



MY FAVORITE SPORT IS THE SPORT OF KINGS

BY JODI MALCOM

It would be too easy to explain my love of horseracing as the result of living in Elmont, Long Island, home of Belmont Park racetrack, for my high school years. Though I remember visiting Belmont Park only a few times during that period, I was merely a young girl, and it was the interesting-looking local hangouts that caught my eye, not the doings behind the Hempstead Turnpike track gates. But my focus on horseracing, also known as *The Sport of Kings*, surely began then, in the 1970s, for this one fact: I remember the day *Secretariat* won the 1973 Triple Crown.

A LIFETIME PASSION BEGINS

A good litmus test to determine whether or not a person is a baby boomer is their ability to remember seeing the Beatles on *Ed Sullivan*, or John-John salute the slain President, or Chubby Checker do "The Twist" on *American Bandstand*. Some remember when the *Tet* offensive began. In the same way, you can identify a true horseracing devotee by the way they can remember exactly where they were and what they felt as they watched the mighty red *Secretariat* make history in the Belmont stretch. It was a vision of athletic excellence, a shining moment of perfection—and everyone who saw it, knew it. I cried my eyes out for the beauty of it. From then on, I knew that there was a unique world to be discovered at the track, and I was determined to acquaint myself with it.

My attention to horseracing was diverted for about a decade, although I jumped back in the years that champions *Affirmed*, *Spectacular Bid*, and *Seattle Slew* raced. In 1988, a filly named *Winning Colors* beat the boys and won the Derby, which naturally snapped me to attention and filled me with the greatest female pride. (I started dreaming then of someday racing a filly that would run

against the colts, and I'd name her *Martina*, after the great net-playing tennis champion Navratolova). In racing, reporters refer to horses as "individuals," and they surely are. Even a spectator like me remembers them like good friends, and the years they raced are somewhat defined for me by their existence.

HANDICAPPING—NUMBERS AND BEYOND

I began handicapping horse races (predicting the outcome of a horse race through various means) when crossword puzzles lost their thrill and challenge. At that time, I taught myself how to use and understand the

Daily Racing Form (www.drform.com — a great tool and a good read). Handicapping tests your mind, your intuition, your observation. It forces you to make decisions and deal with risk. It uniquely allows you to analyze longitudinal data, test information and quantitative methods, and arrive at a conclusion. It's a very satisfying process. When I pick a winning horse, I feel that I've cracked a code. When I don't, I accept that I made a good educated decision.

Then, I re-analyze and try to learn what I overlooked or incorrectly concluded. Let me tell you, I never thought I'd ever enjoy playing with numbers. But that saying that "one does well with what one loves"...well, in this case, it's true. Where I might make an arithmetic mistake on my sales forecasts, my attention to horse workout times and final furlong speeds is usually right on the mark. I simply love the world of horseracing. Don't ask me why. Just know that it started with seeing *Secretariat* win that Belmont.

I love the non-data analysis of handicapping as well. This tests intuition and observation. I like to see how a horse behaves in the paddock before deciding whether it can win. Here are some racing attributes that I consider



JODI WAS PRIVILEGED TO SEE BARBARO (INJURED KENTUCKY DERBY WINNER) WIN THE FLORIDA DERBY IN APRIL 2006.



when summing up all horses and determining whether they will be race winners or even champions (especially three-year-olds who are being tested with each race early in their careers): Basic Competitiveness; Readiness; Determination; Willingness; Stamina; Endurance; Courage; Early Speed; Late Drive.

Come to think of it, these attributes are also to be considered when hiring a salesperson! Individuals with these characteristics would also be the people I would want my nieces and nephews to marry. It doesn't matter the number of legs, or the country of birth—being a champion has to do with attitude and heart. In the world of horseracing, having a champion sire or dam means a great deal as well.

SARATOGA—SUMMER RACING PARADISE

Talk Horse All Day

I live in Manhattan, but in August there's no place like Saratoga Springs, New York. For me, this is heaven on earth. For five weeks, racing fans and the best American horses, jockeys, trainers, and turf writers assemble in a lovely Victorian town and watch the most exciting display of equine prowess that anyone could dream of. I'm there every weekend, haven't missed a weekend in years, and don't want to miss one. I love to "talk horse" with anyone having a point of view, including stable workers and all the people who claim to have shared after-dinner drinks with a trainer or jockey. Everyone has a story, everyone has an angle. The conversation begins early at breakfast, continues on the patio at *Siro's* restaurant for pre-race-day handicapping seminars, continues at *Siro's* post race day, and then at dinner with a discussion of the next day's races. It's total immersion, and it's unlike anything else I've ever experienced.

Discovering Young Winners

Summer racing also gives fans an early look at the two-year-old crop, the youngest horses racing for the first time at short distances. This is a time when young horses are learning early lessons and discovering their speed and determination. I keep a detailed notebook of observations and track these horses for unusual displays of speed, courage, and endurance. These notes come in handy the next year, when I see them racing in Florida, New York, and Kentucky. Have these horses developed? Do they race like their sires? Horses are continually being tested for "class"—what level horse do they deserve to compete against? The very best win their *maiden* race (initial race when they come in first), then race against other winners in *allowance* races. These winners can then compete in stakes races at different levels. In the end,



SARATOGA RACE COURSE

champions earn accolades, money (purses), and the right to breed. Sooner or later, the best horses that you saw in Saratoga as two year olds develop into stakes' winners at age three and four. After that, it's a lovely thing to see their babies—their "crops"—race.

Saratoga Specialties

Horseracing has a very long history, which is documented in breathtaking format at the *National Museum of Racing* on Union Avenue. It also has a Hall of Fame. I never get tired of visiting the place and I highly recommend a visit.

Amtrak runs *The Saratoga Special* from Penn Station on weekends in August. Riders are met at the Saratoga station by bus, and are driven to the racetrack before the first race. At the end of the race day, the bus returns you to the Amtrak station and you can be back in New York City by 11 p.m. It's a long day, but it's a great way to experience this beautiful town, racetrack, and museum, and avoid weekend traffic on I-87.

I've been fortunate to visit many racetracks in the U.S. and many of the major race courses in the U.K. I hope that, someday, I'll have the time and opportunity to visit the breeding farms of Kentucky, so that I can greet the aging champions who I saw race and win during the last decade. This dream trip would be a "Breeding Farm and Barbeque" tour. I plan to have my photo taken with some famous stallions...and eat a ton of brisket.

I have a reserved seat for every summer weekend of the *Saratoga Meet*. If you know that you'll be coming up, I'd love to see you, share a cold drink, and discuss the day's races.

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