



Executive Summary

TIF Reports: Embracing a Future with Free Racing Data

A major concern when Equibase was created was that racing lacked control over its own data. Equibase changed that with its founding in 1990. The service they have provided to the industry in the subsequent three decades has been extraordinary. But, times change. In this era of analytics, particularly in sports, racing should take every step possible to be a part of it. While the suggestions outlined in this paper may seem a significant departure from the status quo, we believe they are well within reason given the state of the industry. The sooner racing and Equibase embrace this path forward, the better.

Data has been big business – for Equibase and its partners. We believe liberalizing access to the data – making it far more flexibly available, and at a significantly changed price point – will drive bettor participation. Enabling data to be both affordable and accessible in a developer-friendly format will inspire bettors, including those not already investing in racing’s markets. Access to basic, free past performances will inspire existing, long-time customers and mass market new entrants. The current cost of racing data, and the inflexible formats in which it is provided, serve as hurricane-force headwinds in today’s wagering environment.

Add to this potent mix the rise of legal sports betting. Data which can inform sports bettors’ decisions is widely available, in many instances at little to no cost, and offered in formats designed for the tech-savvy.

In this paper, we recommend that Equibase should:

- provide free data feeds for registered, non-commercial users;
- provide free, basic past performances on all North American tracks;
- provide responsive channels to regularly address errors and omissions in the data;
- partner with universities to study racing data, developing new and advanced metrics for the betterment of the sport.

Free data, offered in modern formats, will grow handle, increasing racing’s competitiveness for new customers and enhancing the retention of current customers. This is a direct benefit to the tracks, who currently enjoy the spoils of data sales. Growing handle by several percentage points replaces the dividends tracks received via the data business. Growing it by several more covers Equibase’s costs of data collection and delivery.

There is an opportunity for Equibase to take racing ahead with a great leap forward – opening access to its data, unfurling the collective intelligence of the public on a sport that is in dire need of it. Combining this data access with more efficient pricing within wagering markets is a recipe for significantly increased bettor participation – a new way forward which all of the industry should support.

STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS IN “EMBRACING A FUTURE WITH FREE RACING DATA”

“For the cost of roughly 20 days of the Daily Racing Form, I can buy access to enough incredibly detailed, highly accurate, and developer-friendly information to inform me for an entire baseball season, and have enough left over for a few coffees at Starbucks,” says long-time professional bettor Maury Wolff.

Garret Skiba, an analytics and financial professional, is also one of the most successful live-money contest players in thoroughbred racing history, with tournament cashes in excess of \$800,000. He suggests that comparing racing data in its current form to traditional sports is a futile exercise.

“The products out there for other sports, for free, make it so easy to take interest in it as a bettor. The most popular is fantasy football, and almost all of the data is completely free, downloadable, or ‘scrapable.’ To try and compare it to racing is impossible. The absolute ideal scenario going forward would be to open the raw data to the public and let them have at it to drive interest and innovation.”

Tom Reynolds spent more than three decades as a sales and marketing executive for Pepsi-Cola North America, and has significantly increased his interest in racing over time, both as a horseplayer and an owner through Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners. He is also a TIF board member.

“The racing business survives by selling two experiences – one to owners and one to horseplayers. The exorbitant cost of data in an era where data drives participation and decision-making is a barrier to both experiences,” says Reynolds. *“The status quo inhibits the growth that the sport needs. The path forward should be crystal clear.”*

Chair of the Rhodes College economics department, Marshall Gramm, is also the co-founder of Ten Strike Racing, a syndicate responsible for nearly 1,000 starts and more than 200 wins with earnings in excess of \$6.5 million in just six years. Gramm is a highly accomplished horseplayer, most recently recording a fifth-placing in the 2018 Breeders’ Cup Betting Challenge and ninth in the 2019 National Horseplayers’ Championship.

“Despite being one of the most data intensive sports imaginable, the lack of publicly available, well-formatted and affordable data is probably one of American racing’s greatest head-scratchers,” says Gramm.

“Easy access to historical data fueled the analytics revolution in baseball, resulting in thousands of articles and books, and it’s going stronger than ever before. In horse racing, a sport that has a plethora of data and many willing researchers in the betting, breeding and horse ownership population, very little is actually happening.”

“What has been a tremendous oversight to this point can be corrected. There is almost unmeasurable value in getting the raw data into the hands of the public.”