



# PRACTICAL PUNTING

June / July 2018

Online Edition

## **DEEP STATE** HANDICAPPING POWER



HOW TO  
**RECOVER**  
FROM BAD BETS

AUSTRALIA'S FAVOURITE RACING MAGAZINE



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## Since 1985

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## The Editor Says



Our front cover photo pays tribute to one of the most popular horses of the modern era...Happy Clapper. His Doncaster Mile victory in April topped off a great career. He's won 11 of his 35 starts, with nine 2nds and four 4ths. Seven of his wins were 1st-up or 2nd-up off spells. What a galloper!

Cover Photo - Happy Clapper - by **Steve Hart**

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# HOW TO RECOVER FROM BAD BETS

by Richard Hartley Jr.

**It doesn't matter how good a punter you are, there will be many times when you will make mistakes. Bad mistakes. Stupid mistakes.**

The main thing is to learn from them. View the aftermath of your error in a cold, hard, realistic light and make a vow not to repeat what you've done wrong.

It's a simple exercise, but one that a huge number of punters fail to carry out. They make the same mistakes, and new ones, over and over.

Stupid bets, according to the US form analyst and professional punter Barry Meadow, fall into one of several categories:

1. You have no real opinion on the race but decide to bet anyway, just to have some action (see our story on pages 20/21).
2. You like a horse, know his odds are not what they should be (that is, lower than they should be), yet you bet anyway.
3. You change your bet due to a comment made by a friend or even a stranger standing next to you.
4. You are losing for the day and decide to get out by making a larger than usual bet on a late race.

These situations are what is known as out of control times. They help to add a burden to the already sagging shoulders of many punters.

Meadow reckons you need to plan your possible bets in advance. List the day's potential bets on a sheet.

List the name and number of the horse, along with your estimated odds needed to bet it to win, and if you're considering the exotics then write down the potential exacta or trifecta inclusions.

Now, the list is your starting point and I don't suggest,

and neither does Barry Meadow, that you can't stray away from it during the course of a day.

You may have to make changes because of scratchings or perhaps a change in track conditions.

Basically, though, this list is your defining look at the day's racing.

Meadow says: "You are most likely to make stupid bets when you're losing. Most of us get upset, to at least some small degree, when we're wrong. If some troubled trip means we've lost our big bet of the day by a nose, there's a natural tendency to want to bet to make up."

"This is the most dangerous time of your betting day."

This is when the change of mind comes into play, you'll go "safe" and ditch a horse you chose in the morning and back the ruling favourite, or vice-versa, you'll suddenly drop the "too short" hotpot for some hack at 10/1 because the odds look so appealing late in the day!

Meadow says: "The horses don't care whether you're ahead, behind or even for the day. A horse you don't like at 10am, when you were handicapping with cool reason, shouldn't suddenly start looking good when your wallet is a bit lighter."

"Sometimes, one stupid bet gets compounded by a second or third stupid bet, to make up for the first one. That's why some players believe in leaving the track early if they are having a bad day."

"While mathematically this makes no sense, for those bettors who have trouble controlling their gambling, this could be a wise solution. There's always another day, and maybe a better one."

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## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

“If you do make a stupid bet, that’s that. Some of them do win. And when they don’t, there’s not much you can do about it anyway.

“A tennis coach once told me to assume I’d get three bad calls per match. So when one came along I’d say, “There’s one,” rather than getting angry at the unfairness of it all.

“It’s the same with stupid bets. You’re going to make some occasionally. It happens. Just don’t make the mistake of compounding your error.”

Apart from stupid bets, punters are always confronted with the problem of how to behave when you’re nicely in profit. There’s an awful tendency to give it all back!

I know we’ve drummed it out in many articles in the last 21 years, but it really is a sensible idea to keep a ledger setting out day by day betting investments. It’s your TRUE record of what’s going on.

I once impressed on a friend that he should record his bets because he was constantly broke, and constant-

ly betting whenever he got his week’s wages.

“Just do it and see what is happening,” I advised him. Finally, he relented. With my help, he began to write down all his bets.

The results shocked him. He hadn’t realised before just how badly he was betting, just how many losers he was backing, and just how much money he was blowing.

As a result of this little exercise (it took only a few weeks to discover the horrible truth) my mate pared back his betting to a fixed sum every day. I’d like to say he started winning but I can’t but what I can say is that he started losing a lot less money than he was before!

