

Computer Handicapping – Think Local, Act Global!

By Joe Mainardi

After last month's mind-bender on tournament play, I figure that it's time to dial it back and broaden your handicapping horizons for your daily handicapping routine! *So, let's put on those ~~drinking~~ thinking caps!*

First, a favor. If you would, please re-read the title of this article. Yes, I reversed the saying, and for good reason... and since this article has no intent on saving the planet, I don't feel bad about flipping it to make the point. The theme today is to apply what you know about your own track/circuit and expand it to a larger stage.

For instance, on the rare occasions when I travel abroad, I look for a local establishment conducting live racing. I like to see how other countries spend a day at the races (hint: they LOVE to dress up), as well as try some of my "local" handicapping techniques on a "global" stage. I've only been able to find two places to try this out – Australia and New Zealand – and both times I won enough money to pay for the extras associated with a fun day at the track. The reason I can do this is that I have a solid understanding of horse racing, partly from being able to play races at every race track in North America using **Hor\$ense Expert**. I also enjoy trips to domestic tracks, where I went to Arlington in August, to make new racing friends, visit with customers, and take some of the track's money back with me. I'm sure that you have the skills needed to "go global", so let's keep going.

Let's stop here and take a test, okay? No grading, just reflecting. What is unique to the methods you use at your favorite track(s)? Of those, how many could be applied to other tracks? I would expect your answers to be some version of: "I can't tell you or else everybody else will know, and what good will that do ME?" and "They only work for where I play." Well, how about if I take the contrarian view – as I've been known to do, from time to time – and show you how to take your show on the road? **Okay? Good!**

I don't know about you, but I have always been interested in the races beyond my local venues. I started with all of the Southern California tracks, and I was fairly confident in my abilities. Upon my first trip to Vegas, where I could play races from all of the big name tracks, I realized that I wanted to get good at other tracks. Now that you can play races from just about anywhere, from the comfort of your own home (or anywhere else that you take your smartphone... which is just about everywhere), the only thing stopping you... is YOU! That can be easily remedied. In order to play on the "global" stage, you have to have a few things going for you: [1] you're a good handicapper in your own space AND [2] you really believe that you can use it while away from home (and out of your comfort zone). And, yes, this is a path to those handicapping tournaments I described in my last article.

Rewinding to the test, let's look at how I answered those questions. The methods I use are reflected in the **Expert** program, so anybody who uses it has access to my handicapping techniques. You just have to know how to apply them to your wagering style. As for the second question, I know they work everywhere, because that's how I designed **Expert**. Okay... now let's use the table below to address those beliefs and build up your confidence.

| Local Beliefs | Global Reasoning |
|--|---|
| I know MY tracks!!! | You can easily learn about other tracks. |
| There are things that are unique about MY track that only a few people know about! | Inside "knowledge" doesn't help you on every race, no matter where you play. |
| I know MY jockeys and trainers! | You can learn about jockeys and trainers at any track. |
| I get great tips from people who are "in the know"! | Putting aside how wrong they often are, the horses don't know this and they are the ones running. |
| I don't understand anything outside my racing world! | You know a lot about racing, so use it everywhere. |

When I first started, I learned so much about the tracks that I frequented... mainly because it's all I had. After quickly realizing that the other tracks didn't just run on the BIG days – they also had lousy Thursday cards, just like my tracks – I wanted to find a way to gain that knowledge... without having to live and breathe it. The solution was simple AND complex. *Huh?* What this means is that I decided to write a program (called **Hor\$ense**) to help me “learn” about other tracks. And now, **Expert** can pick winners at any US and Canadian track.

The first thing I had to realize was that I couldn't know EVERYTHING about others tracks like I did about my home circuit. The answer to this was in a methodology that I used while writing software for the smart-bomb prototypes of 20+ years ago. It's called the theory of “necessary and sufficient conditions”, and it's actually simple to explain. To have a winning horse, a necessary condition is that the jockey **MUST** stay aboard for the entire race. There are others: the horse must be entered in the race, the horse must have four legs, and so on... but they are only precursors to the running of the race. And, as much as we could banter about some others, none of them meet the necessary condition. Now, let's look at a few of them (and why they aren't necessary conditions): jockey weight must be correct (horse still wins, but will be DQd if not right), must get the lead (purely subjective).

So, Joe, what is sufficient? Well, that's where your skills come in. For example, since I can't keep up with every jockey and trainer, I rely on **Expert** to look at the standings, both short (two weeks) and longer (up to a year), in order to give me an idea of where these humans rank in the race. I look at all of them, so it's not one of my sufficient conditions, but if you believe strongly in only using the top jockeys and trainers, then this would meet your sufficient condition. Another example is if you won't play a horse whose record isn't “good enough”. In **Expert** this is reflected in the relative value of the overall “in-the-money” ratings, making a positive value sufficient in deciding whether or not to play that horse. There are many others, so take a look at what you consider to be the qualifying criteria for the sufficient conditions you use locally, and then try to apply them globally.

Now that you have the framework for success outside your local racing world, the real challenge is to build up your confidence. Unless you have the cash to “learn with your own money”, you should use the infamous “mythical wagers” (somewhere between 25 and 200) to test out your theories. You can learn a lot from losing, so don't be discouraged if the initial results don't match your expectations; just review your beliefs to see what needs to change, so that you can pick winners “globally”, just like you do “locally”. As you do this, you'll learn more about yourself, which should make you a better handicapper. In no time, you'll be ready to tackle racing anywhere on the planet... or at least at the circuit a few states over. ☺