

## Introduction

Most 7-year-old New York City kids spend their springtime Saturday afternoons peering cautiously into a lion's den at the Bronx Zoo or chasing butterflies in left field at the local Little League matchup. I had my own unique childhood regimen. I usually traded in 7:00 a.m. Saturday-morning cartoons for a *Daily Racing Form* and my mother's red and green real-estate markers. These weren't for shading in any Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew coloring books. Instead, I used them for circling hot jockey and trainer combinations and superior times. This fascination all started about 28 years ago, somewhere in between the Kabanger craze, metal roller skates, Rubik's Cube, and the original GI Joe era.

Nowadays, most thirtysomething adults from the Tri-State area can reminisce about those weekend trips to Cape Cod, the Jersey Shore, or Lake George while traveling via the old man's station wagon. We had several old, beat-up station wagons. The truth is, we had about 17 in about a span of eight years. My father had a horrible habit of crashing one a week. However, when the wagon was in driving condition and not overheating from lack of fluids, the old junker was usually barreling down the Cross Island Parkway or the Van Wyck Expressway at about 83 miles an hour. My dad drank like a fish and habitually tossed each empty can of Rheingold out the open window of the passenger seat. If it was winter, he slipped in a slug of blackberry brandy.

The scenery was fantastic as we passed by the usual landmarks—an abandoned burnt car, a rubber tire, and some Italian folks picking dandelions on the side of the road for their Sunday salads. I usually sat calmly handicapping the daily double, using those same green and red markers. I'd occasionally blurt out a fact or two about a first-time starter in the fifth, or a recent Oscar Barrera claim that was coming off three days' rest and moving from a \$10,000 claimer to a nonwinners-of-two allowance race. This was all part of Thursday-afternoon payday, which conveniently occurred twice each month. The poor nuns at Mt. Carmel St. Anthony grade school must have thought I was a very sick child when I was escorted from social studies class at 11:00 a.m. I was my dad's partner in crime. I was an innocent child enjoying every minute of his truly degenerate journey. Horse racing became my passion.

Any horseplayer alive can remember how and where he was first introduced to this fascinating game. For many, that introduction may have come from a parent, uncle, aunt, a high-school or college buddy, or the next-door neighbor. Some days, when you lose that tight photo and miss that pick four or pick six by an annoying snout, you may wish you had never begun this humbling adventure. Most days, though, despite a winning or losing afternoon, it's a game we all embrace with open arms. It's a love like no other. I've had it every day of my life and I honestly couldn't be more thankful.

I'd like to welcome you to the journey of studying trainer statistics and the introduction to Formulator 4.1. I hope you find the following pages and chapters entertaining and helpful in all your handicapping endeavors. If you're looking for a rags-to-riches handicapping guide, you've come to the wrong place. What I can promise you, however, is that you'll become aware of profitable trainer angles and maneuvers that you may not have easily uncovered before reading this book. Furthermore, you'll learn to recognize what trainer angles are worth researching and what angles are basically

worthless. Hopefully, you'll spend less time handicapping unimportant trainer data and more time constructing profitable wagering techniques. Enjoy the ride.

## Chapter 1: Trainer Form

Trainer Form was first introduced into the *Daily Racing Form* in October 2000. Before *Daily Racing Form* started incorporating its own unique trainer statistics into the past performances, it was up to the individual handicapper to keep his or her own trainer-stat records. The practice was tiresome and time consuming, but extremely rewarding for those with the patience and diligence to scan through thousands of result charts. At the impressionable age of 16, I had both the time and the patience.

Many years ago, in the 1980's, I was playing the New Jersey circuit fairly exclusively. This included the Meadowlands in the fall, Garden State Park during the winter months, and the Monmouth Park/Atlantic City racetrack afternoon/evening doubleheader during the late spring and summer. At the time I was armed with my own five to six years of trainer stats, which I had accumulated by cutting out daily DRF result charts and placing them in a plastic binder. My artillery included a cheap pair of scissors, some loose-leaf paper, and a small bottle of Elmer's glue. With these limited supplies I had single-handedly started my own business.