If you keep a record of your bets, then take a “review” every month or so of how you handled being in a profit situation. You can discover this by doing the following:

Find out how many days you wound up a loser after having shown a profit;

## CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

How many days did you run in strife through chasing losses in a bid to get square?

If either has happened to you make a firm resolve to implement a new approach to the future. Such a policy properly carried out could make a big difference to your bank balance and peace of mind.

Let's say you start your day with a bank of 10 units (a unit can be any amount you like). If you back a winner and go, say, eight or even less units in front, put away a portion of it, plus your original stake so that when you cease operations you will still be showing a profit.

Do this every raceday and at the end of the year you will be much better off than if you had given all your bank a "fly". It's not easy to win by betting so it makes sense to never allow a daily profit to turn into a daily loss.

Example: Your bank is \$100. On the first race you bet \$10 and strike a winner at 6/1. Your profit is \$60.

Now, put HALF of the profit AND your \$10 stake into your other pocket. That's \$40 in all.

Now, you have the rest of the profit, \$30, to bet with without touching the bank.

**Remember, you can never run into trouble if you're betting with the bookmakers' money. If you get some, always store a percentage away, together with your day's bank, and then bet on with "their" money.**

On a bad day, don't let a few setbacks throw you into a panic. Setbacks happen to everyone. It's how you deal with them that matters as far as the long term is concerned.

Paul Whittaker, a UK professional, says: "Nine times

out of 10 you'll drown if you madly chase losses.

There's always another day. Should you lose a portion of your bank and there is no logical bet on which to recover, wait patiently until one comes along, even if it is the next day, or the day after that.

"The two groups of punters best liked by bookies are those who play up stake plus winnings, and those who refuse to cut their losses."

Finally, you may be wondering just why it is you make stupid bets because most of us instinctively know when we are doing just that.

Karen Fox, a social anthropologist, and author of the best-selling book *The Racing Tribe* (Metro Publishing) explains: "People are attracted to betting not just by the prospect of winning but because we all have a deep-seated need for risk-taking.

**"This urge to take risks is hard-wired into the human brain; it's part of our evolutionary heritage. Our ancestors experimented with fire, explored unknown territory and tried to ride wild horses."**

"Nowadays, our lives are much less risky, but the wiring is still there and we still need the excitement and adrenalin rush of risk-taking, we can get this from betting a few dollars on a horse."

Psychologist Maurice Walpole adds: "The risk-taking factor is always present in human beings, but the need to express the risky side of our psyche is harder for some punters to control than others.

"Thus we see wild, silly betting when a punter is under pressure. The risk-taking element in the brain takes over. Some can easily resist it, others have no chance unless they exercise enormous control over their natural impulses."

**PRACTICAL PUNTING – OCTOBER 2006**



# THE POWER OF 'DEEP STATE' HANDICAPPING

by Jon Hudson

**They call it 'deep state' handicapping. It's the method used by shrewd computer geeks to make millions of dollars on Hong Kong racing.**

The average punter has no idea of the penetrating analysis the 'deep state' experts go into to flesh out a race and assign a 'value' price to each runner.

The man who has stood at the forefront of such analysis is the American William 'Bill' Benter. He's amassed a huge fortune through his betting exploits in Hong Kong.

Early on he was an associate of the Aussie punting marvel Alan Woods (now dead). Both carved a brilliant path through HK racing.

'Deep state' syndicates are still thriving in Hong Kong.

**So what did Benter do that worked so magnificently - and continues to work? Here are some details**

*(source: The Great TipOff.com)*

1. Benter identified 130 variables (e.g. past runs, speed etc) that influence the result of a race. He and his team review past runs to assign values for each horse against each of these variables. It is understood that these variables reflect both the horse's form and how the race will be run.
2. The variable information is fed into a computer that simulates potential outcomes of the race. The results from these simulations allow Benter and his team to assign probabilities to each runner, representing their percentage chance of winning the race.



