

PHYSICAL HANDICAPPING

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December 14, 2011

OVERALL APPEARANCE

The ideal horse is well proportioned, alert without being fixated, has a beautiful shiny coat with dappling and there is a spring in their step and their head is high and neck bowed. It doesn't hurt when they are playful as well – giving the groom a face full of nose or nipping at their pony and then jumping back. Horses like to play, and young horses really like to play. If you are playful, you aren't scared of the upcoming race, in fact you are ready to roll. I see trainers all the time try to get them to stop being playful and I always think "shouldn't this be fun for them?". One of the most playful horses I ever saw was Majestic Prince back in the late 60s – he seemed to take great pleasure in getting Johnny Longden to bust a gasket. The second you turned your back on him he would slyly start sneaking away. He almost got away on the day of the Santa Anita Derby but Longden turned to him and bellowed "Don't even think about it!" He stopped dead in his tracks and waited for them to come get him. He also liked to grab Longden by the back of the pants and lift his head up. The only horse I know that delighted in giving Melvins. The point is a playful horse is a happy horse and happy horses run.

COAT, MANE AND TAIL

The eyes may be the windows to the soul, but the coat is the mirror of their physical condition. If you have a horse with a coat that just glistens, you got yourself a runner. The glossier it is the better. It will have an almost metallic sheen to it. You will see some that shine like a new Ferrari, they generally don't disappoint. TBTA talked some barns that braid manes, tails and weave the checkerboard pattern into their haunches. These are usually from small barns that take great pride in their runners, and although I can't cite any numbers, they do better than average, especially when they only do it on occasion. Keep notes, it can be a real accurate indicator when they have one who is really ready to run.

The other thing to note is dappling. Dappling is when their coat looks like it has spots on it that look almost like they have a star burst in it. Hard to describe, but it is blatantly obvious in most horses. Here is a picture of Zenyatta on the farm where the light is perfect to see the dappling on her coat:

<http://gallery.pictopia.com/bloodhorse/gallery/7157/photo/9321575/?o=0>

Dappling can be much harder to see in grays; Silver Charm has a natural coloration pattern that looks exactly like dappling. But when he was dappled they took on almost a blue-silver color and the natural spots would look mottled because of the dappling over them. Blacks are almost impossible, but I saw dappling on Sunday Silence right before he shipped to the Derby.

Also look out for those that look like they slept in their clothes – their coat is nasty, clumpy with big patches missing. These are usually horses that were shipped from colder climates and are now losing their winter coat. They are not going to look great but they can still run. Stay away from those that have full winter coats and are running on a warm day out West or in the South. They can really quickly overheat on an 80 degree plus day.

SWEATING AND WEATHER

This one gets all the press and it is one of the easiest to mess up. When horses get warm or nervous they sweat, imagine that. But sometimes it is far out of proportion to the others in the field and the weather is 68 and dry. Kidney sweat (between the legs) is the most obvious and the one that tends to freak people out. Unless it looks like he has 2" of shaving cream between his legs, I don't pay it much attention. I tend to look at the neck, which will naturally get some lather around the reins but when it is heavy and is accompanied by other signs of fear or apprehension, not good. That being said, some look like they stepped out of an Edge Gel commercial and are absolutely normal. Shackleford is one like that, everyone was in a tizzy because he was lathered up pretty good. Romans responded "hell, he gets like that when his feed bucket comes, ignore it". He won the Preakness that afternoon. The other thing that people get wrong is they pay a lot of attention to a horse that is hyper and lathered – yes they should get attention, but the ones that are lathered and listless are dead on arrival, they won't run and are probably getting close to heat stroke. You will have some horse players that will swear lathering is a telltale sign; in my experience it is the easiest to get wrong.

