



Frandsen Publishing Presents  
Favorite ALL-Ways™ Newsletter Articles

**“Pass or Play? ..... That Should Be the Question!”**

When we started to write this article, we planned on it being a relatively short, three column piece on when to pass and when to play races. As we discussed the subject with other successful horseplayers, including a number of professional players that use ALL-Ways software, and as we started to put our thoughts down on paper, we came to realize something significant. This truly is a critically important topic. It may well be the key to turning many unprofitable players into profitable ones.

By far, the question we are most often asked is: “How can I tell which races I should pass and which races I should play?”. It is essential that you know the answer to this question if you intend to be a profitable handicapper. We want to first dispense with the notion of mechanical pass/play decisions and then we will look at the whole issue in some detail.

**Do not make mechanical pass/play decisions!**

Many people who ask us to answer this question are hoping we will give them an answer that they can apply in a mechanical manner. Sorry, but that would be the wrong way to approach this issue of pass or play.

So, what do we mean by “mechanical”? Here are some not so hypothetical examples of mechanical rules for passing races. “I never play Maiden races.” “I never play races for 2 year olds.” “I never play low level claiming races.” “I never play races if there are six or more contenders.” “I never play races if the top four horses have BRIS Speed figures within a two point range.” “I never play a race that does not have one horse as a clear standout in both speed and class.” And on and on.

If you were to adopt hard and fast rules such as these for passing races, you would be making “mechanical” pass decisions. And, you would be missing some of the very best wagering opportunities available to you. Stop and think of the logic here. When someone sets mechanical rules such as these, they are simply saying that these races tend to be more contentious and/or more difficult to reliably predict the outcome. It

also follows that the winners of these races tend to pay premium prices because the races are difficult to handicap. Why would anyone want to automatically (mechanically) eliminate the possibility of winning high payoff races? It makes more sense, in our opinion, to at least examine such races in more detail to look for evidence that one or two horses might have the best chance of winning.

Remember that ALL-Ways software provides you with powerful information that the public never sees such as real insights into the pace match-ups in the race and each horse's current form. Indeed, pace handicapping and form analysis will often lead you to the winning horse.

If you examine ten races that you would have passed on a mechanical basis, chances are you will still pass on seven or eight of them. But, the two or three that you end up playing may turn out to be some of your most profitable plays.

### **Why pass races**

Professional handicappers will tell you they typically get 2 to 3 plays on a race card. We know of successful ALL-Ways software handicappers that typically play as many as 4 or 5 races on a card. Regardless, the message here is very clear.

**“Not all races on a card are playable. Successful players know when to pass a race and they typically pass more races than they play.”**

There are two fundamental reasons why a race should be passed. One is because you can't get comfortable and confident with your selection(s). The other is because the race offers no value from a wagering perspective. We will touch on both these reasons in more detail. But, here is the main point regarding why you should pass races.

“You are better off saving the money you would have wagered ineffectively on non-playable races and adding that money to your wagers on playable races, where, by definition, you are confident with your selection(s) and where the wagers offer value.”

**If you have \$100 to wager for the day, you are better off wagering \$20 per race for 5 playable races as opposed to \$10 per race on all races, many/most of which should not be played at all.**

### **Passing races that offer no value**

Remember that successful wagering requires that we only wager on propositions that offer us value or, in other words, on “overlays”. We define an overlay as when a horse

will pay us more than it should when compared to its realistic chance of winning. A horse that ALL-Ways software makes as a 2-to-1 horse would be an overlay if it is paying more than 2-to-1 and it would be an underlay if it is paying less than 2-to-1. **Successful players do not bet on underlays and they generally require a premium overlay payoff.** Using the example of our 2-to-1 horse, a successful player will probably be looking for a payoff at or over 5-to-2.

There is another axiom in this area of value. "Never bet against a legitimate odds-on favorite." We would define a legitimate odds-on favorite as a horse going off at low odds, say 7-to-5 or lower, that you believe deserves this kind of strong support and that will, in all likelihood, win the race.

**"So, for win betting, we will not wager on any horse that is an underlay and we will not make a win bet on a horse if it is going up against an odds-on legitimate favorite. In these situations, we will pass these races as far as making win bets."**

In this whole area of demanding value, you should also trust your instincts. You have probably said hundreds of times: "There is no way to make any money in this race." Generally, there is an odds-on legitimate favorite that is not paying much and the probable Exacta Payoffs look very low. Many handicappers still try to force a bet in these situations just to get in on the action. The right thing to do is to trust your instincts and pass the race.

**Passing races when you are not comfortable or confident with your selection(s).**

What we are going to advise here, plain and simple, is to pass any race that you just can't figure out. Just about everyone will react to this by saying "Well, of course." Or as Jay Leno would put it, "Well, da". If it really is so simple, then why do so many players ask the pass or play question? Let's do a little "soul searching". See if you have ever been caught up in the kind of scenario described in the rather long paragraph below.

