



Kentucky Derby Analysis - Using Historical Data to Predict This Years Winner

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Here is the premise of this work. Most people who handicap the races use the Past Performances (Racing Form) to analyze a horse's past and evaluate its chance of winning today's race. After a while it makes sense that each handicapper establishes a personal pattern or order to read a given horse's PP's. While reading the various attributes the handicapper is also mentally assigning values to them. As more information is received a particular horse's probability of winning increases, decreases or doesn't change. The ultimate goal is to create a personal odds line or probability schema for each horse in a particular race. The handicapper then looks for an edge or discrepancy between his assigned probabilities and those offered through the tote board at race time.

What many handicappers don't know is that there are nearly 1200 "attributes" for any horse in a given race. These are just the ones in the PP's, i.e. not counting certain pedigree stats or looks of the horse flesh on the warm-up track. This is a lot of information to process.

Is the handicapping population prioritizing the attributes correctly? More importantly, are they giving proper weight to winning attributes? Are there "holes" in the public methods?

The author began database handicapping in the summer of 2010. Not a pioneer, certainly. Please see the bibliography at the end of the book for the true pioneers. Since then, the book Moneyball, by Michael Lewis has become a 6 time Academy Award nominated movie. The interest in using data to make sports/business decisions is now "en vogue".

This project covers the past 16 years of the Kentucky Derby. Each winner since 1997 has been queried against the database. The goal was to determine which attributes seemed to predict winners, and more importantly which were underplayed or overplayed. Notice that attributes could be either undervalued or overvalued. Sometimes the best horse can be over bet.

The discoveries were enlightening. The 1200 attributes were narrowed down to the top 60. They cover nearly every category, including: running styles, pedigree, jockey stats, trainer stats, box earnings, last race attributes and workouts. If you are familiar with PP's I'm sure you will find a ton of useful information. If you are new to the sport this primer may be tough but should put you in front of the game.

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