



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2019

DRF Harness

LEARN TO BET HARNESS RACING



DRF Harness Wagering Guide

By Derick Gwerner

STEP ONE

Starting from Scratch

You just walked into your local harness track for the first time or maybe you are a Thoroughbred player and decided to download a free Harness program from your favorite ADW. What do you do now?

The absolute basics for complete newbies:

- Yes, there are numbers and data everywhere on the page. Don't be intimidated! Every item is easily explainable and by the end of this guide, the task of understanding the information won't be overwhelming.
- Familiarize yourself with the layout. Each page will have a Race Number (top left) and Horses' Names and Numbers (along the left border). Along with the track name, these are the most vital pieces of information if you want to make a bet.

Understanding Track Size

• It is important to take note of track size. Just like in Thoroughbred racing where Belmont Park is a mile-and-a-half in circumference but Churchill Downs is one mile, tracks in Harness Racing can vary in size. While the majority of races in Harness are contested at the distance of one mile, that could result in a horse covering two, three or four turns during the race. This is important because racing away from the inside path on a turn causes loss of ground and makes horses work harder.

• If you are not sure what type of track you are visiting, watch a race. On half-mile tracks a horse must travel around four turns during the race. On five-eighths tracks a horse must navigate three turns. On seven-eighths or one-mile tracks, horses will race around two turns.

• Keep in mind, just like some horses race better over the turf or dirt in Thoroughbred racing, some horses race better on smaller size tracks, (1/2 mile or 5/8 mile) while

others prefer larger (7/8 mile or 1 mile) ovals in Harness.

Helpful hint: Picking winners at half-mile tracks is different from one-mile tracks. Figure out where your comfort level lies and stick to one or two similar-sized tracks to learn the ropes.

STEP TWO

Speed and Recent Activity

The easiest way to begin handicapping is to answer a simple question: Which are the fastest horses in the race? Knowing the answer will not provide you the winner but it will give you a list of strong contenders.

• Listed as #14 in the Harness Eye User Guide (HEG) is the final time for each horses' last race. When you have horses that are competing at the same track each

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The Harness Eye User's Guide

Horse Description

- A** Horse's betting number (letter signifies part of coupled entry)
B Indicates trotting hobbles or free-legged pacer
C Horse's name and medication (L) Lasix (A) Amicar (B) Bute
D Horse's color, sex, age, sire, dam and dam's sire
E Earnings in recent starts
F Best win time current year (* indicates fastest in today's race)

- G** Best previous year win time
H Horse's statistics at today's track
I Horse's current/previous year statistics and lifetime record including wins, places, shows, starts and earnings
J Horse's lifetime earnings and fastest career winning time (with age and track size)

- K** Average earnings per start lifetime
L Owner (s) of horse
M Morning line odds
N Today's driver and his statistics
O Trainer of horse with statistics
P Breeder of horse

(Past Performance illustration for display purposes only)

Horse Description		Past Performance		Horse Description		Past Performance		Horse Description		Past Performance		Horse Description		Past Performance		Horse Description		Past Performance	
1A		HARNESSE EYE HORSE(L)(A)		b c 3, by Six Day War, Cam Cam Lu by Camtastic		Last 6 Sts: \$392,401		1:49.3 Lx1		07 YR 6 2 2 2		\$426,135		07 • 18 8 5 1 • 988,315					
4-1		R. Pierce		H. Trainer		1:50.3 M1		06 YR 0 0 0 0		06 YR 0 0 0 0		- 06 • 11 7 2 1 • 421,990		Life		29 15 7 2 \$1,360,305			
27 Oct 07 4YR		1st 122 281 572		124 152		Big Trot Final 3yo		725480 6		21 21 21 21 21		Piercer		TrainerH		282 291 271 282		1531	
20 Oct 07 4YR		1st 188 283 584		126 154		Big Trot Elim 3yo		40000 3		44 44 44 44 44		Piercer		TrainerH		293 293 271 28		1542	
13 Oct 07 13MR		1st 104 262 553		123 152		Pacing Stakes		137265 4		1 1 1 1 1		Piercer		TrainerH		262 291 281 293		1532	
06 Oct 07 13CHD		1st 188 272 542		122 148 3		D-Pace 3yo Open		195000 1		21 21 21 21 21		Piercer		TrainerH		273 27 28 262		149	
29 Sep 07 10Lx1		1st 166 283 554		123 149 3		D-Late Cls Paces 3yo		93000 6		12 11 11 12 13		Piercer		TrainerH		283 271 272 262		1493	
17 Sep 07 7YR		1st 166 273 564		125 153 4		Pacing Final 3yo		200000 1		11 11 11 12 12		DancerS		DancerS		273 291 281 284		1534	
01 Sep 07 4YR		1st 164 274 564		125 153 3		Pacing Series		72705 5		69 44 42 25 25		DancerS		DancerS		293 28 282 282		1542	

