

HANDICAPPING – A Better Solution?

The merit rating system, as it stands right now, is, in many peoples' eyes, the single most influential and dominant factor through which Racing is the architect of its own demise.

Right now, we are witnessing a mass exodus of Owners and Punters from Racing. The life blood of Racing is draining away and we are just not doing anything about it at a time when urgent and drastic efforts are required.

At the outset, the merit rating system was introduced in order to "level the playing fields". At the heart of the movement to introduce merit rating was the need to stabilise the horse population and in so doing, ensure favourable field sizes in order to then, stabilise and grow tote turnovers.

In the old race figure system, even a horse that took a while to win the maiden, now had to run in a Novice or Graduation Plate, again at set weights and again take on the horses that they could not beat in the Maidens. This was tough and resulted in a lot of horses either battling to win their next race/ taking a long time to do so or being shipped off to a weaker centre straight after the maiden win. The merit rating system was a life line for those horses.

However, the merit rating system as it stands, has resulted in the vast majority of our horses being very lowly rated. Whilst the few top horses remain "stand outs" and are largely unaffected, it's the "nice sort" which is severely punished for being above average. This results in the "nice sort" winning fewer races than it should. The result of this is that Punters find it very difficult to find winners and that Owners scratch their heads, not quite understanding why their "nice" sort will now not win as many races as a horse that is much lower rated, or why their horse is being prevented from winning its' fair share of races.

To the Punters, Racing is more of a Lotto than a science. After regular carryovers and regularly doing their money, the Punters move on to other forms of betting or even Lotto.

Simultaneously, Owners just cannot accept, after buying many horses and paying the keep for years, that when they finally find a nice sort, the horse is rated well above average and has to "skip" the next level of race after winning the maidens. To compound matters, the Owner now watches helplessly, as every time his horse runs 2nd, it incurs more penalties, in some cases, going through divisions because of running consistently, but not winning. And the Owner is still expected to go and buy more horses, to try find another "nice sort", in order to be punished again.....

As for the current merit rating system and the argument that we need our ratings to be in line with international ratings, this does just not apply. The Great One, Mike De Kock, has often said that we need our own system in SA, which works for our Racing. Mike has often said that irrespective of what our ratings are, horses are reviewed and rated by overseas handicappers upon arrival.

The best handicapping system for SA would be one which makes it easier for Punters to find winners and in so doing, once again allows them to follow "their horse" as it goes through the divisions, like

in years gone by.

And when an Owner sees a glimmer of hope as he finally finds a “nice sort”, he should have a handicapping system that, at the very least, allows that horse to win a few races in as short a time as possible.

Perhaps the answer lies in further restrictions on the handicappers, a combination of the old race figure system and specific limits on horses as they progress to at least 3 wins.

Attached, is a suggestion. Whilst this way may not be the complete solution, it will go a long way towards retaining Owners and Punters, which is the crisis that Racing faces right now.

HANDICAPPING SUGGESTION

GOALS :

1. To allow the good horses to progress according to their real ability.
2. To allow the Owners of the good horse, when he/she finally finds one, to, at the very least, win 3 races in as short a space as possible.
3. To make it simpler for Punters to follow the good horses and win some money and then return again, thus making a positive impact on turnover.

CATEGORIES:

Category 1 – 1 Time Winners

- To be rated 70 (65), when winning their 1st race.
- May not be adjusted above MR 70 (65) until the horse has won its 2nd race.
- No penalties whatsoever, one time winners remain on 70 (65).
 - After 3 runs as a 1 time winner the horse may be dropped to its lower rating by the handicapper.

Category 2 – 2 Time Winners

- To be rated 76 (71) when winning their 2nd race.
- May not be adjusted above 76 (71), until winning their 3rd race.
- No penalties whatsoever, two time winners remain on 76 (66).
- After 3 runs as a 2 time winner, the horse may be dropped to its lower rating by the handicapper.

Category 3 – 3 Time Winners

- To be rated 82 (77) when winning their 3rd race.
- May not be adjusted above 82 (77), until winning their 4th race.
- No penalties whatsoever, three time winners remain on 82 (77) until after a further 3 runs as a 3 time winner.
- After 3 runs as a 3 time winner, the horse may be adjusted, up or down by the handicapper.

RULES :

1. Lowest MR in South Africa will be MR50.
2. Lowest MR races in South Africa will be MR66 (61)

3. After the horse has won its first race, the handicapper shall publish the rating of the horse as a guide to Punters and as an aid in eliminations, whilst the horse is in Category 1, 2 and 3.
4. The ratings in Category 1, 2 and 3 herein are gross ratings. To further aid Punters, the nett ratings must always be published, as per the WFA scale.
5. In essence, only after 3 runs in Category 3, may the handicapper adjust the horse upwards. In Categories 1 and 2, the handicapper may adjust the horse downwards only, after 3 runs in that category.
6. Once the horse has been adjusted downwards by the Handicapper, it is now “in the system”, in that, should a horse win its 2nd race off a MR 65, it is not automatically adjusted back up to a 76. Being “in the system” means that those horses are now in the Handicappers hands.
7. Whilst the horse is limited to the ratings of Categories 1, 2 and 3 and eliminations become necessary, the rating of the Handicapper shall be used, when Local Conditions are inconclusive and eliminations by ratings are required.

GENERAL:

1. This handicapping suggestion looks after nice horses whilst still allowing the weaker horses to be granted lower ratings.
2. What must still be the subject of a think tank, is the group of consistent horses. These horses are incurring penalties for places, thus finding it very difficult to win again, for their connections and backers.
3. We have moved the line horse to 3rd place. This was obviously necessary. However, the worst place that anyone wants to finish nowadays is 2nd especially when it went heads up/heads down and the 3rd horse finishes 3 lengths back!