

Playing Tournaments: The Pros and Cons

As part of this month's newsletter, Ken asked me to give his readers some insight on playing in handicapping tournaments and to encourage some of you (who do not otherwise) to perhaps consider participation in the future. The following will not be a discussion on tournament strategy or the various types of tournaments (that will be discussed at this year's seminar in July). What I will do, is discuss the pros and cons of tournament play and attempt to help some of you overcome your reasons for not playing.

THE COST IS TOO EXPENSIVE:

Yes, this used to be very true. In the mid seventies there were only a few tournaments and they were held in Vegas or at a few racetracks around the country. They usually had large entry fees and obviously required travel expenses to participate. As we got into the early nineties, tournament play became more popular. Racetracks and Vegas casinos used them as a way to attract players to their venues. However, the costs still remained high. In the mid nineties, this thing called the internet showed up. As we all know, it pretty much drives our world today. This also changed the world of horse racing. Online wagering became very popular and this also extended to handicapping tournaments. Today, a player can participate in numerous tournaments without ever leaving the couch. This obviously eliminates the travel costs, and many require little or no entry fee to play. Yes, there are still some high end tournaments (with high entry fees), but there are just as many low cost tournaments. It is no longer too expensive to play.

THEY TAKE TOO MUCH TIME (I DO NOT HAVE TIME TO PLAY):

In the early days, this was also true. Most tournaments lasted two to three days and with travel, a player could be out as many as five. This obviously required a player to perhaps take a week's vacation from work just to play in one tournament. This is still true for some of the Vegas tournaments. The online tournaments are much different. Most last about 3 to 4 hours on a Saturday afternoon. The format is 10-12 mandatory races only (a few exceptions) with about 20 minutes between races usually at two different tracks. I would venture to say, Saturday afternoon is when many of us avid horseplayers are either at the track or (in most cases) sitting in front of our computer screens playing the horses anyway. You can easily put in your single pick for the tournament and then play your spot plays or your pick four. Those of us using HTR really do not have any excuse on this one.

I CANNOT COMPETE WITH THE FULL TIME/PRO TOURNAMENT PLAYER:

I will answer this one with a quick story about a fellow HTR member.

This person (by her own admission) was not a regular horse player and certainly not what you would call a regular/pro tournament player. Her interest grew as she met/married her husband who had been around racing for many years. In 2000 she qualified for the newly formed NTRA/NHC championship to held in January 2001. This was the second time this championship was held. I am sure most of you have figured out the rest of this story. This person went to Vegas and beat ALL of the so called regular/pro players at their own game. She still remains the only female to win the event. In fact, there have been really only about 3 (out of 11 years) winners that many would call a pro. Many of the best tournament players have never even been close to winning this event. Yes, it can be done. You can compete.

I DO NOT WANT PEOPLE TO SEE MY SCORE IN CASE I DO POORLY:

I have two answers for this one. First, most any regular/pro tournament player will tell you they have had far more last place finishes (zero points) than first place or even top ten finishes. Your objective should be to WIN the tournament. In most cases, that will require playing long shots. There is no disgrace in having zero points. The good players do it all of the time. They usually laugh about it. "I went O-fer".

The second answer involves another one of our HTR brothers. In early 2009, this person entered one of the online tournaments associated with the NHC tour and tour membership. It was a free event for one of 3 spots awarded to the NHC for January 2010. There were about 900 players that day. This event also allowed the player to pick his/her own leader board screen name. I believe it was about the second race of the contest early in the day and some bomb wins. The leader board is updated after the race and some person named HTR ROCKS is the new leader. As you might expect, the HTR Bulletin board went nuts. Everyone is trying to figure out who this character is. As they day goes on, Mr. HTR ROCKS continues to do well and remained in or near the lead. He also continues to remain anonymous. The HTR board is now smoking hot with everyone trying to figure out the mystery person. The contest ends and HTR ROCKS wins. He qualifies for the NHC championship (for the very first time). Later that night he finally came clean with his identity. If you come to this year's seminar you can meet him in person. Most all online tournaments allow you to use a screen name or they only post your first name and last initial on the leader board. As you can see, you can remain anonymous if you wish.

In closing, I will say one final thing about handicapping tournaments. The online events are certainly a very easy and convenient way to play tournaments. Like most things in life they are the way of the future. Fortunately for me, I started playing tournaments back in the early nineties when you had to attend each event in person. I met some of my very best and dearest friends because of horse handicapping tournaments. They are from every corner of this country. I would have never met these wonderful people had it not been for this great sport and the handicapping tournament trail. I certainly encourage each of you to consider giving tournaments a try. You never know, you could be the next NHC champion or the next HTR ROCKS.

Sincerely,

I just went O-fer 84 in my last contest.

P. S. For those of you attending the HTR seminar in July, I will be giving out my secret strategy on how to do that.