

KENTUCKY DERBY TRASH TALK: A RUN FOR THE ROSES & MISSING MARY

If it is the first Saturday in May, it is Kentucky Derby day. And so it is again today. We dabble with the ponies occasionally here at the Emptywheel blog, from previous Derby Trash Talks, to our coverage of the historic battles of super filly Zenyatta against the biggest and baddest boys of the horse racing world. Heck, we even have our own fearless roving reporter, Rosalind, monitoring the pending debut of Zenyatta's little sister, Eblouissante.

But, by far, it was our friend and colleague Mary who kept up our equine quotient here. Her tales from her farm, in the actual horse country of Kentucky, were a constant over the years. Whether it was the feeding and common chores to care for her horses, saving ones in trouble, to making sure they were ready for incoming storms, it was a slice of life we don't often stop to ponder in the fast paced politi-legal world we generally do here. Mary loved racing horses more than the actual racing really. For the big race days she would always say something to the effect of "oh, I'll probably just be working on the farm for that". Yet, later would say "well, I found a few minutes to see Rachel Alexandra run, wow what a race!"

Mary's voice, sadly, left us just before last Christmas and, frankly, we are still reeling a little from the loss. Communities need glue, and she was part of ours. The first thing I thought when the Derby chatter started up this year was "Damn, I miss Mary". So, our Trash Talk and Derby coverage this week is dedicated to Mary. In honor, one of our longtime good friends of the blog has put together an amazing video, which is at the top of this post, and has a powerful ending. Give it a watch please. If you

are new here and did not know Mary, here is the original memoriam we did.

So, there is a real live Derby today. It has not been one of the years with a big noisy media buildup. While we would probably know Andrew Cohen, the CBS News and The Atlantic legal analyst more for his work in the law, he is a completely devoted and involved soul in the world of horses and racing. Here is his breakdown for this year's race:

On Saturday, the first Saturday in May, Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky, will host the 138th running of the Kentucky Derby, the first leg of Thoroughbred racing's Triple Crown. It ought to be an excellent race. There is no dominant, obvious favorite this year and you can make reasonable arguments for any one of a handful of colts who will be running. As is often the case, you also don't have to look too hard to find a sentimental choice, if you are so inclined, because the field is full of them.

For example, there is Union Rags, the pre-season favorite for the Derby until he ran poorly after a tough trip in the Florida Derby. Union Rags is trained by Barbaro's old trainer, Michael Matz, the mercurial horseman who seems like he could use some good karma for a change on the track. Then there is the fast colt Creative Cause, winner of the San Felipe Stakes, who represents his 71-year-old trainer Mike Harrington's first-ever Derby horse. And there is Bodemeister, trainer Bob Baffert's latest missive, named after Baffert's son, a colt who blew them away in the Arkansas Derby.

Want more? There's Gemologist, one of trainer Todd Pletcher's best, a colt who won the Wood Memorial and who has never been beaten. There's Hansen, a striking

white colt whose owner got into a tussle with race officials in Kentucky because he wanted the horse's tail painted blue for a race. It didn't happen—God forbid horse racing should have an edgy marketing ploy—and Hansen was beaten by another Derby horse, named Dullahan, trained by Dale Romans, son of Jerry Romans, who never won a Derby himself.

There is much, much more in Andrew's article though, it is well worth a read. The title is "The Kentucky Derby and the Slow Death of Horse Racing" and it is an excellent work on the various ills of the endeavor once known as "the sport of kings".

I found a couple of historic takes on the Kentucky Derby from years gone by that you might find interesting, if so inclined. The first is by William Faulkner and is from 1955. Faulkner is such a rich and brooding writer. The second is from the always raucous Hunter S. Thompson and paints the picture of just what a depraved and decadent ramble of a party Derby week is in Louisville. From a man who really knew decadent and depraved partying.

My mother was bred, born and raised in the bluegrass country of western Kentucky and went with her father, my grandfather, to the Derby nearly every year growing up. She also taught American Literature for a very long time; she, like Mary, would have loved these looks back through the eyes of American masters of the pen. They are long, but fascinating pieces.

There are a host of other sports going on as well. The NFL recently completed its entry draft, had more trouble down in the Big Easy and, sadly, lost Junior Seau. Not a very good week. Oh, and former marginal Pittsburgh running back Merrill Hoge is making a blithering ignorant jackass of himself by ripping Kurt Warner, who made the perfectly reasonable comment that he might not want his children to play football at the level of the current college and pro ranks

because of the potential for life altering brain injury. It appears to be Hoge, however, who has an angry screw loose in the head. Notably, Hoge himself almost died from the bullshit he is spewing.

The baseball world has lost Mariano Rivera, arguably the greatest relief pitcher ever, for at least the year to a freak knee injury while he was shagging flies in pre-game warmups. Thankfully, Mo promises to be back for a curtain call, a player of such quality should not leave the game like that. Pujols still can't get a ball out of the yard in his new home in Anaheim and the Sawx are back on an even keel – for now.

The NBA playoffs are in full swing with last year's champion, the Dallas Mavericks on the brink of extinction, the Bulls hanging by a thread without star Derrick Rose and the San Antonio Spurs quietly plowing along. It is still completely impossible for me to find anything but total disdain for LeBron James and the Heat.

So, there is the rundown folks. A lot to chew on and talk trash about. Busy weeks lately, let's have some fun! And Jimi Hendrix in the special video, what more could you ask for. Let's get it on!