William Benter

3. Benter then compares the horse's probability of winning against its market price and identifies cases where the market price for a horse is significantly higher than the computer simulated chance of winning - referred to as value opportunities. Value theory suggests taking 'true odds', where the horse's odds (market price) are equal to its chance of winning, will result in you breaking even over time. Therefore if you always take horses that are over the odds, that is where their odds are greater than their chance of winning, then well tested probability theory warrants your success over time.
4. When Benter started applying his method he used only 16 variables for his form analysis. The increase in variables to 130 highlights the learning nature of Benter's method. The growth of these variables can be attributed to the tireless quest of understanding how poor results occur. In many cases it is likely that poor results are due to a lack of in-

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 7**



formation used to assess the race and its runners. The answer? Understand what other factors may have influenced the outcome of the race and add them to the pool of variables to be assessed for future races.

5. Benter is recognised world over for his work in applied mathematical modeling, probability theory and statistical analysis. His predicative modeling expertise is so well regarded that he lectures at several universities across the US, Europe and Asia including Harvard, Hong Kong and Southampton Universities.
6. Benter's method is reported to deliver him a 24% profit on turnover.

**And what about Alan Woods?** The punter from Murwillumbah NSW was a giant figure in Hong Kong betting. He was known as Mr Huge.

1. Hong Kong racing was the key focus for Woods' analysis due to its attributes that make it easier to assess all runners and reduce the likelihood of unquantifiable factors impacting the outcome of a race. **Some of these attributes include:**

\* a small number of horses running in Hong Kong, minimises effort required for the sizeable task of form analysis

\* with only 2 race tracks in Hong Kong it is easier to understand biases and other factors relating to the track that may impact the result

\* with rarely more than 2 race meetings per week there are less races to assess compared to other major cities

\* races are limited to 14 starters

\* a strong vigilance on corruption exists within Hong Kong racing

\* the one pool tote system drives big pools (as opposed to separate state pools) which results in larger payouts.

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2. A key factor to Woods' success was having more information than the public. This information was obtained through his team's tireless research efforts and assessment of each runner's chances.
3. Woods claimed the value opportunities (those horses that were at higher odds than their form suggested they should be) existed because many people are influenced by their emotions when picking horses. He would always get at least one big value winner on each race card.
4. Woods had a team of people working for him across the globe, performing form analysis, assessing races and placing bets.
5. Woods preferred straight-out and exotic betting types like multi's.
6. Woods studied mathematics at University and worked as an Actuary, underlining his talent for numbers and statistics. He experimented with horse races while at University and gave it away after his self maintained performance records indicated that he was not making a profit. He took it up again after leaving his Actuary career at which time he discovered his winning methodology.
7. It's estimated that Woods was worth more than \$670 million (US) when he died of cancer in 2008.



# EDUCATING THE PUNTER

The Optimist

**I have a story to tell you later about a piece of flattery I was stunned with recently. But first, I just have to say a few things about the frustrating way some aspects of our sport are being handled.**

Firstly do you remember that old cliché about the inhabitants running the asylum? Well, what exactly is happening at SKY One with those damn blinds that are encroaching more and more as soon as the winner passes the post? They are distracting and often cut half the field off before the viewer has even had a chance to absorb the full impact of the finish. They were just an annoyance when they started, being more or less kept in check. Now they are a bombardment that ruins much of the enjoyment or otherwise of the finish, even of the big events, and what do we get? A long list of something that will go in ninety seconds at Outer Western Woop Woop dogs.

True, they are pulled back up, but the thrill has been dispelled. It gets up my nose, as you just might have guessed. But NOW... guess what??? They are drawing these blinds down BEFORE the race, so we are getting all sorts of stuff that might have been of relevance when we were making decisions about our betting, but in the final thirty seconds they are merely a nuisance! So if there is in fact someone in control at SKY, can you please prevent your apprentices (which they MUST be) from operating these irritating shades?

I've given up on the pathetic grammar campaign. When one of our very top callers refers to "He's last start" (as in "he did well at he's last start") and people are employed who cannot pronounce "three", and who talk of "them 'orses", I opt out. However, it would be nice to hear that the SKY authorities are offering their callers brief courses in the basics. Pink pigs flying past, anyone?

As for "late mail"... why not call it "repeated opinion"? All we get is the same tips we heard that morning from the same "expert", and not a dicky bird when their four or more "tips" don't provide a happy result. Finally, I have to share this one with you, compliments of a home-town long-time "expert": "If eez goodernough twin eeza rope". I leave that one for you to untangle. And when you do, then work out what the hell the man meant!