Past Performance Data

- Layoff Line; indicates horse did not race for more than 15 days
- Date of past performance
- Track where horse raced and race number
- Indicates trotting hobbles or free-legged pacer
- Track conditions and temperature
- Quarter, half, three-quarters, mile and final time of each previous race
- Race conditions of previous race
- Purse of previous races
- Horse's post position
- Horse's position at 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, top of stretch and finish with lengths behind leader and 'outs' to indicate horse raced outside of other horses

- Driver from previous races
- Trainer from previous races
- Horse's individual fractional times for each 1/4 mile
- Horse's final time
- Harness Eye speed rating
- Track variant and bias
- Medication and post time odds; * indicates horse went off as favorite; bold indicates horse won the race
- Top 3 finishers from horse's previous races with lengths ahead of next finishers (when available)
- Performance comments

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Continued from page 2

week, a quick comparison of the times of each horses' last few races can provide clues as to the which is the best horse. Be careful to not compare different tracks because a half-mile track is typically slower than a five-eighths and a five-eighths is usually slower than a mile.

- An even easier way to compare horses is via a speed figure. This number, like the Beyer Figure commonly used in Thoroughbred racing, provides an easy to understand indicator of each horses' current ability. In most cases it is just a raw number that tells you how fast a horse performed in each race. DRF Harness Eye uses a modified figure called the "Eye Rating" which also takes into account trip, track size, and other variables. The Eye Rating (#15 in the HEG) can be very valuable when comparing horses moving from different tracks. Other program companies like Trackmaster have numbers for speed, pace and other categories, to similarly assist in uncovering winners easily.

- If you don't understand all of the numbers in the program or don't want to learn how to handicap, just comparing each horses' recent speed figures (higher the number, the better) can help you determine the fastest horses in each race. And the fastest horses tend to win more often than not.

Unlike Thoroughbreds which race perhaps once a month on average, Standardbreds compete closer to three times in a 30-day period and average well over 20 starts per year. The most important races for each horse are the recent ones as they reveal how they are currently feeling. We call this "form".

- Always note the dates of a horses' most recent races. A horse that is racing at regular and consistent intervals – ideally every one to two weeks – is more likely to be fit. A horse that has been away for a while may have been sick or unsound.

- There are exceptions to the above rule. Younger horses (2- and 3-year-olds), especially those competing in stakes (higher quality) races will often have larger gaps between races to keep them fresh and sound (healthy).

- Look for past performance lines that read "scr-sick / scr-injured" for an indication of recent illness. Be wary of betting these horses, as they could need a few races to get into top shape (especially true of lower-level horses).

STEP THREE

Who are the human connections?

The abilities of driver and trainer are extremely important when assessing a horses' chances of winning. Most of the time, horses perform at a higher level when



DERICK GWINNER PHOTOS

Tim Tetrick (left) has led North America in earnings among drivers multiple times while trainer Ron Burke has stood atop the leaderboard since 2014.

they have a top catch-driver (person whose primary job is to drive horses) rather than a trainer or unknown driver in the sulky.

