



mark@markjohnstonracing.com

Mathematics made simple

NOW, before you get into the serious mathematics, statistics and graphics of James Willoughby's column, I'll give you an equation that you can all understand: average number of runners per race = (number of horses in training x average number of runs per horse) ÷ number of races. Simple, isn't it? You would certainly think so, but maybe it depends on whether you are an owner, a trainer, a BHA executive, or a racecourse manager, because the racecourse managers and the governing body just don't seem to be able to grasp it. The BHA are intent on clamping down on the number of non-runners and have sought support for their proposals on the back of claims that non-runners have a serious impact on the public's enjoyment of the sport, and on those substantial international revenues generated by the use of 48-hour declarations which we continually hear about, but never see any evidence of. Personally, I don't think it is about that at all. It is actually about media rights

money, field sizes, and failure to come to terms with the effects of that simple equation I started with. Greed drives the betting industry's hunger for more races every year and the racecourses' desire to meet that demand. Deep down they must know that there aren't enough horses to service that fixture list, or enough owners willing to pay for them, but an

Should racecourses and the BHA not first be looking to themselves to see where they are going wrong?

'I'm all right, Jack' attitude and a period in a financial comfort zone have led them to believe that owners will turn out, and insist that their trainers bring the horses too, if they give them a 'free' meal and a video when they win. However, the reality which is just beginning to hit home is that, the owner will be a lot less likely to want his or her horse to run if another track is offering a better meal, a comfier seat, dare I say more prize-money or, way above all, a

better chance of winning that video. The BHA are at pains to point out that they have no desire to pressurise trainers into compromising the welfare of their horses although it is an inevitable consequence of these measures that there will be more pressure to run, especially for any trainer who has had the right to self-certify removed. But, even if we accept for the moment that there are a significant number of non-runners due to connections' belief that they have little chance of winning or even just less chance of winning than they might have elsewhere, whose fault is that? Should courses be running races where the field size or stalls position means that some participants have little chance of winning, or even significantly less chance than others? If you think your horse has no chance of winning, should you be forced to use up one of your precious runs which, on average, cost owners more than £3,000 a time?

If, for some reason, whatever the reason, a race has become so unattractive to an owner or trainer, should the racecourses and BHA not first be looking to themselves to see where they are going wrong, rather than look at measures to force trainers to run when they don't want to? They need to keep going back to that equation. To get bigger field sizes they need to encourage owners to buy more horses, to run them more often, or there needs to be fewer available races. The BHA's new measures don't address any of those issues. All they do is alienate the very people who could help them to solve the problem.

THE PROBLEMS that we encounter with social media and internet trolls has been brought to the fore again by the death of Permian at Arlington earlier this month and is dealt with elsewhere in this issue. It is a serious problem that most of us in racing have to put up with to some extent and some are better at handling it

PERPETUATING THE MYTH

IN 'Off The Bridle' John Scanlon draws attention (page 31) to a recent survey which suggested that racing is one of Britain's least trusted sports and that almost 50% of people think races are fixed.

In fact, one of the main reasons that racing has developed such a close link with the betting industry is because it is so difficult to fix when compared with other sports. However, the betting industry, the racing media, and the racing authorities, have to take much of the responsibility for perpetuating these myths about our sport. It is has long been suggested that a little bit of mystique creates interest in the sport and regular punters like to feel that they have some edge. The

betting industry and the media have encouraged the idea that information is valuable and that tips, especially from those 'in the know', can give punters an advantage. It is understandable that they should do so as it has a positive effect on betting turnover.

The regulator, on the other hand, should be able to distinguish fact from fiction, but we still have countless rules, regulations, guidelines and post-race enquiries which do nothing to dispel the myth that trainers and jockeys know whether their horse is going to win or not and should be able to provide an explanation when it doesn't go to plan.

It is time to wise up. The misconceptions are self-made.

than others. Reacting to these people is usually a mistake and I tend to make that mistake quite often, but recently I came up with a cunning plan to thwart those who send me emails and the first time I tried it, it seemed to work well. I took two 'internet pests', as I call them, one who was accusing me of lacking loyalty to a

particular jockey and one who was slating me for using the same rider, and put them in touch with each other. I copied them in to each other's emails. One got very upset that she should be considered in the same category as this other person. She has, however, stopped sending me mail, at least for the time being.

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

MINIMUM £70,000 per race. All races. Now that's proper prize-money, and Ascot and others who want to run top-class racing festivals need to pull their socks up and take heed of the example set by York. York fully deserved all the praise they got for a tremendous festival of racing and their stance on prize-money, but there is another track which is coming right up to

the mark, albeit at a lower level, and they are not getting the praise they deserve – Chelmsford. A £50,000 handicap and a £25,000 handicap on a Tuesday evening; a £19,000 Novice stakes for 2yos and a £45,000 Conditions stakes for 3yo fillies on a Thursday; two £25,000 handicaps and an average prize-money pot of more than £12,000 for eight races on another Tuesday;

and handicaps worth £80,000, £50,000 and £30,000 on a single Saturday. I hate to admit that I started to wonder how they can possibly do it but perhaps I have been brainwashed by 30 years of listening to racecourses pleading poverty and blaming poor prize-money on others. Maybe they could all do as well as Chelmsford. I'm certain that they could all do better than they do now.

WHICH trainer has had the most runners, and the most winners, at Chelmsford since it rose from the ashes of Great Leighs? Having told you about the exceptional prize-money, I'm sure I don't need to tell you that it is me.