Oh Dear, am I just getting old? I have told so many people over so many years that they cannot beat the local product. OK, Brian Blackwell is a close pal... I admit that and you know it... but he is also the best in the business. It really is that simple. And reading what he writes is pleasurable. Now that's unusual. Use him as your yardstick.

## HOW TO FEEL OLD(ER)

An old pal called me recently. His grandson is talking of a career in racing. Betting investment in fact. Well, would I have a chat with him? Could I explain that there is no golden goose? No treasure trove without effort? He has all the hard copy of our old friend PRACTICAL PUNTING MONTHLY, and he has trolled all the great writers of those thirty-odd years. Dicky Hartley, Damien Witchurch, Dessie Green, Russ Writer, "Toothy" Jardine, Jon Hudson, the great Martin Dowling, Becky Symonds, so many fantastic professionals seeking the holy grail. Needless to say, Statsman is right up there too. So yes, I agreed with my old friend that this would not be time wasted, and I set about assessing my more recent views on what the game is all about. I mean NOW .

And it HAS changed. I am the first to accept this. When my pals Reg and Johnny would meet with me on Saturday at the track, we were confident in each other's ability to beat most of the competing punters. And we did! But the computer and then the internet bookies changed all that. What we had shared was available to the lazy punter who did no work. However, it soon became apparent that the new world of punting not only gave these fly-by-nights more information, it confused them more! I suspect they didn't get, and still haven't got, the fact

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that computers simply do their basic cold-blooded analysis for them, but have no way of allowing for the things that make the difference between an investor and a punter/gambler.

And I tell you this: the gambler still crashes! That nonsense about “gamble responsibly” and all the other “advice” you get after being encouraged to make bets is just what I say it is. It’s Nonsense. They use it to avoid the obvious. They are not aiming at you and me. They are targeting the poor unfortunates who can’t see that certain betting styles are being offered because they do not offer any more chance than Lotto of collecting. Well, all right then, not much more chance. I recall reading the great Alan Potts asking his readers which betting cards they found hard to find in English betting shops. The answer was the win cards. Usually plain white, with no pretty pictures and pounds signs all over them. Why? Because they offered the biggest of all chances of winning.

So we started chatting, young Jayden and I. I’m not sure I convinced him, but I laid out some basics that he might think about. You know the stuff. Have a few systems that work for you, systems that have reliability written all over them. Then...

**Have a battery of rules that are time-proven. You want them again? OK, here we go.**

1. Never listen, neither before nor after a race, to the rider or the trainer.
2. Horses that win keep winning, and horses that lose tend to continue that trend.
3. If you have never heard of a horse do not back it under any circumstances.
4. Be a cynic. Be prepared to ask why your horse won’t win. For example, has it got a difficult barrier?
5. Be a realist about VALUE. Value is opinion. Value

is what you think it is. It is NOT any horse that is at longer odds. Most horses SHOULD be at long odds. That is NOT value; it is merely the market’s reflection of odds.

6. Wide barriers can never, ever be value bets. They are always suspect.
7. An on-pace horse is usually a better risk than a backmarker finisher. For one thing there is less risk from traffic jams.
8. On that same point, a sprint is much more likely to be run at a true pace, so you can assess your on-pacer’s chances much more accurately.
9. You must learn to manage your money and not the reverse. The bottom line is that it remains your money until the moment you hand it over. Then it is the bookmaker’s money, unless you can drag it back. After you hand it over, either on line or physically, it does not belong to you. All you have is something on your account saying you will be paid IF you win.
10. This is the one I tried to impress on Jayden most of all because I could not think of any better place to start a career as a racing investor:

THE TOP RIDERS AND THE TOP TRAINERS ARE THERE **BECAUSE THEY ARE THE BEST**. They are the most successful and they are consistently highly competent. They win most of the races. If you bet against them you bet to win a minority of races and you support a training and/or riding combination that is not as successful as the top echelons.

I explained that he couldn’t walk around it, that it is as it is. If you start blind and want to learn, watch the best. See what they do. The best trainers will only have top riders so that’s a very good lesson to start with.

It would be interesting to read any ideas you might have as to helping the new generation to deal with starting out. I have brought my ideas down to fewer than a dozen as you can see, and I am fairly sure that as a general rule that last one is the most significant introductory revelation of all.

It assures you of a good supply of regular winners and often at surprisingly good prices.

What do **you** think?