Drivers

- The statistics for each driver appear next to their names in each race. You should give extra consideration to drivers that have a higher (10% or more) win percentage.

- Take note of any driver changes from the horses' previous race. If a horse was driven by his trainer in his last start and now picks up a high-percentage driver, this is typically a sign of confidence and the horse's chance of victory would likely increase.

- Leading drivers will often be listed to drive multiple horses in the same race. When a successful driver is listed to drive two or more horses in the same race, he usually drives the horse he feels has the best chance of winning. Most past performances will list this information on the bottom of each race page.

- While a driver often picks the best horse in the race when given options, sometimes they will choose a horse because of a personal connection, or to obtain more drives from that stable down the road. These preferences take time to learn but easily become common knowledge when following a track over time.

Trainers

- Trainers are like coaches. Once they

establish a winning record, they usually have an edge on luring the most sought-after talent. That is why many of the best trainers in the sport have very large barns and at times multiple horses in the same race.

- The most important number on the program is quite possibly a trainer's winning percentage. Horse racing is very much a trainer's game and a top conditioner can make a horse faster.

- Trainers will typically win somewhere between one and 35 percent of their races. Just because a trainer is winning at a 30 percent clip at one track, it does not mean that their success will translate into victory at a major track like the Meadowlands.

- It would be wise to avoid trainers that win less than 10 percent of their races, but be aware of your horse's odds, and give extra consideration to a low-percentage trainer with a horse that is listed at lower than expected odds. These situations could mean that the horse had something go wrong previously and it is really better than they look on paper.

- Keep in mind that certain trainers might only ship their horses in on occasion. Look for trainers with a high success rate but fewer starts (10-30) - as they often turn out to be good betting options.

Helpful Hints: A great horse will make an average driver look good. An average driver can make a good horse look bad.

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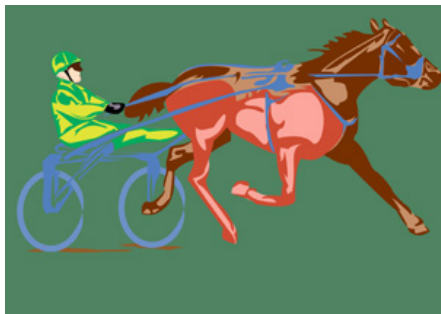


WOODBINE
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STEP FOUR

- Most calls will list two numbers, the first



- Another way to understand how a horse raced in his previous outings is the “short or performance comment” on past performance lines. While many programs will contain a comment, only DRF Harness Eye has “free-form” descriptions to accurately describe the trip a horse had, trouble he might have encountered or his general appearance during most efforts. These short comments are like a one-stop clue into what happened to the horse during each race. A comment like “coasting” tells you that the horse was an easy winner and could be in peak form. Something like “dug in, held” describes a horse that might have had to work harder to win. If you do not have the time to examine the past performances, the short comments could be your ticket.

STEP SIX

Horse quality/Class

Just what has my horse done in his career?

- The upper right-hand corner of every horses' past performances is set aside to provide you with a complete summary of the how the horse has done for his career as well as the an in-depth listing of his record over the last two years (go back and check our sample Greenshoe's magenta-colored area). This space will list a horse's record (starts-wins-seconds-thirds) for the two most recent years and over its career as well as earnings for each year and for its career. Also displayed is a horse's fastest win time in each of the two years listed and for his/her career, with the name of the track at which the horse recorded this time on the same line

- A horse's record can be very helpful in deciding which is the "classiest" horse in the race. Compare your horse to the others in the race. Does your horse win more often than the others in the race? Are his career and yearly earnings far superior to his competitors? Answering these questions could help you pick the winner.

Helpful Hint: Yearly and career earnings

are best used when horses are facing easier competition. A horse that is "dropping in class" can often improve when facing a softer group.