During this adolescent gambling journey, I stumbled across some intriguing trainer angles—many of which weren't highly publicized and available to the rest of the horseplaying community. My teenage gambling run was a good one. In fact, there was a point when I traded in catching feeder goldfish and cleaning ferret cages one summer at Nature's Children Pet Shop for a full-time escapade at the Monmouth Park third-floor grandstand. It wasn't long before I realized that Monmouth Park's Joseph H. Pierce Jr. (first off the claim) combined with Chris Antley on board paid far better than the \$4.75 an hour that store owner "Dr. Dan the Pet Shop Man" was willing to part with.

There were a few memorable trainer-angle scores. One unforgettable hit included a 60-1 bomb from New Jersey veteran trainer Timothy Hills in a small New Jersey-bred stakes race. The sly New England horseman moved his older colt up in class, from dirt to turf, and retained the jockey services of Abigail Fuller. According to my yellowed racing charts and Timothy Hills stats, it was a winning angle. Needless to say, I was hooked on trainer stats for life. A similar angle in today's highly technological era, however, would likely produce a much smaller payoff, with the data now available in print and online for thousands of handicappers to read, utilize, and wager on.

Don't despair. Despite the fact that today's player is slightly more sophisticated, and armed with various tools to uncover these types of overlays, there are still some valuable angles that produce overlays day in and day out. The key is having the patience and ability to sift through the extensive trainer-stat "data dump." There are still some golden nuggets left lying for recovery. The Trainer Form created and printed by *Daily Racing Form* is a wonderful inclusion to past-performance data, and is an excellent starting point for the trainer-angle enthusiast.

Over the last six years, the DRF editorial staff has slowly added Trainer Form categories they felt were relevant to producing winning angles. Although all the categories can be considered a supportive feature, it becomes relatively obvious that

some of them are far more helpful and relevant than others. At the present time DRF is tracking almost 40 trainer statistics, which cover every trainer's record over this year and last year in a variety of situations. There are as many as six individual categories listed under the past performances for each horse, depending on the number of applicable statistics. Each trainer stat will list:

- The number of starts for the trainer in each category
- The win percentage for the trainer in that category
- The \$2 Return on Investment for the trainer in that category

The complete list of comprehensive trainer stats includes the following, and the abbreviations indicated in parentheses are what appear under the past performances of each horse.

1. First North American Start (1stNA)
2. First race after claim (1stClaim)
3. First race with trainer (1stW/Trn)
4. More than 180 days since last race (+180Days)
5. 61-180 days since last race (61-180Days)
6. Second off a layoff of 45-180 Days (2Off45-180)
7. Second off a layoff of more than 180 Days (2OffOver180)
8. 1-7 days since last race (1-7Days)
9. First-time starter (1stStart)
10. Second starts with maidens (2ndStart)
11. Maiden special weight to maiden claimer (MSWtoMCL)
12. First-time time turf (1stTurf)
13. First-time blinkers (1stBlink)
14. First-time Lasix (1stLasix)
15. 2-year-olds (2YO)
16. Dirt to turf (Dirt/Turf)
17. Turf to dirt (Turf/Dirt)
18. Blinkers on (BlinkOn)
19. Blinkers off (BlinkOff)
20. Sprint to Route (Sprint/Route)
21. Route to Sprint (Route/Sprint)
22. Two sprints to a route (2Sprints/Route)
23. 31-60 days since last race (31-60 Days)
24. Won last start (WonLastStart)
25. Dirt (Dirt)
26. Turf (Turf)
27. Sprint (Sprint)
28. Routes (Routes)
29. Maiden claiming (MdnClm)
30. Maiden special weight (MdnSpWt)
31. Claiming (Claim)
32. Allowance (Alw)
33. Stakes (Stakes)

34. Graded stakes (GrdStk)
35. Debut in maiden claimer (DebutMCL)
36. Debut at a distance greater than or equal to one mile (Debut $\geq$ 1Mile)

Of the 36 Trainer Form variables listed, I have found approximately one-third (or roughly 16) to be immediately supportive to one's daily handicapping regimen. They include those that fall under the following trainer patterns: (1) recent claims; (2) layoff runners; (3) debut starters; (4) new barn acquisitions; and (5) any horse undergoing a makeover or modification (such as adding or removing blinkers or Lasix, stretching out or cutting back in distance, or moving from one surface to another).