There is another thing you should know about horses, they are not real wild about rain, a light shower is fine but when it is coming down hard, they want to go back to the barn, like yesterday. You can tell the ones who really hate it because they will try to bury their head in their pony's mane. They are also more alert in a more "country" environment. You will see horses that pop up at Del Mar and then not run in the money again until Del Mar – and this was true long before Poly. Where would you rather be – on the ocean with continual breezes, nice cool weather and natural sounds; or at Hollywood next to I-405 and LAX... Horses also love the laughter and sounds of fairs or any human entertainment. Watch all of the heads pop out of stall doors when there is a group of people laughing – it's like they want in on the joke.

EYES AND EARS

The eyes and ears of a horse tell you almost everything you need to know. They work in tandem with the ears first and then the eyes follow if they deem it necessary. The ears tell you a ton about their mental state – if they are pinned back, they are not happy campers, and this is a relative thing, the more they are pinned back the unhappier they are. Each ear can operate independently and they rotate on their axis like a vertical antenna. When they hear something they will turn an ear to the source, if it gets louder or changes pitch they will rotate the other ear and if it needs further investigation they will turn their head and look at it. A horse that is all apprehensive and hyper will turn their whole head, aiming both the eyes and ears at the object of their interest at the same time, and then they whipsaw it in the other direction because there is some new stimulus. That's not good if they keep it up. Watch their ears during the race, it will tell you what they are thinking. Zenyatta was classic – while she was behind her ears would flop around like the Easter bunny but as she got to within about two lengths of the lead they would start stiffening and when she took the lead they went straight forward, locked and loaded. Watch her ears flop around during the race until she gets close to the lead:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pfy8wai7yds&feature=related>

This seems to be a trait of most closers; their ears just flop around until they get serious. Frontrunners tend to have them back the whole way.

LEGS

Is there an ankle or knee that looks bigger than the others? If there is, watch to see whether they favor that leg. It could just be an old, healed injury or it could be an active injury. The more you watch them, the more familiar you are with what they are “supposed to look like”, and any change will stand out.

Are they favoring one leg or another? Pretty obvious it would seem, but it is never going to be pronounced or they would be scratched. Watch when they stand – are they putting weight evenly on all four hooves? Do they lift the same hoof off the ground over and over when they are standing still? Watch their gait carefully for any additional signs. Be forewarned on gait, there are some very healthy horses out there that walk like they have a corn cob up... Well they walk funny, always!

Do they look like they are stiff or sore? This is a big deal especially in older claimers and in the second runs of maidens. Some horses recover quickly, some need 6-8 weeks before they are good to go again. When they change the spacing of the races, look very carefully – if they are getting a fast turn, look at them for any signs that they are still stiff or sore. This is a category that rarely is a problem, when they turn them fast the trainer generally knows that they came out of their last in good order and that they recuperate quickly. When they were on a 4 week cycle and now they are coming back after 7 weeks – you need to look for things like missed works, or a late return to works, and look at the quality of the works as well. Also, do they have a history of physical problems? If they do, you should look at the possibility of a flare up. Again, the delayed returns are the biggest cause for concern. If they had to go down on their belly in their last, there is a reason for the delayed return, but that doesn't allay the concern. Plus horses are creatures of routine, and messing with their routine can cause real problems. Did you ever have a family member or a friend who lived and died by their routine? Remember how they decompensated when that routine was disrupted? Horses can be exactly the same. A disruption in routine is cause for concern.

Are their shaved spots or a series of lesions that run linearly along the tendons? Although not all that common now, “pin firing” was a treatment for bowed tendons that used heat, cold, or caustic chemicals to create a “counter irritation” that would heal the damaged tendon quicker. Make sure they are not old scars from grabbing a quarter. If they look old and healed, they are probably old and healed... Remember, that 7 year old claimer could very well have been pin fired as a two year old. Which brings up another point, older horses (6+) are much more difficult to analyze. Many are held together with duct tape and bailing wire and look like crap, then they go out and win and then win again, each time looking like a basket case in the paddock. That is part of the experience requirement – some do look like hell and still perform, but most do not. Give a little extra slack to the older runners.

