

US analyst eyes the right 'situation' in form

Can you pick a winner in 60 secs?

By Martin Dowling



Any student of form knows that racing is full of factors that may, or may not, mean something in relation to the outcome of a race.

We know, for example, that we can look at the barrier draw for a race and decide, pretty quickly, if it is a positive or a negative factor. A good beginner with early pace, suited at the distance, who draws barrier #1 is going to be helped by the gate. In contrast, a tardy beginner, not suited at the trip, may well find the inside gate has robbed it of any prospect of playing a role in the finish.

So, we need more than 10 fingers to count up the number of factors that come into play in any race.

But what if we drew up the "best" of them, the ones considered most positive, and used them in a full-frontal assault? We could check out the form and note any runner with

one or more of the positives in its favour. Surely such an approach could be a strong one?

Well, US form analyst Frank DiTondo more or less pushes such a line in his book *The One Minute Handicapper*, currently enjoying widespread success among American race fans.

DiTondo's book, close to 400 pages, is a detailed study of what he thinks a punter needs to do to acquire a profitable status. It's a thoughtful approach that could easily be adapted to racing in Australia and New Zealand.

DiTondo calls the various factors "betting situations" and he lists 22 of them.

He says: "The idea to write the book struck me when a light went on. It's in the form, I realised. While happily in line to cash a fat ticket on a \$38.60 winner in the second at

Saratoga, I would have been even happier wheeling the winner in a \$2,069 exacta, or miraculously picking a \$17,183 trifecta.

"The wheels quickly started to turn, recalling numerous other profitable wagers resulting from Betting Situations, using obvious, readily available and easily accessible information in the form, and closely noting betting patterns on the tote board.

"I thought then it'd be a good idea to make the form less mysterious and intimidating by designing a friendly Betting Situation worksheet. My objective? To make it easier to gather and analyse the information necessary to make an informed wagering decision and to uncover opportunities to find long-priced winners."

DiTondo stresses that he's not trying to re-invent the wheel. His list of 22 Betting Situations embraces a raft of ideas and research from the US Daily Racing Form itself, plus Beyer Speed Figures and some other products.

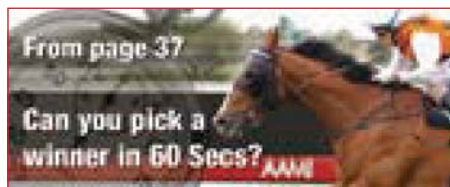
Basically, DiTondo is advising that you have a bet only when Betting Situations, as he lists them, are evident, and the more Situations a runner has the better it is likely to be as a chance.

Now for the purposes of this article I will list only some of the 22 Betting Situations. It wouldn't be fair to the author to list them all! Some of them hardly apply to the bulk of Australian/NZ racing, anyway, particularly those relating to horses going from "dirt to turf" and being



Frank DiTondo

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the first time on Lasix (ant-bleeding drug).

The bulk of the listings, though, have relevance to Australia and could well prove a lot of help to any form followers who like the idea of using the Situations as the backbone of their analysis.

I'll list SOME of the Situations which can be applied to Australian/NZ racing:

- Back Class (typically an older horse with more success in earlier stages of racing career)
- Beaten Favourite
- Blinkers On/Off
- Post Position (more favourable)
- Preferred Distance
- Preferred Track
- Wet To Dry Track
- Trouble Trip (last start)

Now it may very well be the case that you take into account these factors already. Fair enough. What *The One Minute Handicapper* suggests is that you use a worksheet to determine which runners have the most Betting Situations in their favour.

In some ways, DiTondo's approach is along the same lines as the PPM Tick Test which we have published a couple of times since 1985.

This, too, worked on a set of factors and required the use of a worksheet on which you ticked off in little boxes any positive factor in a runner's favour.

I've had letters from readers over the years who claim to have used the Tick Test with great success. Typical is a letter from Audrey T. from Seymour in Victoria. A lifelong punter, Audrey says she took up the challenge of the Tick Test after we first published it in the late 1980s.