What separates these categories from the others is that these Trainer Form stats are specific, and often indicate a favorable trainer maneuver that is likely to improve a runner's performance. It's this immediate improvement in performance we're interested in capitalizing on. In the upcoming chapters, I'll discuss how these Trainer Form stats can sometimes be misleading. As you become familiar with the DRF Formulator software and learn how to utilize it, you'll discover that many of the Trainer Form categories listed in the daily paper contain completely different win percentages and ROI's when separated according to a horse's age, sex, or a trainer's performance at an individual racing circuit. It's this hidden trainer data that requires some work and digging on the part of the handicapper. This is the data we'll be concentrating on.

### *HOW TO USE TRAINER FORM*

I could easily fill 400 pages with examples of how using Trainer Form data exclusively from the daily paper produced boxcar payoffs. That's not my intention. However, I will list a few examples of how the data produced from my Top 16 can be utilized almost immediately without any further "filtering" (a term you'll become very familiar with when using the Formulator software).

Let's take a look at one average, chilly March Wednesday afternoon from 2006 and see which Trainer Form statistics could have steered you toward some potential runners. More importantly, the following examples will show you how this unique handicapping feature could be used in addition to other standard handicapping tools, such as speed figures, trip and form cycle analysis, pace examination, etc.

Despite getting off a step slowly at the start and being forced to gun to the early pace, then racing erratically in the stretch, this 4-year-old colt by Unbridled, trained by Steve Asmussen, kicked away from a group of \$50,000 maiden claimers for a comfortable two-length victory. Reading from left to right, you can see Asmussen's past success with these types of runners, and a scholarly Trainer Form handicapper could have assumed that this colt could be ready for a nice performance despite the nearly 13-month layoff.

Asmussen was winning at a rate of 50 percent with a profitable \$4.60 return on investment for North American starters (1stNA: 6 .50 \$4.60); he had a 24 percent win percentage and slight \$1.87 ROI loss for new acquisitions (1stW/Trn: 156 .24 \$1.87); and he had a 26 percent win percentage with a small 16-cent-profit return for starters adding

Lasix for the first time (1<sup>st</sup>Lasix: 42 .26 \$2.16). Some fairly decent numbers for a trainer winning 16 percent (58 9 11 6 .16) at the current Aqueduct meet.

I would like to add that there is no magic win-percentage number that one should be looking for or focusing on when evaluating Trainer Form starts. As a general rule, however, I like to see win percentages that are considerably higher than the trainer's general stats at the meet with all starters, have a minimum of seven starts within a specific trainer category, and, finally, if you're the kind of person that insists on being married to a number, a minimum of an 18 percent win percentage or higher for the specific Trainer Form angle. I believe this is a reasonable beginner-bettor's guideline, and one that will help you familiarize yourself with the Trainer Form handicapping feature while eliminating those stats that are cumbersome.

This group of \$40,000 3-year-old claimers was filled with about a half dozen entrants who were not only stretching out to the 1 1/16-mile route for the first time, but also making their initial attempt on the turf. A great betting race and a Trainer Form fan's gala for finding potential overlay trainer patterns and angles. The number 4 horse, Fill In, had a lot of interesting angles for Southern California-based trainer Mike Mitchell, who was having a rousing Gulfstream Park meet, clicking with 35 percent of all his starters (20 7 3 1 .35).

Mitchell had already had tremendous success in 2005, and continued his winning ways when setting up a small army of original claiming stock along with those he recently acquired 3,000 miles away from his home base. Despite having some Trainer Form numbers that were slightly below his overall win percentage, there were a lot of positive trainer maneuvers (makeovers) that should have tipped you off to his winning intentions.

In addition, for those of us using the Formulator software (please see the next chapter), there was one general layoff angle that screamed "Play me!" like a pink neon sign blinking in a completely lightless room. It was the 31-60 days since last running date category (87 .30 \$2.26). Although the Trainer Form stat indicated a 30 percent win percentage for the year (which was accurate), a careful filtering process focusing just on Mitchell's Gulfstream Park entrants produced an astounding 80 percent win percentage. If that angle wasn't enough, the collection of other positive modifications, such as 1<sup>st</sup>Claim (111 .29 \$2.02), 1<sup>st</sup>Blink (13 .31 \$2.65), Dirt/Turf (32 .22 \$2.58), and BlinkOn (19 .32 \$3.17), may have swayed you to seriously consider this mediocre 2-1 betting favorite. If you dug even farther and noticed the talented New York jockey John Velazquez taking over the mount for J. C. Leyva (a 33 percent winning combination thus far (J/T 2005-2006 GP: 12 .33 \$2.57), it was surely a winning scenario no matter how you decided to spin it. Well, maybe not.

