

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

### **CHAPTER 9 -- Pittsburgh Phil gave Tod Sloan the Start which the Jockey Afterward Became Famous in the Turf World**

Many stories have been written as to how "Tod" Sloan became famous as a jockey and many have been told as to who it was that gave him his first opportunity. Sloan had been riding horses for a long period before he was heralded as one of the most famous horsemen in turf history. All reports to the contrary, it was "Pittsburgh Phil" who gave him his real start and it was an upright beginning.

It was in the late "nineties" that "Pittsburgh Phil" happened to be in California while racing was being conducted at the old Bay District track. It was a prolonged meeting, and for some cause, which "Phil" attributed to a few of the conniving elements then rampant, he found himself a loser on the meeting to the extent of about \$50,000. He had made up his mind to quit speculation, knowing that he could not succeed when there was so much in and out running, and where inconsistency in the handling of horses predominated. He was inclined to believe that several of the jockeys were pulling horses in the interests of their employers. Many times one owner did not know what his neighbor was doing, and inconsistency was so pronounced that sometimes three and four horses in a race were being taken care of by their riders, and a horse would win that should have finished out of the money. The racing was so mystifying that a cold deliberating handicapper, who depended upon form for his deductions, was a victim at almost every turn.

While "Phil" was sitting alone in the grandstand, the day before he had decided to leave, Sloan happened to be not far away having no engagements to ride that day and when he noticed "Phil" in solitude, went over and sat beside him. In those days Sloan was hustling his way through the world as best he could, putting a bet down for himself when he had the money, and when he was without, doing his best to get someone to make a wager for him.

When Sloan was seated he began a conversation. "I think such and such horse will win this race sure," said he to 'Phil,' naming the horse to which he referred.

"What makes you think so, too?" returned 'Phil.' "You rode him the last time he started and he finished away back." 'Phil' knew what Sloan was driving at and was gathering such information from him as he could. "If he could not beat the lot that he met a few days ago he cannot beat the field that he meets today."

"Well," said Sloan. "I'd like you to put a bet on him for me, he is as good as 7 to 1, in the betting. He'll win sure, Mr. Smith."

"Don't talk nonsense." returned 'Phil.' "Why didn't he win the other day? Tell me why you think he can win today?" Though 'Phil' asked these questions, he knew what the trouble had been in the previous race and merely wanted to learn what information Sloan would give.

"That horse was short the last time out," was all that Sloan said in answer to "Phil's" direct question. "Well, I'm not going to bet any more on the races here," said 'Phil,' "so I don't care to put a bet down for you, but sit here and we will watch the race and if this horse wins I will make you a proposition."

They sat together, while the race was being run, and just as Sloan predicted the horse won in a common gallop.

"Didn't I tell you he would win?" was Sloan's first remark after the horses had passed the winning post. "He was a good horse the other day but he met with a lot of interference, as well as being short of work."

"Say, Tod, why don't you make up your mind to be thorough in your work," asked 'Phil,' "and ride from the drop of the hat? You'll make plenty of money and be successful. I will give you a start. I'll make an agreement with you if you will abide by it strictly and confidentially."

"What will you do?" asked Sloan.

"What will I do?" returned 'Phil,' repeating the question, while he gave himself time to think, "why, I'll give you \$400 every time you ride a winner at this track. It will make no difference whether I bet on it or not. If you win a race you can go to my representative every Saturday night at the Palace Hotel and collect \$400 for every winning mount you have had during the week. That is more money than you can make mixing up with 'sharps' and you will get your money. There will be no standing you up for it and paying off in promises but it will be in good solid gold coin. There is one thing I shall want you to observe and that is secrecy. Upon no consideration must this interview be mentioned or even intimated. I do not wish to see you, or be recognized by you. The only two things that you have to think about are winning a race and collecting \$400 for so doing, and if you win ten races next week you can go direct to my representative and he will have instructions to pay you \$4,000. Do not let your valet or anyone else know that you and I have had this conversation or that we have made an agreement."

"I'll do it. I'll put all I know into every race that I ride. You can bet on me every time," was Sloan's decision.

"Oh no," replied 'Phil,' "I am not going to bet on you every time you ride, but I am going to bet when I think you are riding the best horse. But that will not make any difference in the fee part of the proposition. You will get your \$400 if you win whether I bet or not."

"It's a bargain. When does it begin?" said Sloan.

