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Ability is key factor

AS James Willoughby said in last month's Klarion: 'Each time the Olympics comes around, some within the racing community wonder about the potential for so-called 'crossover learning' from other sports. Are strategies popular in sports such as athletics and cycling transferrable to the racing domain?'

How right he was. During the recent Olympics I was bombarded with questions about tactics in horse racing and, in particular, with queries on why we don't adopt slipstreaming ('drafting') and pay more attention to aerodynamics. Someone even questioned whether or not the tassel on Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed's new racing colours might be slowing the horses down!

Fixated

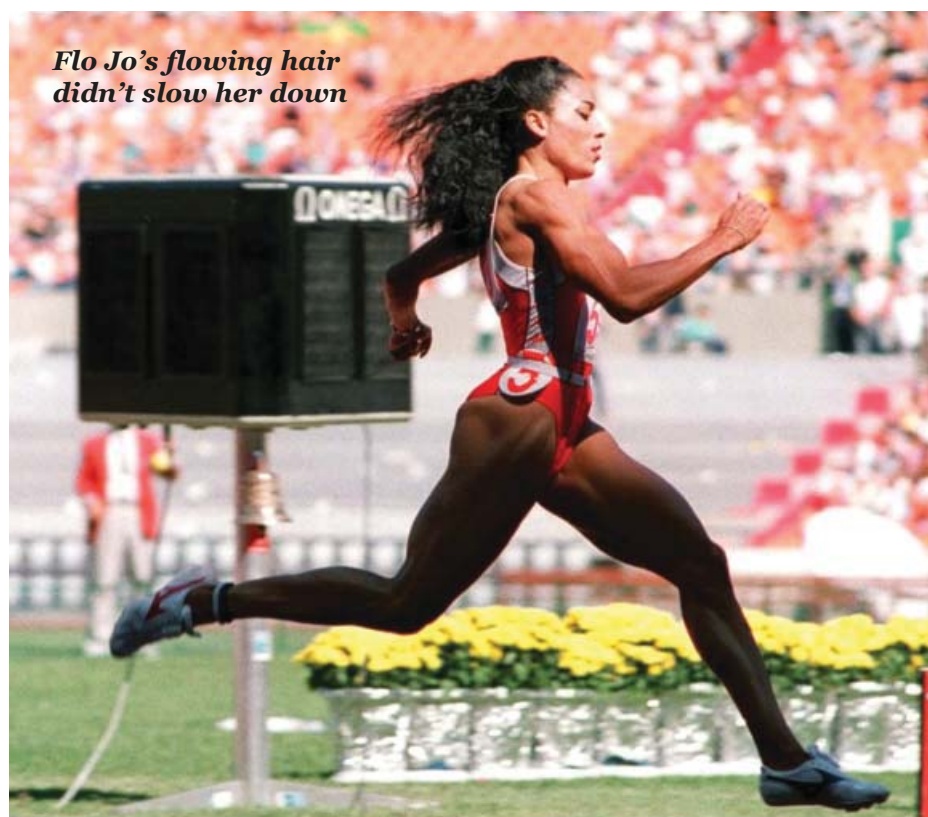
James made a pretty good fist of addressing the issue last month, but it is almost impossible to do so within the confines of a double-page spread.

There are, as James said, countless factors affecting the outcome of a race and it is wrong to get fixated on just

one or two. Most of all, it is wrong to lose sight of the fact that, by far, the most important factor is the relative abilities of the participants.

That said, readers and, in particular,

owners can rest assured that I have taken account of the possibility that we could learn from other sports and I have been thinking not just about the effect of aerodynamics on horses but,



Flo Jo's flowing hair didn't slow her down

Cartoon capers a benefit for the bookies

IAM continually criticising the coverage of racing on racecourses and, sadly, I am not seeing much improvement.

Newmarket has now ironed out the initial teething problems with its televisions in its Owners' and Trainers' facilities and now does have dedicated screens for RUK, Attheraces and Newmarket TV. This is excellent, but it still saddens me that they make so little effort to show racing to the general public.

On most racecourses the coverage of their own racing leaves a huge amount to be desired and the coverage of

away racing is, frankly, abysmal. Unfortunately, in most cases, the only place where you can be reasonably certain to see all UK races is in the on-course betting shop if it is operated by an independent bookmaker. And so I found myself, during the Doncaster St Leger meeting, in their Ladbrokes to watch racing from Musselburgh. All away racing was covered as I expected, but they also had 'cartoon racing' from five fictional tracks.