STEP SEVEN

Technology

The sport of harness racing has changed dramatically over the last two decades.

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DRF Harness EYE
 VOLUME 16 NUMBER 240 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2019 \$8.00
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There was a time when you had to go to the track every night to gain a strategic advantage. But the explosion of social media, technology and off-track wagering has changed the landscape.

- While there is no beating the experience of standing along the rail and rooting home your horse at your local racetrack, virtually every state and province now permits off-track or online wagering. You can sit down at your desk or pick up your phone and wager on tracks across the world.

- With the explosion of online wagering, the ability to watch races has increased dramatically. Anyone can go back and watch replays of past races to gain insight into how a horse performed in recent starts. This is a vital step to success as the past performance lines in the program only tell part of the story.

- Social media has added a new flavor to the sport as trainers and drivers have taken to Twitter to provide a run-down of their horses racing on any given day. This can be valuable information depending on who is doing the touting. If you keep track of what people say it may lead to future clues as to who gives out the best information.

- Twenty years ago you needed to purchase your local paper to find out more

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information about racing. With a simple tap of your finger you can now find out the latest information on stakes races, read features about the industry, and even get free handicapping information and selections. DRF Harness provides free daily selections and analysis from a number of tracks each week at drf.com/harness.

STEP EIGHT

Pools and Odds

Horse racing involves pari-mutuel wagering. That means you are playing against other people who are wagering on the races. All the money wagered on each individual bet – minus takeout (a tax on the wagers) – is placed into a pool and divvied up to people who select the correct horses at the finish.

- Understanding the concept of odds is a key to wagering, but it is not as difficult as it seems. Each horse is assigned a return on investment determined by the amount of money wagered on each entrant in the race. The odds range from 1-9 to 999-1 and payouts on simple wagers, like WIN, PLACE and SHOW, are based on a \$2 minimum. Odds of 4-1 (payout of \$10.00 to \$10.80) mean that for every \$2 you wager, you will profit \$8.00 to \$8.80. In simpler terms, use XX-YY to represent random odds. For every YY you wager, you will get XX.

- Takeout is an often overlooked but extremely important part of the wagering equation. Similar to the vig on a sports bet, tracks keep a percentage of each wager. This can range from a low 10 percent to a high of 35 percent. If you place a \$10 wager at a track with a 10 percent rate, \$9 will remain in the pool to be distributed to the winners. That same \$10 bet at a track with a 35 percent takeout will leave \$6.50 in the pool. You wouldn't go to Target and purchase a TV for \$1,000 that you could get at Discount Joe's for \$750, so finding a track with the best rates can be beneficial.

- Watching the pattern of betting can often provide clues to how a race will unfold. Some keys to look for are horses that are bet heavily early or late in the wagering. A horse at lower than expected odds early in the wagering could represent a "wise-guy" horse that had a troubled trip recently. Similarly, a horse with odds that drop significantly late in the wagering could be due to smart bettors, or even computer-based players which use algorithms, taking advantage of perceived value.

Helpful Hint: All tracks in the same state are not created equal. Track A in New York may offer an 18 percent rate on takeout for WIN wagers while track B could offer 14 percent.

POOL TOTALS		ODDS		RACE		POST TIME		RESULTS		WIN		PLACE		SHOW		EXA.	
WIN	2310	1-2	10-11	6	10:04	1	14.60	1	14.60	1	14.60	1	14.60	1	14.60	1	14.60
PLACE	2351	7	12	7	10:15	2	7.40	2	7.40	2	7.40	2	7.40	2	7.40	2	7.40
SHOW	2295	8	13	8	10:15	3	7.20	3	7.20	3	7.20	3	7.20	3	7.20	3	7.20

DERICK GIWNER

The track toteboard provides valuable information on odds, payouts and more.

STEP NINE

Wagering basics & more

There are many types of wagers available in today's game. They range from selecting one horse to as many as five in a given race or betting one race to as many as every race on a card.

