

Uncovering Early Morning Profits

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By Sean Caffey

The DRF Press continues to build towards a comprehensive library covering all the territory in the complicated landscape of handicapping thoroughbreds, but one book slipped through the cracks and is now offered by an independent publisher – *Bruno on Workouts*, self-published by the highly experienced clocker Bruno De Julio. This book fills a gaping whole in the wealth of handicapping tomes on the market, and offers insight into one of the more interpretive and artistic elements of judging a horse's condition – the morning workout.

“Handicappers see the workouts on paper, but rarely know what goes on behind the scenes to take advantage. A time is a time to a handicapper. If the horse worked in 59 flat, then he must have worked well. If he worked in 1:01 flat, they assume it was a bad work,” said De Julio.

The book starts by giving the reader a primer on how works are scheduled, timed, and what the various terms (such as “Handily” or “Breezing”) mean and how they can be properly interpreted. DeJulio also lays out the different types of works that trainers use – such as “maintenance” works, “blowouts,” and “stamina” works – and what they are intended to accomplish. Possibly the most important nuggets involve the inaccuracy of official workout times, and how drills can even be missed – situations that can obviously benefit the handicapper in the know.

While understanding workout analysis is not some magic key to instant profits, it certainly adds another layer in judging the fitness of a thoroughbred and the intentions of a trainer. One of the more interesting and potentially profitable points De Julio hits upon is how the times of the workouts are often irrelevant. “Trainers aren't stupid, they aren't going to show you something every time out (with a horse),” said De Julio.

De Julio points out a particular situation where this is most relevant – when a trainer is stretching a horse out to a distance of ground. Often times, they may intentionally ask a horse for less speed over more distance, to try and train the horse to spread its energy out over more ground. In other words, regarding stretch-out runners – slower can be better in works at seven furlongs and beyond.

“You don't blow them out when they are going 1 1/16 mile, you just need to get them fit. The horse that's fit, he just needs to be pointed in the right direction,” added De Julio.

A good example of this could be found at Oak Tree on October 10, 2005. Bully Hayes was stretching out from 7f to 1 1/16 miles, and Bruce Headley – who De Julio refers to as “one of the last true horseman” – had him ready off a couple of moderately timed 7f works (1:27 and 1:25 respectfully, slow for a Santa Anita track that was playing very fast at the time) and a final work of 5f in 1:00.3, only the 9th fastest of 29 works at

that distance on that day. Some handicappers may have felt that these workouts weren't the typically fast Headley works, who is often known to show off his horses in the morning with bullet drills. But, since Bully Hayes was a front-runner as a sprinter, it is safe to assume that Headley was trying to teach him to conserve his speed. The talented colt won this allowance race fairly easily, showing speed and then pulling back and stalking, paying \$12.40.

To demonstrate the value of understanding workouts, De Julio offers the following queries in the first chapter of his book:

“Would you bet a horse with a published four-furlong gate work of :52 and change? Would you bet a second time starter that got beat by almost 36 lengths in the debut? Can you confidently bet on a horse that has been off for 17 months,” asks De Julio. He responds by contending that many handicappers would probably answer “No,” but assures a change of heart after he lays out scenarios that led to 18-1, 7-1, and 6-1 winners.

Another interesting angle that De Julio touches upon in his book involves the cheap older claimer. He describes the “less is more” training approach, which De Julio contends is often necessary with the hard-knocking warriors of the game.

“The older claiming horse, the road warrior, is a battle hardened veteran of racing. He has learned the ropes and developed his own style. He has his favorite tracks and surfaces. Most likely, he has changed trainers a few times, especially the ones that specialize in claiming races, and he is quite comfortable with changes in scenery,” states De Julio.

The “cheap” older claimers fall into the \$25000 and under range, and are “physically challenged” animals that just need enough to stay racing fit – not particularly fast or rigorous training programs – according to De Julio. This can be a useful angle on those common occasions where a public handicapper points to a lack of recent drills or slow ones as a negative, when they may actually be all the horse needs to be ready. The tout's lack of confidence may influence enough bettors to help the price remain juicy on the claimer in question.

De Julio offers many compelling examples of this type of handling of lower-priced claimers in the second chapter of his book. One horse that seems especially indicative is Razik, who had been laid off for almost a year, and was returning at a significantly reduced claiming price for trainer Thomas Blincoe (dropping from \$32,000 to \$12,500). Razik came in with only three workouts over about a month-and-a-half, all moderately timed and capped by a 6f drill in 1:14 six days prior to his return on March 17, 2005 at Santa Anita. The layoff and the drop must have been a concern for handicappers that day, topped off by the modest works, but Razik had raced against \$10,000 company just a few starts before the layoff, and had been razor sharp versus tougher company. Razik won and paid a generous \$12, en route to another four-race winning streak.

Throughout the course of the text, De Julio enlightens the reader on many other ways to apply workout analysis while handicapping certain horses, including: First-time starters, second-time starters, the older maiden, layoff runners, and horses competing for the Triple Crown and Breeders' Cup as well. Furthermore, De Julio includes useful reference sections on trainer patterns – particularly in regards to success with first-time starters – and what tracks certain conditioners tend to do better at (or have their top horses ready to roll). One example of this point is Doug O'Neill, who De Julio points out wins way more often with two-year-old maidens in the Spring at Hollywood Park than any other time of year on the Southern California circuit - an important point for anyone planning on backing an O'Neill first-timer. De Julio also discusses how handicappers and the media can often misconstrue workouts –especially workouts in company – most often because trainer intentions aren't properly analyzed. Also, he touches upon the importance of knowing the peculiarities of a particular track's surface when it comes to analyzing the training that occurs there.

This may not be the most polished text on the market – earlier sections of the book contain a number of typos and some points that may seem a little hard to follow – but it's sort of like one of De Julio's favorite horses, Fusaichi Pegasus, when he won the Kentucky Derby – a slow start, settling in and finding his way through traffic, with a powerful and decisive run to the finish line. Whether a novice or an expert, the serious handicapper or horse fan who follows De Julio through this entertaining and informative journey will surely benefit.

Naturally, most players do not have the time and resources to follow all of the workouts on their local circuits and clock them personally, and to this end De Julio suggests subscribing to one of the many workout analysis services available online – two of which he is personally involved in: www.todaysracingdigest.com, which covers the Southern California circuit, and www.racingwithbruno.com.