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### Playing the Pick Three and Pick Four

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The Pick Three (P3) and Pick Four (P4) offer creative opportunities to cash generous tickets without the large bankroll required to effectively play the Pick Six. Three main factors make the P3 and P4 such good bets.

- (1) As with all horizontal (race to race) bets, the P3 and P4 offer the advantage of a single takeout versus the multiple takeouts that would occur in a win parlay.
- (2) Whereas the Pick Six is usually a matter of survival (not losing a race), the P3 and P4 allow a sharp player to leverage a couple of strong opinions into a major score. The handicapper should be much more aggressive in the P3 and P4.
- (3) The P3 and P4 usually have a minimum one-dollar bet vs two dollars for the Pick Six. This allows small to medium sized bettors to compete with larger punters. The smaller minimum bet coupled with less total betting combinations tend to level the playing field.

As in any other form of betting, you have to be willing to frequently lose small amounts in order to make the occasional big score that puts you on plus street. This applies if you are a \$2 bettor or a \$200 bettor.

If your budget for the P3 is \$10-\$20, you are rather limited in the straight tickets you can play. You could go 1x2xall (with a ten-horse or less field) 2x2x5 or 2x3x3. With any of these setups, I would be reluctant to use any horse that figures to be 2/1 or less. If you like a price horse in the sequence, you don't need to cash the P3 with two 4/5 shots in the other legs. Just bet the long-shot to win. In the P4, I am more willing to take a short price in one leg, if I like prices in the other three races. Straight tickets available in the P4 for \$20 or less are 1x1x4x5, 1x2x2x5, 1x2x3x3, 2x2x2x2.

If you can afford to invest \$50-\$100 in the P3 or P4, you not only get more coverage on straight tickets, but can construct multiple tickets that more accurately reflect your opinion of the relevant contenders (see strategy section).

The best time to play the P3 or P4 is when favorites figure to be over-bet in at least two legs. For some players, it is difficult to leave these obvious horses off their tickets. But you must have the courage to do so if you want

to succeed monetarily. Let's say there are big favorites in the first two legs that figure to go off at even money. In New York, with a 14% take, that means that each have about a 43% chance of winning  $\{(100-14)/2\}$ . This implies there is a 32.5% chance they both lose. So, roughly one out of three times, you have a chance to be alive for substantial payoffs since most small players will already be gone, and larger players' tickets will be diluted.

Another good time to play is when all legs look contentious. This is a situation when knowing how to construct multiple tickets is important.

One idea to remember at all times is that no one is forcing you to play the P3 or P4. Just because they are on the betting menu, doesn't mean you have to partake. Make sure you have a reason to play, rather it be vulnerable favorites or a sequence of wide-open races where you have some particular insights. Be leery of races with lots of first-time starters (if it's the first leg, you can at least see the odds). In this situation, only play if you are reasonably confident in the other legs and can afford to spread the race(s) with all the first-timers.

Under all circumstances, do not squander money by playing combinations that include too much chalk. The idea is to make money in the long run, not to cash a \$25 P3.

I tend to play straight tickets in the P3. Constructing multiple tickets isn't that cost effective, although I often punch some preferred combinations for more money. The main thrust of my P3 play is to bet aggressively against one or two favorites, especially in the first leg, as you can see the betting action. By starting off with an overlay, you are almost assured a good P3 payoff if you connect. Another reason to go against the favorite(s) in the first leg is that weaker players overspread the first leg trying to stay alive.

One P3 play I like to make in contentious sequence is to guarantee a win if two of my three top choices win. This is an inexpensive way to catch a nice number. Simply play three tickets of 1x1xall, 1xallx1, and allx1x1. For \$1, the cost of this play is just the total number of horses in the three races, and you will always be alive after the first leg.

The P4 lends itself more to multiple tickets, and that is my preferred method of play. The concept is to select primary (A) and secondary (B) contenders in each leg. If I can get any two A's home and any two B's in the other races, I secure the P4. Of course, three A's or four A's will also do the trick, and you should play those combos for a little more - if you are that good, you deserve to be paid.

For example, look at the layout below which lists the (A) horses first followed by the (B) horses after the slash.

1<sup>st</sup> leg 1/23456  
2<sup>nd</sup> leg 1/23  
3<sup>rd</sup> leg 1/234  
4<sup>th</sup> leg 1/23456

The basic play consists of the following eleven tickets:

AAAA	1/1/1/1	\$1
AAAB	1/1/1/23456	\$5
AABA	1/1/234/1	\$3
ABAA	1/23/1/1	\$2
BAAA	23456/1/1/1	\$5
AABB	1/1/234/23456	\$15
ABAB	1/23/1/23456	\$10
BAAB	23456/1/1/23456	\$25
ABBA	1/23/234/1	\$6
BABA	23456/1/234/1	\$15
BBAA	23456/23/1/1	\$10

This play comes in at \$97 for a dollar vs a straight ticket cost of \$432. I usually play the 4A ticket for \$4, the 3A tickets for \$2, and final six 2A tickets for \$1. This would bring the total cost to \$115. The beauty of this play is that it gives you the opportunity to catch a bomb or two as long as you can get A's home in two legs. Of course, you could use multiple A's in any leg(s), but that will significantly increase the cost.

And remember, don't worry about cashing if you want to get the cash.