- WIN / PLACE / SHOW – Win means you are betting the horse to finish first. Place means you are hoping the horse will finish first or second. Show means that your horse must finish in the top three. Since it is harder to win, that generally pays the most, followed by place and show in that order.

- EXACTA, TRIFECTA, SUPERFECTA, HI-5 – An exacta (or perfecta) bet requires selecting the first and second place finishers in a single race. A trifecta (also triple or triactor) requires selecting the first three in order. A superfecta requires selecting the first four horses in order. A Hi-5 wager, of course, requires the person wagering to select the first five finishers in order. There are two types of Hi-5 wagers. The first would distribute the pool to all bettors who correctly select the top five finishers. The second, called a Jackpot Hi-5, only pays the entire pool if ONE person correctly selects all five finishers. Otherwise a consolation is paid out to all of the "winners" and the pool is carried over to the next day.

- DOUBLE, PICK X – The double requires a person to correctly select the winner of two consecutive races. Expanding beyond two races, tracks also offer Pick 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 wagers. These extend the theory behind the double to even more races.

- With the exception of win/place/show, all of the other bets are called exotic wagers. You do not need to bet one single combination. These bets are typically placed in multiples. This is where it becomes a bit more complex, but here are two examples:

TRIFECTA: 1 with 2,3,4 with 2,3,4,5,6,7

PICK 4: 1 with 1,3,4 with 1,2 with 7,8

1. In the trifecta example, you need the "1 horse" to win, any combination of the 2,3,4 to finish second and any of the 2,3,4,5,6,7 to finish third. The cost of this wager for \$1 would be \$15 (1 x 3 x 5).

2. In the Pick 4 example, one of the horses you have listed in each leg must win for you to cash. The 1 must win the first

race, the 1,3 or 4 must win the second leg, the 1 or 2 must win leg three, and the 7 or 8 must win the final race. This would cost \$12 (1 x 3 x 2 x 2) for a \$1 wager.

- As in Thoroughbred wagering, many Harness tracks offer guaranteed pools. This means that the track is promising that the total in the pool will reach a specific amount. The United States Trotting Association has a Strategic Wagering initiative that works with tracks to post guarantees.

- When no bettors correctly select a winning combination, often that will result in a carryover pool. This takes a large portion of the pool and pays it in the next like wagering opportunity. For example: If no one correctly selected the winners in the Pick 4, the money would be "carried over" to the next Pick 4 wager offered by the track. This is sort of like the lottery available in most states. If no one has the winning ticket, consoling are paid and the majority of the money is paid on the next drawing if someone hits.

Helpful Hint: If a pool doesn't reach a listed guaranteed amount that creates value for players because the track will have to add the extra money into the pool out of their pockets.

STEP TEN

Money Management and patience

You can be an expert handicapper, but if you don't know how to manage your bankroll and pick your spots, all is lost. Below are a couple of tips.

- You don't need to play every race. Pick your best bets on the card and try to avoid playing the rest of the races. If you must play every race, set aside 20% of your bankroll for these "fun" bets and 80% for the serious wagers.

- Similar to the stock market, it is best to diversify. If you like a horse, bet to win but play exotics as well so you can maximize your returns since bets like exactas and pick 3s pay more than win bets.

- Do not fall into the trap of betting multiple combinations that could produce a loss of money. For example: Playing a \$2 exacta of the 2-horse first with the 1, 4 and 5 in the second slot (\$6 total) makes little sense if the 2-1 exacta is returning \$5.60.

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MATT
ROSE



DARIN
ZOCCALI

1) What is one piece of handicapping advice you would give to a person who is walking into a Harness track or looking to make a bet for the first time?

Garnet Barnsdale

Figure out quickly the mathematics of winning. Learn what “takeout” is and avoid playing high takeout bets. Avoid “play it safe” wagers like Win, Place or straight show betting. You can make money at this, but there is a very small margin of error and you need to understand the math first.