Are all of the horseshoes the same or are they wearing a plate or “cheater” shoes? If they are then you are probably looking at a quarter crack or frog injury that they are trying to protect. Yes they can win like this, but I am suspicious of these. Like people, horses have a high degree of variability in their response to pain. Some would run if a leg was hanging by a bloody thread and others will squeal if they get a hang nail.

BANDAGES

Another physical clue that gets a ton of press and another that can send you sailing down the primrose path. The purpose of front bandages is to provide protection against “grabbing a quarter”, where the horse will lacerate a lower leg with their other leg. You will hear it said that they also wear bandages

“for support” – do you really think an Ace bandage is going to support 1200 pounds of weight? They are often cited as a negative, especially when they come back off of a layoff wearing them. My research shows that they are much more common at the lower class levels, are used much more in dirt horses than turf runners and they win at a slightly lower percentage at the bottom levels but at the upper levels there is no difference between those that wear front bandages and those who don't. They are also the main component of the claiming “hide and seek game”. Claiming trainers will use them as camouflage on horses they don't want claimed – think of the old Mafia don rolling into court in his wheelchair with the IV and oxygen mask... All in all the use of bandages is not that great of an indicator of where the horse is physically.

BODY

Do they look proportionate and well conformed? Are they bigger or smaller than normal? Large two year olds take time to grow into their body – analogous to 7th grade humans, where the best athletes are usually the ones with early maturity and a smaller body type. They kick ass until the big kids catch up and then they disappear into the woodwork. Pretty much like many two year olds that won easily and then at three they come up against those that have more talent and have finally matured. There are some that are just big all the way around like the Kris S line, and some that are very long legged like the Giant's Causeways. When you see them in the paddock and walking ring they look like dorks – tall, lanky, underweight, and a general look of cluelessness on their face. When I was at Del Mar this summer there was a Giant's Causeway two year old who was a prototypical GC – he was tall with long spindly legs, looked to be a couple hundred pounds underweight and all of the attention and hub-bub of the race left him dazed and confused. His name was Mental Giant and he runs for Baffert. He is 4-0-0-1 through his last race in October. He is now on the shelf for next year. These are the kind that go away as two year olds looking like they are no hoppers, and then they come back at 3 with a full load of muscle, improved coordination and balance and they win at box car odds. Some trainers will wisely hold the larger horses back as they wait for them to mature mentally and physically. In the case of Zenyatta she was almost 4 when she made her debut. Interestingly, those that are held back like Z tend to have very productive years at 4-5-6 and seem to have a much lower injury rate.

The smaller, well conformed horses will tend to do very well during their two year old season and then run well enough at 3, but the other kids have caught and passed them. These are ones I target as disappointers in their 3 year old season – ones like Comma to the Top, Declan's Moon, JP's Gusto.

The last thing I do when evaluating them is to look at their natural conformation and match it to the race type. That is – do you have a sprinter body type (short and compact with heavy musculature) in a route race? Or do you have that long, lean router showing up in a sprint? The router types running in a sprint just don't have the burst of power necessary to get them up front, usually leaving them finishing “evenly” in 4th or 5th. Sprinters running routes will generally power out there, run like hell for 6F and then die on the vine. This is really important for maiden debuters, where there are not a lot of routes, so you see the Giant's Causeways running in 5 ½ and 6F maiden races. Sometimes they have enough natural talent to carry them, most of the times they don't.

The ideal two year old is a little on the small side, looks perfectly conformed for their size, don't tend to be heavily muscled and are usually the most calm and collected.

TAIL

I am mentioning the tail because like the ears it is an indicator of where they are at mentally and is a good indicator during races – when they swish their tail it is saying I don't particularly like what you are doing, and then there are the "tail poppers", smack em with the whip and the tail pops up and down dramatically. They will go all the way down the stretch popping their tail in rhythm to the jockey's whip. You have to watch these to see if they hate it even worse the next race, because they can get to the point where they refuse to do anything.

