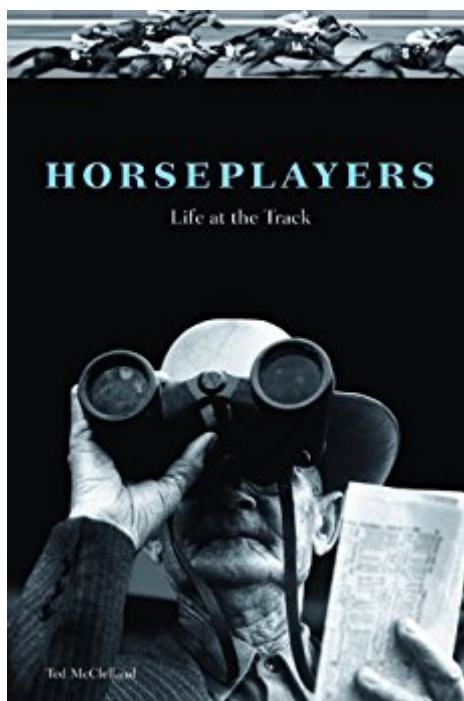


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Horseplayers: Life At The Track



Synopsis

This fun and witty exposé of horse racing in America goes behind the scenes at the track, providing a serious gambler's-eye-view of the action. Ted McClelland spent a year at tracks and off-track betting facilities in Chicago and across the country, profiling the people who make a career of gambling on horses. This account follows his personal journey of what it means to be a player as he gambles with his book advance using various betting and handicapping strategies along the way. A colorful cast of characters is introduced, including the intensely disciplined Scott McMannis "The Professor", a onetime college instructor who now teaches a course in handicapping, and Mary Schoenfeldt, a former nun and gifted handicapper who donates all of her winnings to charity. This moving account of wins, losses, and personal turmoil provides a sobering look at gamblers, gambling, and life at the track.

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Customer Reviews

Ted McLelland, Horseplayers: Life at the Track (Chicago Review Press, 2005) Ted McLelland

devotes a whole chapter of this book to a friend of mine. Cool. The obsessive reader of books on horseplaying (which is a very small group of people; in fact, it may well only contain me) needs to take a break from handicapping tomes and huge books of mathematical formulae every once in a while and read something about the equine and human sides of the sport. The former is less sparsely populated with truly great material, though Jane Schwartz' *Ruffian: Burning from the Start*, which is finally back in print on a steady basis, certainly fits the bill. The human side has been covered somewhat better, from the academic (John Rosencrance's thoroughly engrossing and entertaining *The Degenerates of Lake Tahoe*) to the poetic (Bill Barich's masterpiece *Laughing in the Hills*). *Horseplayers: Life at the Track* is a fine addition to the literature of the human side of horse racing. McClelland's book, actually, reads kind of like Rosencrance's, but with a plot and human names (or, in many cases, nicknames) plastered on the characters. You will meet the down-and-out, the desperate, the obsessed, the obsessive, the compulsive, the bum, the mathematician, and others. In fact, you'll meet pretty much every type of social outcast there is. (There's even a religious fanatic, though certainly the most likable one I've come across in print recently.) The one thing you'll lack is a truly well-rounded normal person, but then, the track doesn't seem to attract too many of them. Assuming they even exist. (We all have our faults, yes?) Even if you're not a big reader of nonfiction, if you like your books full of quirky characters, believe me, you're going to get a kick out of this book. And you may even pick up some tips on how to operate at your local track. (Here's a starter: stooping is not a good idea.)

Looking for a fun, fast-paced read this summer? If so, odds are you'll love this book. The author, Ted McClelland, spends a year as part of a fascinating subculture -- people desperately searching for the edge it takes to make a living betting on horses, whether it's searching the grandstand floor for winning tickets that were discarded by mistake, developing a new handicapping system, or just doing what your gut tells you. McClelland introduces readers to the regulars at Chicago's horse tracks, from grifters to whales (big-time betters). The book is much more than a series of character profiles, though, because the characters are McClelland's friends, mentors, confidants, and foils as he searches for his own edge. I can attest that you don't have to be a horse racing aficionado to enjoy *Horseplayers*, you just have to appreciate excellent writing. McClelland has a reporter's eye for detail, a novelist's skill with metaphor and character development, and a humorist's wit and sense of timing. He also throws in historical tidbits and wonderful literary references for good measure. It is a truly great read.

A well-written and interesting look at handicapping and folks who try to earn a living doing it. What a pleasant surprise! This book paralleled my life in many odd coincidences, and that added to the fun, but even if you didn't grow up near one of Chicago's racetracks there is great material here of interest to any horse fan. The author, Ted McClelland includes tales of road trips to other tracks large and small, as well as a lot of material about off track betting at America's great racetracks. Ted somehow finagles his editor to give him a one year stake for betting the horses under the premise that he will write a book about his experience. This book is the account of that year and Ted's attempt to come up with a successful system for handicapping. In the process Ted meets a blind man who handicaps with a numbering system that would confuse Fermat, an ex-Nun who successfully handicaps through her perception of the horses' willingness to improve, a former college professor who develops a system that leads to paying off the mortgage (and confounding his father-in-law) and a whole cast of characters who live (or try to live) at the track. The book is full of information on horse racing and gambling but it's the personal descriptions of the people he encounters that really make the book worth reading. Ted is a gifted writer and he captures and relates the true stories of these people with humor and dignity. Since finishing this book I've found some of Ted's articles and have found them equally well written and I will definitely be buying his other two books. A good book by a good author.

I bought this book because I am very interested in horse racing and learning to be a better handicapper. McClelland gives a very good look at the life of regulars at the racetrack, primarily through the eyes of losing gamblers and their different personalities. If you are thinking about becoming a professional horseplayer, then I definitely recommend reading this book first. It gives a good description of how one guy became a winning bettor, and how many have become losers. This book will probably not make you a better horseplayer. However it is a very interesting look at the types of personalities you might find at the horse track and I found it to be a great read.

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