Dave Brower

BUY the official program so you know the names of the horses, their betting numbers, the driver, trainer and owners. It is an invaluable booklet of information, even if you need to keep it simple.

Jeremy Day

Look for horses with good last quarters. Don't bet place or show.

Derick Givner

Take it all in for the first few races. You can learn a lot just by watching. Just like any other sport, Harness Racing has streaks and horses trained by the same person or driven by the same person could often be good plays.

Bob Pandolfo

Stick to the dominant drivers, best post positions, and avoid horses that are not likely to be able to get the lead during the opening half. Do not bet any post position that is winning at less than 10%. This information is available in the track program.

Greg Reinhart

Do your research. There are many great handicapping books and websites that will guide you as you're getting involved and trying to learn the game. Also don't be afraid to ask questions on social media or to people at the track.

Matt Rose

Don't be overwhelmed by all the information . . . keep it simple at first until you are more comfortable. Remember, I'm the expert and will lose and you will have beginner's luck.

Darin Zoccali

For your first racetrack experience, I would suggest attending the races with

friends who know a bit about racing and can help explain what is encapsulated within the past performances of a racing program. My suggestion would be to keep it simple. Once you learn a bit about it, use three factors to begin handicapping: class, form and time. These are probably three of the easier traits to identify when looking at a program.

2) What wager type would you suggest to this newbie? Why?

Garnet Barnsdale

I would steer them toward whatever wager offers the lowest takeout (especially non-jackpot carryovers) and explain why it is critical to turning long-term profits. Then I'd help them handicap the ticket.

Dave Brower

I would simply suggest a straight across-the-board bet. \$2 to win, place and show. So, that if your pick finishes first, second, or third, you get to cash a ticket! There is nothing quite like cashing a ticket for the first time, whether you make a lot of money or a little.

Jeremy Day

I would recommend exactas and trifectas so they would have a better chance of catching a decent payout.

Derick Givner

I'm a big proponent of the three-horse exacta box for new players. Boxing three horses in one race costs just \$6 for a \$1 base play and gives you the opportunity to win good money. Plus it is easy to explain to someone that they need two of the three horses they selected to finish first and second.

Bob Pandolfo

Exacta keys: Once you've handicapped and found a horse you like, use that horse as a key in exacta boxes with two or three other horses. Exacta pools are big and exactas aren't as difficult to hit as Pick 4's and Pick 5's, which are for more advanced players.

Greg Reinhart

For the new bettor, I don't think there's anything wrong with a good, old-fashioned show wager. Your horse only has to finish in the top three, and if you get some money back in your pocket, it feels good and makes you want to come back and try again.

Matt Rose

A win bet is the simplest and doesn't need any explanation, but if their selection was a heavy favorite I would let them know so they aren't disappointed at the small payout.

Darin Zoccali

Again, keep it simple. This isn't a time to try and hit a Pick 5. I would suggest beginning with a win or win and place bet. From there, exactas and daily doubles. My rationale for this is two-fold. First, it's easy for the player to determine if he has won. Second, it is far easier to simply pick a horse to finish first or second then crazy exotic combinations. Thus, the individual may cash more tickets, have a better experience and want to come back.

3) What do you feel is the most important aspect of harness handicapping? Speed? Trip? Human connections?

Garnet Barnsdale

I'm going to go off the board here and go with “change”. My first step handicapping every race is to look for change: Post position changes, up or down in class, barn change, driver change, equipment change, change in a horse's perceived fitness, change in track, etc. It's so easy if you aren't meticulous to miss one of these and cost yourself a big score by not including a horse on a ticket.

Dave Brower

To me, the most important aspects are the class level and the trainer. There is no more potent angle than when a horse is dropping in class, especially if they are conditioned by a good trainer. Good trainers win races. Simple as that.

Jeremy Day

It depends on what type of race it is. Just answering that specific question without knowing what type of race it is, I would answer watching the same horses for two or three starts closely.