GAIT

You want to see runners that have a fluid gait, where everything works smoothly and in concert. Some will look like they could dance on egg shells and others look like they work in a gravel quarry busting rocks. Where you want that smooth action, you can't discount those with a funky hitch in their gitty-up, some just walk stiff and funny and can still run. Sunday Silence never looked great in the paddock, he always looked like he was stiff and sore but would then run great. Lookin at Lucky was another who looked a little funky. You have to know how each looks and acts, and you will quickly figure out whether their gait is textbook or phone book... What you watch for is a change in their gait – were they perfect but now walking funny? That is when you run screaming into the night. What I want to see is that springy, lighter than air trot where it looks like their feet aren't ever touching the ground. Take a look at Mr. Hot Stuff in this video from the :28 to the :36 second mark, that is what I am talking about when I talk about a springy trot:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RidoHBCM1IY&feature=related>

Unfortunately his ten cent head controlled a million dollar body... Now he is out jumping fences.

PENT UP ENERGY

Most horses will become more on edge when they realize they are going to race, how they handle that pent up energy is a big deal. Some like Seattle Slew and Zenyatta had their pre-race dances, others will bow their neck and prance on their toes like they are big bad stallions (which they usually are). What you don't want to see is them eating themselves up – lathered, stiff and jerky, lots of whites in their eye, overreaction to stimuli. Some look like they are ready to get it on, some look like they are ready to get out of there as soon as possible. Intense is good.

ALPHA FEMALES

In the horse world, the herd is run by the dominant female, known as the Alpha Female. She makes the decisions, punishes those that get out of line and makes sure that all are safe and taken care of. In one of my horse books the author says the difference between a stallion and the alpha female is that if a cougar was near the herd the stallion would run it off, the alpha female would hunt it down and kill it. Her children have an inherent advantage; they have first dibs on almost everything and know that they are privileged. They are also calmer, more mature and much more likely to run. These are usually the "blue babies" – they are the children of the dominant mares and pick up the emotional maturity that comes from being the offspring of the queen. The blue hen Vertigineux (dam of Balance and Zenyatta) was an alpha female, and her daughters are alpha females – they put Zenyatta in a paddock with six other mares after she retired; guess who leads the band? All horses are aware of who's who in the social

hierarchy and they will defer to them by default. Which is why Sharon and I saw all of the little maiden claiming fillies get the hell out of the way of Zenyatta when they schooled her before the BC. You don't tug on superman's cape, you don't spit into the wind, you don't pull the mask off the old Lone Ranger and you don't mess around with alpha females. If you find an alpha female, or the child of an alpha female, make note, they won't disappoint. I have had many times where I am watching a bunch of two year olds in the paddock and will ask "who is his mama?" for one that looks and acts different from the rest and 9 out of 10 times I will get the name of some killer mare.

REASONS TO LOOK CAREFULLY

There are a couple of data points that should make you look closer when they hit the walking ring:

1. A discounted sales price – when you see an A.P. Indy (\$150K fee) sell for \$20,000, there is a reason. These are the ones who had some physical or conformational issue that drove down their value. Yes sometimes there are \$14M horses like The Green Monkey who can't run, and yes there are \$50K claimers like Lava Man who go on to make \$5M – but 90% of the time the buyers got it right, especially on deeply discounted types. If you see this kind of mismatch between stud fee and sales price, start looking closely. There is a caveat here – the stud fee printed in the PP's changes as the stud fee changes, so a horse that originally had a stud fee of \$30K like Medaglia d'Oro can become \$100K in two years. So where the actual stud fee may have been \$30K and the foal sold for \$60K (a 2x premium), they can show up in a PP as \$100K stud fee with a \$60K sales price, which now looks like a \$40K discount. Conversely, you can get a stallion that started at \$50K and was at \$5K three years later.