"Tomorrow, and next Saturday if you have ridden any winners go to Mr.---" ('Phil' was always discreet about letting the world know who was working for him and though he gave Sloan the name of his representative he did not divulge it to the writer when telling the story) and collect whatever money is coming to you. He will have full instructions to pay, no matter what the amount."

It was only a person with turf wisdom such as 'Phil' possessed who could see his way clear to make such a proposition payable. But he knew what it meant to have a jockey trying to win every race against a half a dozen who were manipulating horses at the dictation of unscrupulous owners and trainers. There were many times presumably that 'Tod' would win races through such manipulations, being "shooed in," as it were, and there was no question that some of his winning mounts would be quoted at ridiculous prices by the bookmakers. All these things had been well thought out by 'Phil' and he laid his plans accordingly.

To keep the matter as quiet as possible he employed several persons, whom he trusted implicitly, to execute his commissions in the ring. These men were never seen with "Phil." In fact they were practically strangers to the bookmakers but it was a band of well versed and thoroughly educated employees, who learned signs and signals perfectly, which were directed from 'Phil,' while he sat apparently unconcerned in the grandstand oblivious to

what was going on in the betting ring. At the same time he was kept well posted as to the prices and who was betting on horses by his messenger who was employed for such a purpose.

It was not long before Sloan began winning race after race and upon nearly every occasion 'Phil's' agents made some good sized collections. All the wagers were made with cash, and to blind the operations each agent took a different section of the ring daily, so that the same bettor would not be so familiar to the bookmakers.

Before every race 'Phil's' commissioners would be at several points of vantage, where they could catch his signals. Then they would go into the ring and fulfill his orders. Many of these commissioners were not known to each other, so secretly and systematically were the speculations accomplished.

In less than three weeks "Phil" had recovered all his previous losses and was a good winner, and at the end of the first month he was between \$70,000 and \$80,000 ahead. The bookmakers were confused. They did not know where all the money was going to. None of the regulars seemed to be making any headway, and yet money was being taken out of the ring by strangers, whom no one knew, except in a betting and collecting way.

It was common to hear conversations between the bookmakers, as they returned from the track, asking each other what they knew about that clerical looking fellow, who beat three or four races that day or that country looking chap, who thought nothing of betting five or six hundred on a 3 to 1 shot and collecting four times out of five Sloan was becoming so popular at the end of a month that he was a public favorite and the rank and file would have nothing but Sloan.

One day going home in the street car 'Phil' happened to be seated beside John Coleman one of the most prominent and gentlemanly bookmakers in the business, when the conversation turned to the doings in the betting ring. "I can't understand who is getting all the money " said Coleman. "in the last month I have lost over \$10,000 and it has been split up into a thousand parts. No one man has got it, but it has been divided between half a dozen big bettors whom nobody knows. They come along and bet two or three hundred in cash and invariably get away with it. There must be some big combination somewhere that is getting a lot of money. It reminds me of the 'Little Pete' episode of a few years ago when he had all the jockeys in the business on a string. The strangest part of the thing is that in nearly all cases they play Sloan's mounts just as if he had been nominated to win every race no matter what horse he rides."

'Phil' smiled and intimated that Sloan was a good rider and no one could be blamed for following him.

"Well, in the future." replied Coleman, "if Sloan is on a natural 3 to 1 shot they won't get better than 6 to 5 for my money. I think I will string with them, instead of going against the deluge of Sloan money, and there is many another bookmaker will do the same thing."

This was the beginning of the end of the successful campaign of the "Phil"-Sloan combination at Bay District track. When "Phil" saw that he would have to take such short prices against Sloan's mounts he knew that the odds were somewhat against him, and that it would eventually become unprofitable to accept even money against a horse, which, under normal conditions, would be quoted at two or even three to one.

It was only a matter of a day or so when "Phil" settled up his affairs, paid off his commissioners, and packed his grip for the East taking Sloan with him. Not until after he

was gone did the bookmakers awaken, rub their eyes and gradually grasp the fact that they had been outwitted by "Pittsburgh Phil." In argument some said that "Phil" had only just engaged Sloan to ride for him in the East on account of his good work in California. They were loath to believe that he had been in his employ for a month, and it was not until the story was told by "Phil" himself, that the skeptical could be made to understand that such a clever yet honorable system could have been employed to "separate them from their bankrolls."

Sloan had to thank George E. Smith, "Pittsburgh Phil," for his rise in the turf world.