"It's been the backbone of my betting ever since," she told me in her letter of 2005. "Doing the ticks doesn't take too much time and all the selections that come up can hardly be faulted as formline favourites."

Which brings me back again to *The One Minute Handicapper* book and the author.

I think we can safely say that Frank DiTondo is proof that it's never too late to start winning at the racetrack.

DiTondo, who turns 76 later this year, says he's been cashing regularly in the 8th decade of his life, and it's no coincidence that this happened just after he authored *The One Minute Handicapper*.

DiTondo was only 12 years old when he first attended the races, but his initial experience left him with an indelible memory.

"I went to Suffolk Downs," he recalls. "Whirlaway was running. He won the Triple Crown in 1941 and is the only Triple Crown winner to ever win the Massachusetts Handicap."

DiTondo is not so much a professional handicapper as a guy who has created a way to refine

The backside money goes there," he argues. "At my website, www.oneminutehandicapper.com, I've got a testimonial from a guy at the Daily Racing Form. He said, "I'm watching the second at Gulfstream. The first flash is on the 1-horse, Letsringthebell, who is 20-1 in the morning line, but opens at 3-5. It goes up to 12-1 and he puts \$20 to win on it and it wins for fun and pays \$37."

DiTondo's book also emphasises taking a long look at beaten favourites.

"When I have a beaten favourite, I go back to the charts and I might see that he had a troubled trip or a poor ride. If you give it a second chance,



the extraordinary amount of data contained in the Daily Racing Form.

"The information is in the form," he says. "You simply have to know where to look and what to look for."

Following his own advice has led DiTondo to many happy moments of recent vintage at the track.

"The last three years, I've been cashing bets that I never thought I would cash," he says. "I cashed a ticket last year on a \$46 winner. The exacta paid \$878, and the trifecta was about \$3,300. That was one situation called "first flash". I had a \$534 exacta on an overlay and then I had a \$48 winner and a \$178 exacta and \$1,800 trifecta on what I call 'reclaim'."

In *The One Minute Handicapper*, DiTondo elaborates on the betting situation known as first flash.

"First flash can be the smart money.

you probably get a better price on it. I picked Nobiz Like Shobiz to win the Wood Memorial because he was a beaten favourite in the Fountain of Youth. He had a troubled trip."

DiTondo has been on the owning side of the racing game as well as being a keen handicapper and punter.

Becoming an owner in 1986 by "getting his feet wet" in a racing partnership was a natural progression. In 1988 he teamed with Monica Driver and formed the White Sash Racing Partnership. Private ownership followed in 1993 after meeting John Parisella. That experience became the stepping stone to becoming the syndicator and managing partner of the Parisella Racing Group partnerships following his retirement from a major life

insurance company. The contractual dissolution of PRG Silver Stables in 2000 led to the re-birth of White Sash Stable and a return to private ownership.

Summing up, then, *The One Minute Handicapper* is a welcome addition to the ranks of modern racing books that deal with the problem of making a selection. It is, of course, written with the big American racing market in mind but the thrust of its arguments apply just as much to us Aussie and Kiwi punters as to the Americans.

I've always been a believer in "lists" where handicapping is concerned, as readers of my many PPM articles over the years will have realised.

Having a direct line of sight when you study the form is a tremendous advantage over the punter who doesn't really know what he's looking for.

Remember the Professional Eliminator Form Chart that we published some years ago? It was much like The Tick Test. It allowed you to tick off the positives about each runner in a given race.

Once you had filled in the chart's squares for each runner, you add up the ticks for each horse and those with the most number of ticks are considered the main chances.

When you reduced the race to four or fewer chances you had a bettable race. The number of ticks would tell you how close a race might be. If you ended up with six, seven or eight runners all within a tick of each other then that race would be a difficult one.