2. A foal of a known brittle sire. There are lots of sires out there who produce fast but brittle types and you have to look at theirs closer, especially if there have been any missing works or they appear "off" up close. The big ones out west are Tribal Rule and In Excess, lightning fast but built like a glass Christmas ornament. I used to joke with Laura about Heleanor Rugby, a Tribal Rule filly out of an In Excess mare – better bet her now because she won't be around long. Of course she ran six times as a freshman without problems and is now on the shelf for the winter... Most know who the national sires are that get brittle runners, you also need to know the regional sires who get shaky Jakes.

3. Gaps and works. I always look for gaps in their works or their races and use that to key on certain runners when I do a physical evaluation of them. Sometimes it is something simple like a cough or runny nose, sometimes it is not. Look at how quickly they came back to work after the race – did they usually work for the first time 7-10 days after a race and now they are at 3 weeks before they work? That usually means they had a seriously tough race that took it out of them and they need more time to recover. This is a major red flag for me, and I will usually go watch the race replay to see how hard a race it was and how they acted after the wire – were they gasping like a carp out of water with their head down? Did they look a little shaky on the gallop back? I am usually off of them for their next race. Another clue is the pattern of the works – were they working :47 and :59 before the race and now are working :49 and 1:02? Ignore the first work back, trainers aren't normally going to work them fast after they come back from a race. But the works should be back to pre-race levels in the 2nd and 3rd work. If they do go out and blaze a :58 first back and then follow that up with more fast works, you got one that will progress next out. The classic is a maiden claimer who was working :48 and 1:01, then races, finishes a fast closing 3rd, starts working :46/3 and :59/1 and then shows up in a straight maiden race next out – look out! And they pay big.

One more section to go, and to me it is the big section – mental and emotional.

HEY – ARE YOU LOOKING FOR TROUBLE???

Probably the most ignored data by handicappers is “trouble lines”, thinking that they were just a matter of bad luck and this race will be different. Except that many times you will encounter runners that have one trouble line after another – broke slow, broke in air, threw head, hopped start, stumbled, steadied, checked, drifted, lugged, broke through the gate, bolted, hit the rail, yada yada yada. Every race it’s something, then they actually have a clean trip and run some ridiculous time, which sets up players to believe that the trouble is behind them. Uh-huh. Several months back I was playing Santa Anita with Jonah and I warned him that my pick, Dave’s Revenge, was a total and complete nut job who had 18 different ways to lose a race, but when he managed to avoid trouble he would kick the crap out of the field. So knowing that we plunged in. Yep, sure as stronach he did it again. Does he still do that? Here was the chart note from his last (28th) race a week ago “DAVE’S REVENGE unseated the rider when fractious in the gate”... By the way, he was the favorite. Now what was that definition of insanity? Something about doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result... If you have a horse that has two trouble lines in his last ten races you need to look hard at them. If it is 3 you need to look really hard, and if it is 4 or more? You are a glutton for punishment. Yesterday a horse by the name of Russian Bayou ran, and he has quite the resume for trouble – steadied into lane, off bit slow, bobbled start, steadied after start... 50% of his starts have trouble lines. Guess what happened – he got caught between horses and was squeezed back; he finished 5th. Every day, at every race track in the country you will have these types that find trouble, and when you think they have it worked out and they are ready to roll, they will pull a new one on you – like Crisp bolting the final turn when she was 8 lengths ahead, or Carol’s Legacy romping to an easy win, well until he hit the rail and tossed Pedroza to the track...

There is no way to predict trouble, but you need the odds to cover the trouble line – what I mean is that if you have a horse that has 50% trouble lines, that means he is effectively out of the race half the time. Which means you need double the odds you would normally require. I have gotten to the point that I just pass up the race when I see a quick one with a history of trouble. I can’t bet him because he loses 50% of the time due to his troubles, but he is more than fast enough to win if he doesn’t. The problem with these types is that their odds generally don’t rise – players see the hot races and ignore (or even worse, excuse) the troubled races.