**Could this be you?** "The race has a full field of horses. There appear to be six and maybe even seven horses that have a legitimate shot of winning the race. All their speed and class figures are pretty close. There are not any "tell tale" signs pointing to a specific horse or two such as a pace match-up advantage or an unusually fast early pace figure or final fraction figure or a superior workout, etc. But, look at the odds on the tote board. These horses are going off at 4-to-1, 5-to-1, 10-to-1 and up. WOW! And, look at the probable Exacta payoffs that are on the monitor. They are \$60, \$80 and \$100 or more depending on the combination. WOW! Imagine what the Trifecta will pay! With these kinds of payoffs, I need to "CRUSH" this race. I am not really sure which horse is going to win, so I am going to pass on making a win bet and focus on the

Exacta and Trifecta. I obviously do not want to box six or seven horses in an Exacta, so I will go with ABC/ABCDE. This will cost me \$24 but remember how big the Exacta probable payoffs look. I better stick to a one dollar Trifecta to keep the cost down. I will play it as ABC/ABCDE/ABCDEF. This gets all the contenders in at least the show spot. It will cost me \$60, but the payoff should be huge. Oh-Oh! I am running out of time. I better get to the window so I do not get shut out. I am a bit worried about the "D" horse. He could really win this thing. I better add another Trifecta ticket of D/ABC/ABCEFG. It will cost another \$15 but the payoffs will be huge".

So what has happened here? Before you know it, this person has wagered upwards of a hundred dollars on a race that has not been handicapped. There are so many combinations being wagered and so many other combinations that could actually come in that this really is a confusing situation. This leads to last minute, rushed, confused and very undisciplined wagering. The chances of cashing the wagers are very poor indeed. The result is typically a surprise winner, a lost wager and the person goes in the hole for the day.

The fundamental problem here is that this race cannot be handicapped successfully. It is just too contentious. It should be passed. But, many players get caught up in the euphoria of a possible big payoff and then base their wagers on "a wing and a prayer".

This example is not as extreme as it may appear. Such races show up at least once on most cards just about every day. And, there is probably another race or two that, while not quite so difficult, should still be passed because of the difficulty of narrowing the potential winners down to no more than three horses.

If this scenario has happened to you in the past, do not despair. Most successful handicappers have gone through this costly learning process somewhere along the way.

So, it is important to acknowledge that there are some races that are just too difficult to handicap successfully. We will define "successful" as being able to narrow the list of probable winners down to no more than three horses. These difficult races are not restricted to Maiden and low level Claiming races. They can very well be some of the higher caliber races run at your track where most of the horses are in good form, at the same relative class level and can all run to the par times of today's race.

ALL-Ways software will give you powerful indicators of these unplayable races. Typically, ALL-Ways will identify six or more contenders in overly contentious races **and** ALL-Ways software's first selection will be assigned odds of 4-to-1 or higher. The ALL-Ways' Comprehensive Ratings of the contenders will tend to fall into a narrow

range as will the speed figures and the class figures. ALL-Ways software is telling you that it does not have great confidence in its selections for this race. **This is not only good, it is GREAT! It is Wonderful!** Some races are just not playable and they should (MUST) be passed. When ALL-Ways software helps you do this, it is doing its job very well indeed.

**“The most powerful signal you can get to pass these kinds of races is your own intellectual honesty. If you cannot narrow your candidate(s) to win the race down to three horses or less such that you are comfortable and confident with your selections, then you should acknowledge it and pass the race. And, any handicapper that does not have the probable win candidate(s) pegged should not be playing Exactas or Trifectas.”**

When you come across a difficult race, by all means look for angles that can point you to the probable winners. ALL-Ways software is full of information, that the public never sees, that can help you do this. If you can narrow it down to three horses, chances are that two of them are overlays and you will have a good two horse win bet opportunity. If you can narrow it down to only two horses, you may have a good two horse win bet or, if not, you can bet on the horse that is an overlay.

Note that you can also, look at past ALL-Ways Newsletters for important tips on how to handicap tough races including how to handicap “Contentious” and “Chaos” races, how to use “Race Pace Shapes”, how to handicap “Honest Pace Shape” races, how to identify long shots, how to evaluate “Dangerous Non Contenders”, and more. You can get all past issues of ALL-Ways Newsletters off our Web site and they are free.

## Summary

- Not all races are playable. Some, perhaps most, should be passed.
- Do not pass races using mechanical decisions. Give yourself a chance to handicap every race. If you do not, you will miss some very good opportunities.
- Pass any race that does not offer you a value wagering opportunity.
- Never bet against a legitimate odds-on favorite.
- Pass races where you cannot comfortably and confidently narrow the probable winner(s) down to one, two or, at most, three horses.
- If you get it down to three horses, bet the two that are overlays. If you get it down to two horses, bet them both if both are overlays. Otherwise bet the one that is an overlay.

- Use the money you save by not wagering on a passed race to increase your wagers on races you do play.
- If you simply need the action of betting on every race, then establish one bankroll for your serious wagers and another “Action Bankroll” that you are prepared to lose betting on the races you really should pass. An even better way to get the action you desire is to play two tracks, wagering on the good 3 to 5 races at each track.

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Frandsen Publishing Corporation is the publisher of the quarterly ALL-Ways Newsletters, which are widely considered to be one of the best sources of handicapping and wagering insights available in the industry. And, ALL-Ways Newsletters are FREE!

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Frandsen Publishing is also the developer of ALL-Ways Handicapping Software. ALL-Ways is serious software for professional and serious horseplayers. Phillips Racing Newsletter calls ALL-Ways Software “absolutely the best free handicapping tool on the market” and gives ALL-Ways a 9 ½ rating ... the highest ever awarded. And, ALL-Ways Software is FREE!

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