Part of the running line in the following result chart for Full In reads: "FULL IN reserved off the pace, rallied inside FAMOUS FROLIC to reach near even terms for command inside the eighth pole, then dueled with that rival and was just edged to the wire."

It just goes to show you that despite the most favorable Trainer Form numbers and stats available, you still need the trip and some racing luck. That favorable trip and luck went to number 10, Famous Frolic, who won the photo over the rallying Full In to produce a \$127.60 exacta based on a \$2 bet. Trainer gurus who selectively establish their

own records, and perhaps even devise their computerized database for the meets they play regularly, may have been aware that trainer Milton Wolfson had had only two turf winners on the Florida circuit in the past 12 months, making it a little bit of a stretch to bet assertively on Famous Frolic. There were, however, a few Trainer Form stats that might have stirred your interest in this 14-1 Charismatic colt making his third start off a layoff. The first important angle was the 25 percent win percentage Wolfson had accomplished with horses making their first grass attempt (1stTurf: 4 .25 \$3.20). The second was the basic surface switch from dirt to turf (7 .14 \$1.83). You could have made a reasonable case that Milton was in a position to end his 0-9 skid at the Gulfstream meet, based on some positive trainer stats in a couple of categories where he had enjoyed previous success.

A final illustration of how the *Daily Racing Form* Trainer Form works, and how it can be used in addition to your daily handicapping routine, takes us to race 4 at Oaklawn Park on March 8, 2006. This \$15,000 maiden-claiming route for 3-year-olds and up featured some of the cheapest and most unreliable horses at that track. From a handicapping standpoint, total chaos was expected, and that's exactly what happened when 31-1 shot Requiem of Dreams crossed the wire three widening lengths in front.

The optimistic and creative horseplayers who had backed the winner were rewarded handsomely, and deservedly so. This struggling 4-year-old colt had been beaten a combined 65 lengths in four lifetime starts for trainer Walter Bindner Jr. After what was described as a "pinballed start" in his February 10 outing on a sloppy track, when he rushed into contention with a quarter-mile to go after getting off slowly, he was fairly well-backed at 6-1 when he returned a little over two weeks later at the same \$15,000 class level. The result was a disappointing seventh-place finish. What happened next, however, might have provided the clue to the sudden wake-up call on March 8.

Requiem of Dreams changed barns and landed under the care of Charles Cannon and owner Benny Campo. The colt's first Trainer Form line read 1stW/Trn (19 .21 \$1.88). Not exactly the type of trainer stat that jumps off the page and makes you do an Irish jig on the kitchen floor while holding your *Form* above your head, but worth noting nonetheless. It's important to stress that it is always advisable to take a second look when a horse changes barns, despite its dismal previous form. Whether it is the influence of better general care, different feed, new medications, implementation of some ground-breaking equipment or remedy, or something as simple as a little TLC and change of scenery, it can make a world of difference in a horse's performance.

The second-place finisher, number 1, Mountain Jett, was a more realistic play, and offered the following pair of notable Trainer Form stats: 2<sup>nd</sup> Start (24 .25 \$2.36), MdnClm (80 .28 \$2.41). Morris G. Nicks showed a profitable ROI in two important stat categories, and there was reason to believe there was a little talent hidden within this colt after a wide trip and green "erratic" stretch run in his debut. Furthermore, the trainer also had some decent stats with general route runners (Routes: 97 .15 \$2.11) and Mountain Jett had attracted some betting action at 8-1 in his initial start.

Rounding out the trifecta and mammoth superfecta were number 9, Critical Acclaim, and number 3, General Genius. The trainer of Critical Acclaim was only 1 for 30 at the current meet, and his assets weren't immediately visible to the untrained eye, but those

who took the time to do a little more research could have used him on their exotic tickets. His 15 percent win percentage in general maiden-claiming events was worth noting (MdnCln: 33 .15 \$1.94), especially if you took it a step farther and filtered out only his Oaklawn Park starters. You would have quickly discovered that his mediocre win percentage was easily overshadowed by his juicy prices in the Oaklawn wagering pools. This was a key stat that could have only been uncovered by utilizing the Formulator software, which leads us to the subject and introduction of the program in Chapter 2.