LIES LIES AND RACING STATISTICS (A BRAIN TEASER)

Q1: Over the long run, horses starting from outside post posititions win less often than those starting from inside posts. Why is this?

A1: The most common explanation is that there are fewer starters from outside posts and, thus, fewer winners. Easy softball, right?

Not so fast. It's a bit more complex. Let's rephrase the question...

Q2: Horses starting from outside posts should statistically win at a lesser percentage than those starting from inside posts. Why?

A2: Ok, now we've brought it down to percentages. Horses starting from outside posts tend to lose more ground because they can be stuck running wide around the turns and may need to run farther than those breaking from the inside. Therefore, outside posts are usually at a disadvantage. Surely, this must be the reason. Right?

Well, sort of, but it still doesn't fully explain the statistics. Let's break things down further and simplify the question...

Q3: Over the course of a racing season, even if all races were run on a straightaway with no turns, inside posts are expected to exhibit a higher win percentage than outside posts. In fact, even if all post positions were randomly re-assigned before the start of each race, the originally-drawn inside posts would still be expected to win at a higher rate than the originally-drawn outside posts. Why is this?

HINT: What is the most ignored factor that skews racing stats?

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* ANSWER BELOW *
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********** ANSWER **********
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Let's simplify with a specific question. Why can't the winning percentage of the 4 post be directly compared to that of the 12, even with no ground loss involved? Well, it all comes down to FIELD SIZE or, more specifically, the fact that FIELD SIZES VARY. Horses breaking from post 12 are always guaranteed to be facing at least 11 others, while horses breaking from post 4 could, quite possibly, be facing as few as 3 but never more than horses with higher post positions. Not so puzzling now, is it?

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