Is this not 'fixed odds betting', just like the machines that are under so much scrutiny? Is this a way of getting round the laws on fixed-odds betting terminals?

more importantly, the dynamics of horse racing for more than 30 years and long before I got an opportunity to put my theories into practice.

James and I generally sing from similar hymn sheets on this subject, albeit that his hymn sheet comes written in much more technical language, but I thought that he actually let our doubters off a little too lightly last month. He conceded in his penultimate paragraph that 'drafting is good'. I wouldn't go so far as to say that because you can't 'draft' without having ground to make up and, as James has told the world so many times, to make up ground on an object travelling at a near constant speed requires some acceleration and that is the ultimate sapper of energy. It is far more relevant to a racehorse than wind resistance.

Above all it is vital to consider all the forces acting on the object and, when you do that, you see that a racehorse is not comparable with a bicycle. It is especially not comparable with a bicycle in a velodrome, where polished wood surfaces (are they still wooden?) and ultra-high pressure, pencil-thin, tyres reduce friction to a minimum. That said, when you introduce the use of the slope, as in the cat-and-mouse sprint races, you see that the advantage gained from drafting is greatly reduced in the face of the

additional forces applied to the object going up and down the bank, and the rider who takes the initiative is just as likely to win as the one that sits in behind. Momentum, potential energy, and the energy required for acceleration now far outweigh the aerodynamic forces acting on the bicycle and rider.

Advantage

Take the bike out into the real world, where racehorses live, and you see things a lot more clearly. Most of us who have ridden a bike know the advantage that can be gained from slipstreaming. I ride bikes quite a bit, at least when compared with those who don't ride bikes at all, and on flat roads I find that the fat lads at the back, of which I am one, can keep up quite nicely with slipstreaming. But, as soon as a hill comes into the equation, we're in big trouble. Now we have to lift our extra weight up the hill and

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slipstreaming isn't going to help a lot. Take the bike off road, as I also do on occasions, and, hill or no hill, you won't notice the effect of drafting. Apart from the frictional forces

acting on the racehorse, which vary dramatically on different surfaces and terrains, you must remember that the racehorse has to lift its 500kg mass off the ground in every stride. In that sense it is much more akin to the human runner than to the cyclist. I have never been a runner, but there does not appear to be much advantage from slipstreaming for runners and although we do see some lycra and tight clothing used occasionally in track athletics we also see the likes of the late 'Flo Jo' - Florence Griffiths Joyner - powering away from her opponents with her great mane of hair flapping behind, so I don't think we should lose too much sleep over a tassel on a cap. Cyclists, on the other hand, shave their legs.

● When the Olympics are over and most of my friends and acquaintances return their attention to horse racing, I get fewer questions about slipstreaming but I still get lots of queries about our tactics or lack thereof. It is often pointed out to me that far more winners come from behind than make all in races. I can't argue with that but now, if anyone reminds me of that fact, I ask them: "Why do

white sheep eat more grass than black sheep?" The answer, of course, is that there are more of them and the same applies to horses who are trying to come from behind.

☐ I TRY, as much as possible, to let contributors to the Kingsley Klarion have the freedom to express their own opinions regardless of whether or not they coincide with my own but John Scanlon does, invariably, copy me in when he is sending his articles to Mikaelle and our editor, Gerry Hunt. This month he sent his 'Off The Bridle' column with a little note which said 'check final section as I'm not sure if Mark will be happy with me criticising Qatar or whoever is responsible for their magazine'. (see his column, p.33).

Too right I am! If the organisers of the Glorious Goodwood Festival set rules for their leading trainer and rider competitions, then neither they nor their sponsors should try to move the goalposts when they don't like the result. Thank you, John, for pointing it out.

☐ THIS time of year brings new meaning to the word 'busy' for me and I have no time for anything but yearling sales and, in the few gaps between, training horses. Nonetheless, I could not resist the invitation from my alma mater to attend a celebration of the centenary of the birth of Alf White (aka James Herriot).

It required a dash home from Newmarket on the last Saturday in September and meant only a few hours of sleep before returning early the next morning to start viewing for the Tattersalls Book 1 sale, but I was glad I went.

When normality returns and I have time to read something other than a sales catalogue, I may break out my old copies of the Herriot books. They inspired me once and might well do so again.