There is a pony in this mess – those that perform despite trouble; they are the best bets in horse racing. I remember two the first day we were at Del Mar – Warren’s Fancy and Stoney Fleece, both won despite significant trouble in their earlier races. We bet both pretty good, and had a high degree of confidence because they had both won after getting mauled. Warren’s Fancy won her last start in a maiden claimer after murdering the break. Now she is up in a starter allowance, first out against winners and she is 12/1. She missed by a neck to the chalk and paid very well. Stoney Fleece was steadied hard at the start of his debut and trailed the field, was 7th at the top of the stretch and blew by them all. Next out he was in a starter allowance, first out against winners, and he won for fun. Never, ever discount these types, they will pay off in spades. Won despite trouble is one of the most positive comments there is. Once they have established that they can win despite trouble you will find that they are the ones that are always around the lead at the wire. Lookin at Lucky was like that, he was unflappable and was never bothered by anything on the track – including Gomez and Espinoza playing samurai jockeys in the middle of the frickin’ Santa Anita Derby... These are the kinds that will aggressively split horses down the lane and keep battling until the bitter end. I bet them even when they are over their head class wise, they just somehow seem to gut it out.

BE REALISTIC

Before we start the section on mental and emotional analysis, I think I need to add something about this whole process – 90% of the time there is nothing remarkable about a runner, and that is normal. Don't go looking for a physical "sign" under every rock. Don't panic when the whole field looks normal, because they usually are. Don't build castles in the sky! Look for the horse that strikes you positively or negatively and figure out why. "The 4 really looks good!" Okay, why does he look good? "His coat glistens and is dappled, he has that spring in his step and he is alert without being anxious." Works for me.

PEDIGREE AND PHYSICAL HANDICAPPING

Pedigree analysis is an integral part of physical handicapping. You need to know the physical and mental characteristics of the dam and sire to make an assessment of one of their foals. What is the normal conformation and physical characteristics of the parents? If I saw a 17 hand Tribal Rule, I would start digging because they just aren't that big. Or a 13 hand Rock Hard Ten. You also need to know who the precocious (early win) sires are – some are dangerous from their debut and others are going to need some time. Who are the precocious sires out there today? Tribal Rule, In Excess, Unbridled's Song, Congrats, Indian Charlie, Roman Ruler, City Zip, Closing Argument, Distorted Humor, Tapit, Lion Heart, Tale of the Cat, Wildcat Heir and the Storm Cats. One that is impressing me with his ability to get some serious early runners is Artie Schiller. Here is the list of who gets what in the world of freshman:

<http://www.bloodhorse.com/horse-racing/thoroughbred-breeding/sire-lists/two-year-old>

The average development sires are Giant's Causeway, Tiznow, Awesome Again, A.P. Indy, Medaglia d'Oro, Forestry, Freud, Pulpit, Malibu Moon, and Smart Strike.

The late developers are Pleasantly Perfect, Rock Hard Ten (any of the Kris S' line), Ghostzapper, Dynaformer, Invasor, Quiet American, English Channel, and my old pal Unusual Heat. Don't give up on these when they fall on their sword as two and early three year olds because they can come back with a vengeance as a four year old!

Laura has an article she wrote back in April about precocity:

<http://www.ironmaidensthoroughbreds.com/files/Download/4-7-11MaidenHandicapping.pdf>

As you spend time doing physical analysis of runners you will start to see the striking similarities of bloodlines, and you will see the same things over and over until you get to the point where you can identify an Unusual Heat in the walking ring from 100 yards away without your glasses – just look for the one who is throwing their head side to side, that'd be him. Has a head that looks like a shoe box? That would be an Unbridled's Song. Short head with heavy features? A Smart Strike. Small, well conformed and cool as a cucumber? A Smarty Jones. Large, heavy boned, with heavy features? One of the Kris S's. Tall, long legged and silent? A Giant's Causeway. Short, stocky with a major league attitude? A Storm Cat.