# PLAN OF THE MONTH

The Optimist

**Now this is as true as the nose on my face. Or on yours for that matter.**

I have been struggling for some time with the problem of Chris Waller's multiple entries. He has taken over the mantle of mass invader of Sydney races from Gai Waterhouse and is of course the most successful trainer, maybe ever.

I sat down on the morning of May 31 and asked myself the simplest of questions, but one I had never been able to answer satisfactorily (meaning that I had failed to pick winners with any answers I came up with).

So I addressed the question in a way that resembled passing the buck. Using the Sydney Telegraph (which is the only paper that provides comprehensive form guides, albeit sometimes truncated), I noted the races in which Mr Waller had entered more than one horse.

Now I checked the selections made by our eminent "experts". After the previous Saturday's huge success with our own resident expert Brian Blackwell (at almost 50/1), I felt more kindly disposed to the poor folk who are presented with a mass of horses and fields, and with a very brief time in which to make selections. So I simply perused the tips to see if anyone had tipped Mr Waller horses in any race where he had more than one runner.

Needless to say the answer was positive and some (hopefully) winning tips were there. **Now I decided to apply a handful of very reasonable constricts to the horses I identified.**

1. Must be ridden by a top rider (if you haven't read my Educating the Punter yet there's more on this in that article).
2. Must be one of more than one final Chris Waller runners in that race (after scratchings).
3. Must be the longest priced Waller win tip all day by any tipster.
4. The tipster must be a regular (not the tea lady).

5. If this is the longest of all Waller runners for the day, double the bet and make it each way.

Why on earth would I do this? Well basically I wanted to go as way out left field as I could possibly imagine. I wanted a journalist whom I KNEW and one that could, and did, tip winners, even if, as most do, he finished behind over any given long period. I needed somebody who in other words knew his stuff.

It's beyond me how he did it but the selector named FOLLOW SUIT, Corey Brown's mount, in the third race at Warwick Farm this very day. My only personal thought all day was a Waller horse in the following race, a neddy called Cormac. It ran second but as I spent most of my time that afternoon sifting early chances for the Stradbroke, I didn't bet. That was fortunate, because the replay suggested I'd have been excited then disappointed. That isn't exactly all that rare in our game, is it? I did have an interest in a horse named Metamorphic in the last but he had the outside draw and was scratched. Should you note him running in something easy, he might be worth a small something.

**Anyway back to business.** Home romps FOLLOW SUIT at \$26. The return was exactly what the paper listed that morning and it also was better than any TAB return by a dollar or so.

Not just that but it was indeed the longest Waller horse listed that morning, so the bet would be doubled. Now look, I'm an old hand at this stuff and I know full well there'll be a lot of water under the bridge before another one strikes. Or maybe... just maybe... **not**... and that's what makes the pursuit of a winning system so fascinating. Just imagine that another one has poked up before you read this. Or say something we've dug into here gets you thinking about the entire long-priced challenge.

What was there about that horse? In his one run since a spell, he'd finished LAST. He had a win near the distance of today's race, but a long time ago. He'd had a trial and run fifth. I just do not know. I might mention Mr Waller's two others in today's race (at much shorter prices) ran third and fourth. And so? I don't know what that means either.

However, this simple little plan struck, and it has the additional advantage (a security check maybe) of only selecting one horse per meeting. Let's hope it gets your grey matter functioning and maybe, just maybe, it could be the start of something big!



## SEGNIS HOMINES BONA QUAM MALA SENTIENT

When did you last see a racing column start with Latin? Pretentious? I agree but I saw this line in a recent book I was reading and could not resist. The book is “*Skin in the game*” by Nassim Taleb and is an interesting and quirky volume challenging beliefs across a wide spectrum of fields including finance. But the sentence was very relevant for me at this moment.

It means “Men feel the good less intensely than the bad”. You had worked that out of course! But in the subject of behavioural finance it means the pain of a loss is stronger than the joy of a profit and I have long held that to be so in gambling. The natural

runners the trainer had taken to the meet – something he had not planned to do before. Of course there was no joy there either with both losing and the cost of the day worsened. Another complained to me of a poor run one day which he thought he could solve with a large bet on the favourite in the last. He chose not to and the horse won to add to the angst but clearly if it had lost then more than planned for the day was gone. It is the short term pain and the wish for an immediate relief that can make the day worse.