Derick Givner

Outside of the horse, no factor means more in our sport than the trainer. A top trainer can move a horse up to a new level.

Bob Pandolfo

They're all important but most races are won by one of the fastest horses in the race. If all of the horses appear to be about the same speed, it may be best to pass that race.

Greg Reinhart

Human connections and form. If a horse is racing well, I won't shy away from backing it as it goes up the class ladder. And it's a trainer's game right now, if a horse has a significant upgrade (or downgrade) on that side, you have to give it a second look.

Matt Rose

Speed on smaller tracks, trip on larger tracks. It's very enticing to lean in the direction of a horse with a lot of 1's in the program.

Darin Zoccali

I used to think it was speed. Now, seemingly every horse can go to The Meadowlands and pace in 1:50 or trot in 1:52-1:53. Fifteen years ago it wasn't like that. It was easier to spot horses who simply weren't fast enough. Now, I think there are two important factors. First, handicapping the trip a horse may get. Since so many horses can pace fast enough to win a race, the trip they work out is often the deciding factor in their result. Second is the human connections behind the horse. Specifically, certain barn changes almost completely nullify what the horse's recent form may be. We have seen that prove true often in recent years.

4) If a Thoroughbred player wanted to try Harness Racing, what advice would you provide?

Garnet Barnsdale

If you are aiming to be a serious player, stick to one or two tracks, educate yourself on who the top human connections are and how they operate, and make sure you are watching live races and/or replays and making written or mental notes for future use.

Dave Brower

Do not try to use thoroughbred handicapping angles for harness racing. It's a completely different game. Use the official program, which hopefully contains some analysis from an expert to guide you in the right direction. It's just a start, but will give you things to look for when you start to do your own handicapping.

Jeremey Day

Watch as many replays as you can for the card you want to handicap and learn which drivers put themselves in good position consistently.

Derick Giwner

Especially on smaller tracks, Harness Racing is much more trip-oriented. If you can figure out where the horses will be midway through the race (it's not as difficult as it seems), you'll be ahead of most players.

Bob Pandolfo

Use the same principles you do when

handicapping thoroughbreds, but try to focus mainly on horses that figure to leave the gate. And, read my book, *Trot picks: Modern Harness Handicapping*.

Greg Reinhart

Form is form, speed is speed, and ground loss or gain is ground loss or gain, no matter the breed. I don't really feel the differences are that significant; if you can handicap one, you can handicap the other, I've found.

Matt Rose

All of the wagering principles are basically identical and it's still a horse race. Someone has to win. Also get out from behind that computer and go experience how close-up and easier it is to follow Harness Racing live.

Darin Zoccali

My first piece of advice would be to begin at The Meadowlands. The pools and race-flow are such that they provide the closest experience to that of betting on a thoroughbred race. It's a mile track, there are often 10 horses and while important, speed is not as dominant as it is on half-mile tracks. From there I would suggest working through other tracks as he or she sees fit and while harness racing is a different game, I would advise that they not abandon their handicapping strategy, but learn how to apply it best to harness racing over time.

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Thoroughbred players agree, Harness is a viable option

By Derick Gwerner

There is no arguing that Thoroughbred handle dwarfs that of Harness Racing. While for 2018 the Sport of Kings led by nearly a 9 to 1 margin in U.S. handle, Standardbred Racing still accounted for a strong \$1.37 billion in money wagered for the year.

The wagering pools may be smaller in Harness, but according to many large players, the opportunities to consistently win are most certainly greater when compared to Thoroughbred Racing.

"There's a lot of money to be made," said 2018 Breeders' Cup Betting Challenge winner Chuck Grubbs, who focuses most of his attention on betting Harness.

Grubbs is a regular player at Northfield, The Meadows, Meadowlands and Mohawk Park as well as Keeneland, Santa Anita and Churchill on the Thoroughbred side. While people may be surprised to see smaller-sized tracks like Northfield and The Meadows on his list of go-to tracks because handle tends to be lower on half-mile and five-eighths surfaces, Grubbs cited consistency as a main reason.