We know that family lines can tell us a ton about their performance ability, why would we think that physical and mental makeup don't follow suit? We should, because they do.

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL ANALYSIS

In my mind this is the most important analysis. Physical issues are generally not very subtle and most will not get past the vet come race day, but there are no scratch categories for nutty horses.

You will routinely hear warnings about anthropomorphic correlation to horse personality and behavior, but I am not one who will be leading the charge on that one because I believe that horses DO exhibit behavior that is closely akin to “human” behavior; I also believe that dogs fall into that category. One of the things that humans do well is to read the physical signs, body language and facial expressions to ascertain where someone is at mentally. We do it every minute of every day and are quite good at it – well other than the male/female thing... We can pretty easily tell when someone is upset, angry, anxious, etc. In fact we can communicate volumes about our mental state with a look or a stance or just by shrugging our shoulders. Dogs and horses seem to have that ability as well – they can read us as well as we read them. They have some extra parts we don’t have – a tail, ears that move, but the expression of emotion can be strikingly similar. Let’s talk some about the mental states and emotions that can affect a race:

Anticipation – this isn’t really anxiety, it is them getting ready to do battle, these are almost always the best runners out there, they know their job, they know what to expect, they are just getting ready for the actual race. The outward signs of this anticipation are things like dancing or pawing at the ground, bowing their neck, plus these kind seem to zone out into their own world before they run. Once they start displaying these signs, I am much more worried when they don’t do it. These are the Zenyatta’s and Seattle Slews of the horse world.

Apprehension – the “I’m not so sure I want to do this” state. You would expect some apprehension in a debuting two year old, it is the first time they have ever done this racing thing. It is a normal response to a new situation – and horses are not wild about new things, they are genetic fraidy cats who adhere to the philosophy “when in doubt, haul ass”. Not an unreasonable response when the predators of the world look at you as a 1200 pound meal on wheels... They look at things suspiciously, will be a little reserved and can look a little clueless. Not a reason to strike them from the potential candidates but worth watching to make sure it doesn’t start moving towards behavior that does warrant a line-through.

Anxiety – is the next step up in the worry scale, now they have moved past apprehension and their worries are starting to affect their ability to run. Anxiety is expressed in a number of ways – they are hyper-alert, their ears are up and focusing on anything and everything, the whites of their eyes start flashing, they tend to move their head as a unit rather than operating their senses independently. They are now more focused on the anxiety than on racing. Not an insta-toss but getting close. Watch to see if it progresses and how they respond when they step on the track.

Fear – the final stop on the high anxiety train, now they are more worried about their perceived survival than anything else. Their behavior has now gotten everybody’s attention – they tense up, look for an exit, rear, make noise and they let everybody know that they are not happy and that they are in survival mode. They are toast. If they don’t rear/flip in the paddock or break free and they actually make it to the gate, you want no part of them. Guaranteed they will take off like a shot and will spend themselves, or they will break through the gate. This is almost always exacerbated by the starting gate crew who just want the horse in the gate, so they pull their ear and circle the whip behind them, then blindfold them and muscle them in... Just tear up the tickets and get a beer because the horse? She not run so good.

Anger – you can't miss this one because everyone within the zip code will know when you have an angry horse. They flatten their ears, bare their teeth, there are daggers coming out of their eyes and there is nothing subtle about their movements or intent. They will do things that endanger themselves and everyone around. Angry Storm Cats are dangerous animals, they will stomp you like a stuffed animal. About ten years back Tabasco Cat did his damndest to kill Wayne Lukas' son. The families with attitudes are well known – Storm Cats, Native Dancer, Roberto, Dynaformer, Empire Maker, In Tassar, Court Dancer, Graustark, Halo. I personally guarantee you that Nashoba's Key was not Mary Poppins, I still have the scar to prove it. When you start looking at the family tree you see that they can and do pass this attitude on – that whole Hail to Reason group is not from Welcome Wagon... There are some that will run well angry, most will not. Many trainers have to use tranquilizers on these two year olds in morning works and gallops to keep them under control.