All germane to my own situation. This is going to be a losing financial year for me, but worry not, kind hearts! It is my fourth losing year in the last ten and there is a profit overall, which is not the case for most punters if we are really honest. This is a hard game to make regular money from for the great majority of participants and so losses must be kept at sensible levels. I am not a big punter so there is no Ferrari out the front but the game is more for my ego than my wallet. I like to finish in front, satisfying my competitive streak!

But as my records showed I was losing I reduced bet size and also tried to analyse why the situation had arisen. As I noted last issue one method was dropped and more work went into the actual form

*‘It means “Men feel the good less intensely than the bad”. You had worked that out of course!’*

reaction to such discomfort is to try and take away that pain and the usual method is to chase losses. In my days of working with those having problems with gambling it turned losses of thousands of dollars into tens of thousands and sometimes hundreds or even millions. Two small examples I saw recently with a couple of regular players was when one who owned a share in a horse that was taken out of the city to race and was expected to go close to winning suffered a medical issue in the race and failed badly. The owner/punter messaged me to express his “pain of the loss” but his remedy was to chase the stake outlaid by backing the other two

study. Beaten favourites was not completely thrown out but more selectively chosen. I still think there is something in that angle and wins by Houtzen and Live and Free at good prices encourage me to think I am moving in the right direction there. Since those changes I have shown a sound profit but it is still early days.

However the strong message is - do not ease the pain by chasing. Losing runs can be very long – the

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“gambler’s fallacy” is that they must end soon. Had I chased my losses on a daily or even monthly basis the situation would have been much worse. I must have learned something from all those rather sad stories I heard!

And remember to check out the reasons for your choice to bet. Are they realistic? You do not want to be saying after a race “*Fiducia pecunias amici*” – I lost money because of my excessive confidence! (Same book).

### INFORMATION ISSUES

A very experienced racing participant (you know who you are!) recently raised an issue that vexes him with me - disclosure of tactical changes prior to a race. As he is both an owner and a punter at times he asked why there is a need for the intended change (e.g. So and So will be ridden more forward today if circumstances permit) to be broadcast. In other sports he noted tactics are not required to be made public as the other team may act on those in pre-game planning.

It is the old argument of the rights of the punter versus the rights of the owner. In a past life when I was the punter’s representative to a racing committee I argued strongly for such information to be made available – ideally at 10.00 in the morning so all punters could, if they so wished, access it at a clear moment rather than as is now when it is relayed at various moments dependent on the connections visit to the stewards.



*Unforgotten...* a likely superstar for the spring racing  
Photo: Steve Hart

Now I am not so sure. Accepting that the information flows at various times is it really of value to the punters? Things go wrong and we have all heard commentators say “Well, they wanted So and So up front but he has missed the start” or some such change to the expected situation. Even speed maps – which I am not a great fan of – can go awry in the event. And with most bets on, be it at the TAB or online, before racing starts the only ones who may benefit are regulars at the track or those following consistently through the day if they caught the announcement. Not a level playing field.

So I am less committed to the need for connections to give away what they may feel is a competitive advantage than I was. Any views?

Until next issue – have fun punting! Until next issue – **have fun punting!**



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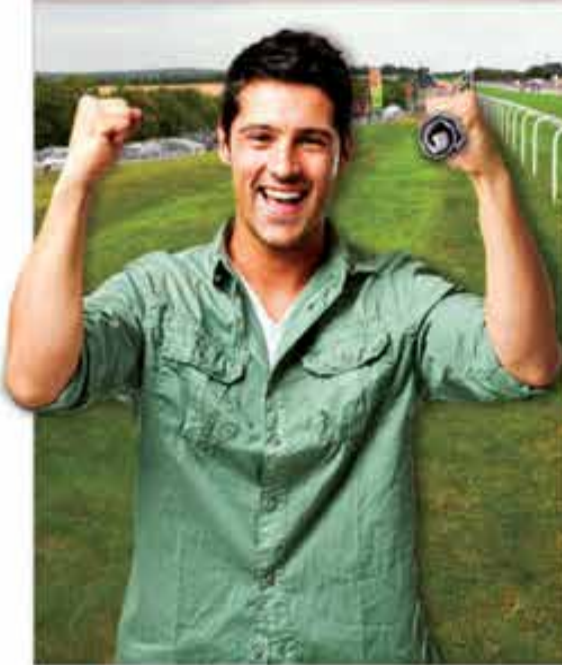
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