"Both of those tracks race year-round. You see the same horses, drivers and trainers each week, so you pick up their habits," said Grubbs. "I definitely would say Northfield is my number one handle. I love to bet Northfield."

Mark Weaver, a prominent owner in Harness Racing, also enjoys playing both Thoroughbreds and Harness on a regular basis. While not a professional per se like Grubbs, who admits betting on racing is the only job he has had since he was 16, Weaver puts a substantial amount of money through the windows on both breeds.

"I think probably the opportunity to make money is easier in Harness Racing, but to make a lot of money it is not comparable, you have to go with Thoroughbreds," said Weaver, who tends to gravitate to the best opportu-

nities rather than a specific track. "I check which tracks have the best carry-overs or what I'm familiar with, but I'll play any track. I actually prefer playing Thoroughbreds because since I don't own any I'm not forced to bet only my own horses."

Grubbs agreed that the opportunity for the big score is much greater with Thoroughbreds but consistent success really helps the bottom line.

"I like to play the big tournaments in Thoroughbreds. I look at them as a shot to win \$100,000 in one day. When I play a Harness track, I'm looking to win \$1,000 or \$2,000 a day. It is a grind," said Grubbs. "You can make a way bigger score in Thoroughbreds than you can on Harness. I prefer Harness because even though the pools are a lot smaller, it is the same horses racing week after week. In Thoroughbred, if I see one that gets cut-off or run into, I may have to wait six or eight weeks or even six months, you never know when they will race again. If a Harness horse gets run into or gets in trouble. I know in seven days I can play that horse again."

When attacking races the races, Grubbs stressed the importance of watching race replays. Before the upcoming Breeders' Cup in California, he'll put in 20-24 hours just watching races. With a track like Northfield, which is his bread-and-butter wagering location, despite seeing most races live, he'll spend an hour or two each day reviewing the action.

"Harness and Thoroughbred is no different for me when it comes to handicapping - it's replays," said Grubbs. "If a guy goes to the races and loses all the time, it is because he is not putting the time and effort in. If you sit in front of a computer and watch a replay of the horses' last two or three races, you will come to a conclusion on what type of form the horse is in."

Of course there are many available angles for coming up with top selections and Weaver mapped out some of his favorites for each breed.

"I'm a big believer in barn changes and driver changes," said Weaver when it comes to Harness. "Not that one driver or trainer is better than another, but sometimes things get stagnant and horses just need a different set of hands. There are all kinds of different things, so it is hard to narrow it down."

"In Thoroughbreds it is more about the pace play. I look for horses that can get loose on the lead and get brave. I also look for horses that have shown speed going two turns and shorten up to a one-turn sprint. I like that angle. Every race is its own challenge."

Both Weaver and Grubbs felt strongly that there was no reason for a divide between the two breeds. The key to success is doing the homework.

"There are a lot of similarities and a lot of differences, but given a couple of weeks most would be able to pick up on it," said Weaver on Thoroughbred players trying Harness. "If you put your time in and study it, you can figure it out. It is an easy game to fall in love with."

"I grew up watching all three, Harness, Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse at Los Alamitos. To me Harness is the most strategic. I love it. I think people are missing the boat because it is a great sport and great sport to be an owner in; it could be very profitable."

"The thing about Harness Racing, and this goes for Thoroughbreds too, there are a lot of lazy people," said Grubbs. "Instead of going to the track and buying the program to handicap. Buy your track the night before and while you are lying in bed winding down, study the program. If you just show up at the track and don't put in any work, you are going to be throwing away your money."

Harness Racing may lack the glamour of its Thoroughbred counterpart, which has the Kentucky Derby and Breeders Cup on national television and in the public's eye, but there are many advantages to crossing over and testing the waters. As the saying goes, "Try it, you'll like it."



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