Bitter – there comes a point when they just don't want to run any more, they are burnt out. In the horse racing world they call them "sour" and you can see the progression of them getting worse and worse until they just won't do it – they won't load, they sit down in the gate, they try to shuck the rider, they will just trail the field and refuse to respond to the rider at all. When you see one going down this path they are no-bets until they get some time off. You start seeing degradation in speed figures that is alarming – like a 96/92/84/77/56 kind of regression. I kind of wonder if that was the situation with Blind Luck.

Aroused – if you ever want a bunch of two year old colts to lose focus, just put a mare in season within sniffing distance and they will lose their mind. Imagine a 13 year old boy with Dad's Playboy for the first time. Trust me, he has other things on his mind. By the way, a horse can smell a filly in heat for up to a mile! How can you tell? They are preoccupied, they all tend to face the same direction and they put their noses up and sniff the air. They snort and paw at the ground. They get wood in the paddock – "hey Mommy look at that horse over there..." and then they try to mount the ponies or any other horse they can get to (and they could care less that it is another colt they are jumping). Back in the early 70's I was with my grandfather at Santa Anita and we were watching the horses in the walking ring, except that they all would run over half the ring, dragging the groom along and then would slow to a crawl at the other end and they were all looking back towards the barns with their noses going up and down and they all started snorting and pawing. My grandfather looks at me and says "let's go, we ain't betting these". I finally get out of him that a mare was in heat and they were all very aware of it and they were not worth a bet. The hilarious part was the horse that got the most worked up about the whole thing? He was a gelding. There are some young colts that are just hypersexual and they don't need a mare in season as a reason, they just walk around perpetually horny – hey I remember back when I was 16 and.... Never mind.

Inquisitive – this is a really good sign, because horses as a whole are inquisitive beings, except that most are also scared of anything new, so the ones that are curious don't have as much of that natural reticence and are much more likely to adapt to the new experience of racing. Watch for the ones that respond to what is going on around them – they turn their ears towards the source, look, take a step in that direction. It isn't fear, it is curiosity. Tells you a ton about their personality and their overall intelligence. The one attribute I have seen consistently with the elite runners is they were all way above average intelligence.

Dull – probably the one thing you see more than any other sign. They don't respond to stimuli, they don't look around, their ears just sort of flop at half mast, their eyes are dull and listless, their coat is dull and patchy. They are withdrawn and just aren't into it. Their feet barely come off the ground as they

walk, there is a delay in responding to the groom or the lead out. I have probably only been burned by these about 10 out of 2,000 times, so I just line through them. If you have a good record book of runners and they change barns and show up dull? It usually means they are not adjusting well to their new environment – it could be they don't sleep well, or don't like the food or they miss their friends (yes horses very much can miss their friends) or their handlers. At the end of the day it doesn't matter why, don't do it!

Playful – I kind of covered this earlier, but a playful horse is a happy horse. Yes they can get perverse over time and the barn folks and the ponies get sick and tired of them nipping and mouthing everything but they do run well.

INTERNET RACING

As a last thought, the advent of the Internet in betting horses has been a huge deal, but it comes with a price – you will have one helluva time evaluating runners from a video feed. Not only will you miss anything that is off camera, they just never give you a chance to see the horse in action; I have gone hoarse screaming at the computer because the only thing I see in the warm up is the damned pony!

Okay, that's my "quick" take on physical handicapping. It is a skill that will pay major league dividends and will help you to better understand the "why's" in horse racing. Hope it helps.