have so far discovered the weight carrying ability of a horse, and you see him in a race with considerably more weight up than in your opinion he can carry, it is safe to say that this horse can be thrown into the discard, and depend on the old adage, "watch and wait." Do not understand me as saying that all trainers resort to these tricks. The majority do not, and this is a point which the player of horses has to learn. He must study the disposition of the men who train horses, as well as the horses themselves. I have found that everything being equal, two-year-olds run much more consistently than any other class of horses. They are taught to race. They are young and they know nothing else. In fact they are just like children playing on tip toe all the time.

Their consistency is due to their inexperience, for with age comes cunning and the developing of a disposition either good or bad. Some horses retain an even disposition throughout their career, while others become exceedingly eccentric. It is a common expression on the turf that a horse is "getting cunning," which means that if things suit him he will run a good race. But if they do not he will perform very indifferently. Real good horses have a lot of character about them, and they will run very consistently when in first class condition. A horse that has become eccentric in his disposition is liable to perform very indifferently. There are hundreds of horses that can win and will not run their best-horses that will work alone in the morning and shirk in the afternoon.

Administering stimulants to horses was due to the fact that some could run and would not. In these days they are called "dope" horses for the reason that they are stimulated with drugs.

Before the stimulating drug was discovered a draft of sherry or whiskey mixed with coffee was given to horses in the shape of a drench, and it has been known to have effect, but progress and experiments afterward proved that drugs were absolutely essential to make some horses put forth their best efforts. The drug question has been a very serious proposition for years, and at one time was beyond the control of racing officials. It is even now a source of considerable trouble. When the use of stimulants became prevalent I carefully studied the question, frequently getting advice from veterinary surgeons as to the effect certain kinds of drugs would have on horses. It was an exceedingly vexing question with me, for on that problem alone depended many of my investments.

When I discovered that a horse was a "dope" horse, it was absolutely necessary for me to know whether a stimulant had been given to him or not, for two reasons. If in my investigation I found that the horse had been given a stimulant, I knew he should run a good race, and therefore become a factor in my calculations. On the contrary, if he had not been stimulated by drugs it was equivalent to his not being in the race at all. If the horse in mind was one of the choices, it was a safe betting proposition to bet against him, and look elsewhere for the winner. It was sometimes very easy to beat a race two ways under such conditions, and I have frequently played the winner of a race and laid against another.

It is rather difficult these days to tell when horses have been drugged, for different drugs have different effects on horses. It was generally conceded in the old days that if a horse "broke out" into a pronounced perspiration that he was drugged. Sometimes he was and sometimes not, was my experience. The fretful horse will "break out" any day while in the paddock, and nearly all horses will show some perspiration on a hot day, so that if any of them have been drugged it cannot always be detected by their coat. But there are two things that hardly ever fail in distinguishing a horse that has been stimulated and a horse that has not. The first is the glassy appearance of the eye and its bright, anxious look. The pupil also dilates. The second sign is the nostril, which becomes considerably distended. The breathing also is not uniform. The nostrils will expand and contract in an unusual manner. In some instances the forehead and the hide around the top of the head and neck will show continued perspiration. But those who have used stimulants on horses have things down pretty fine. They cannot stop the look in the eyes and the distending of the nostrils, but they can make their horses look as if they had been "doped" when such is not the case. Giving them a good stiff preliminary breeze under very heavy blankets will cause horses to have a "doped" appearance. This avoids suspicion in many cases and eludes the vigilance of the racing officials after they are drugged, because the horse goes to the post in apparently the same condition as regards his outward appearance every time. If it were possible to make owners and trainers send their horses to the post in the same condition at all times, stimulating horses would not create the scandal it does, for the horses would run consistently. It is the abuse of stimulants that causes so much criticism by using them one day, and not another. This creates scandal and denunciation of the sport. All the patrons of racing want is consistency in horses, and when it is possible, they should get it. There is enough natural inconsistency in horse racing without its being forced on the public by unscrupulous men.