There were 16 factors in the Professional Eliminator Form Chart, as follows:

- Is the horse on the first four lines of the pre-race betting market?
- Does it have an excellent trainer?
- Is the jockey reliable?
- Has there been a significant jockey switch from moderate rider to excellent rider, or apprentice to excellent senior rider?
- Was the horse a very good last start winner?
- Was the horse unlucky last start?
- Is the horse suited by the distance of today's race?
- Has the horse raced within the last 21 days?
- Has the horse raced within the last seven days
- Has the horse been reasonably handicapped so far as the weight is concerned?
- Is the horse suited by the Class of today's race?
- Has the horse a win strike rate of 20 per cent or more?
- Has the horse a place strike rate of 60 per cent or more?
- Has the horse won at the current track?
- Can the horse handle prevailing track conditions?
- Is the horse drawn well at the barrier?

** *The One Minute Handicapper*, by Frank DiTondo, published by Racing Ventures Ltd (www.oneminutehandicapper.com). Available from Daily Racing Form and the author. **PPM.**

ADELAIDE

ANGLE

Adelaide correspondent Mal James covers the South Australian racing scene with the special assignment of selecting strong horses to follow.

Highly promising sprinting mare **THE CHUNKSTER** resumed from a spell at Oakbank over Easter and created a big impression. She had a hard run but proved her superiority by winning with authority. The mare boasts an impressive race record and more wins are in store.

SECRET DAUGHTER also resumed at Oakbank and appeared desperately unlucky when blocked for a clear passage in the straight. She appears to have come back in fine fettle and can be followed with confidence over the coming weeks.

MR TCHAIKOSKY has had a few starts following a 90 week spell and has not enjoyed much luck but the gelding is in an astute camp and can be expected to keep improving with racing. The father and daughter training team of Mick and Kylie Huxtable have been having a fabulous run over the past month. They have several talented horses in their stable, including **PRINCESS DAME** and **PRINCESS JOY**. Both have not enjoyed the best of luck in a few starts so it won't surprise to see them salute in the coming weeks.

Ambitious plans are in store for the Leon Macdonald-trained **SERIOUS SPEED**. The filly resumed from a spell at Morphettville at the end of March and caught the eye with a slashing run to come from the rear of the field to finish 3rd. She indicated that a fruitful campaign is on the horizon. She ran 2nd in the VRC Oaks last spring and an interstate trip is on the cards.

Handy galloper **SPIELMASTER** has another new trainer and resumed for Mark Kavanagh at Morphettville. The son of Singspiel has won from 1100m to 1500m, and although he did not show up don't let him get under your guard. **BLAHNIK** resumed recently from a break at Morphettville and hit the line in powerful fashion for a close 3rd; he will gain a lot of benefit from the race and will win races this time in.

Perth Cup winner **BLACK TOM** failed to fire last campaign when he mainly contested Group races; he resumed from a spell at the end of March over 1600m at Morphettville, lumped 60kg and looked in great condition. He may need a few starts before we see the best of him, so look for trainer David Hayes to place the gelding to advantage this month over a staying event.

Stablemate **CAPTAIN IN CHARGE** resumed from a spell a few weeks ago at Morphettville and had a chequered run, but there was plenty to like by the way he hit the line. The gelding campaigned in Melbourne last preparation without success; he looks to have come back from a break in peak condition and may prove to be a more mature type this time in. Lightly raced **LAPPEL** can be followed in the coming weeks judging by his first-up 3rd at Oakbank where he came home in dogged fashion. The gelding's two wins to date have been over 1050m and 1200m; no surprise to see him run well-up to 1400m this preparation. Much travelled apprentice Ryan Plumb has had a re-evaluation of his career since transferring his indentures to Lindsay Park; the likeable hoop has his claim down to 1.5kg and is starting to get the right opportunities his talent deserves.

MAL JAMES' BEST TO FOLLOW

- **RESHUFFLES**: Caught the eye recently first-up.
- **ASHKABAR**: Resumed big in condition and will continue to improve.
- **AUTUMN JEUNEY**: Trained at Mt. Gambier; will not be long out of the winner's list.

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