

WEEK 09

The wait is over. Almost...

- The icing on the cake, part one -

April 29, 2023

I was lucky. I know I was. I say that in regard to my short lived career as a race-track groom (followed by a somewhat longer job at a race track farm). I was never assigned a horse that ended up with an injury of any kind that resulted in it's euthanization, to be taken from the track in a horse ambulance or one that had to be vetted in extreme stress or retired. Believe me, it was not that I was giving them any additional care than any other groom. Like I said, I was just lucky. I would bring the horse over to the walking ring and when the horse was handed off to a ponygirl (or boy), I would walk away from the track, turn my back on the event and tho I could not escape hearing the announcer, I'd be gripping the lead fearing I would hear a gasp from the crown as a horse went down or whatever. Lucky. I never did. I'd bound back to the track to clip the shank onto the horse, quickly looking him (or her) over to check to see if there were any visible injuries and on the way back to the barn, I'd check for any signs of lameness or whatever. Lucky. None.

I saw all of this as my heart when out to this week to the Derby prospect WILD ON ICE which had to be euthanized after an injury during a workout. When I heard he was out due to an injury, all I wanted to here was that he was OK and would be retired and perhaps find a second career away from the track. That was not to be. Wild On Ice was put down on April 27th (my birthday) and I cried. This gelded son of Tapizar had won the Sunland Park Derby in his last start and I really gave him no chance in Kentucky but everyone that gets into this race (that races in the United States), holds on to that dream that will put them into the winners circle on the first Saturday in May. There is n't a breeder, owner, trainer, or jockey who doesn't want that and if they tell you differently, they are not being honest. As a kid, if you played football, you dreamed on being in the Super Bowl; of hitting the run that would give your team a win in the World Series or to excel in the stage that is the pinnacle of your sport. I didn't deny that dream of his connections. And now all I can think about is his groom. The groom is the closest to the horse during its racing career. They are with them day to day and get to know their quirks and their demands. I had a horse in my barn once that would put his head over my shoulder and pull me back to him if he thought I did not give him enough hugs or scratches when I greeted him in the morning. I had one that would grab his feed bucket and shake the heck out of it if he was not the first to be fed, and he was the most vocal when the barn door was opened. Could tell you so many stories that when I think back just make me smile. But I know the groom of Wild On Ice is not smiling. He (or she) is broken. They will busy themselves with the other horses in their charge but their mind and heart will be on that little gelding whether on not he got them to Kentucky. Whoever you are, my heart goes out to you.

This was not a good week for horse racing, to be sure. Jockey Dean Holland died as a result of injuries in a fall in Victoria, Australia. The riders of these gallant animals take their lives in their hands each and every day, be it in a race or in a work out. As do the exercise riders. There are at least two deaths a year that are racetrack related.

And continuing with the equines that are the center of this world, the lovely colt GOLDEN PEGASUS was euthanized as a result of a catastrophic injury at Laurel Race Course in Maryland on April 20th. Another horse was also destroyed. Of course, the "I hate racing" folks and the PETA people are out in full force. The track was shut down once again while they try to find the reason. They were taking entries for Saturdays card after the decision was made to open again. Enough on this.

In my last entry, I noted my disapproval of the "Road the Derby" that allows a Japan-raced or a European-raced horse to be assured of a starting spot in the Kentucky Derby. I have not changed my mind, and will not. This is a move only to get the big Japan betting dollar. I will say again that I am not against a Japanese-bred horse (or a horse bred anywhere) to start in the Kentucky Derby. I just want the playing field even in that they should be running in the US prep races, earning points as they do, and qualifying based on this point system (how I long for the days when points didn't qualify a horse!). They (the powers that be) have all but tossed a filly out of the mix as a probably started in the Derby. So why not designate one US all filly race as a guaranteed starting slot in the Derby? Makes just as much sense.

That being said, I'll talk about DERMA SOGOTAKE was guaranteed to be in the starting gate for the Kentucky Derby after winning the March 25th UAE Derby (G2, 1900 meters on dirt). (By the way, today is his birthday.) Prior to that, he was 3rd in the Grade 3 Saudi Derby and won a listed stake in his homeland. He prefers dirt to turf, his 4 wins (from 8 starts) having come on dirt tracks. His first two start were on turf (in Japan) and he didn't show much of an interest, finishing 6th and 4th so he was tried on dirt and told his connections that is what he wants to do. Let's look at his pedigree, which to me is a saving grace as he is by the US-bred Mind Your Biscuits who won at a Grade Two level in the US and Grade 1 at Meydan in Dubai. He was basically a sprinter tho his win in the Lukas Classic was at 9 furlongs. His record was eye-catching, winning over 4 million dollars (US) and 6 races in 23 starts, finishing in the money in 13 others. He was Champion older horse in Dubai and twice he was named New York Horse of the Year. His pedigree was not looked upon favorably so when he was retired, he was purchased by Japan breeders and currently stands at the renowned Shadai Stallion Station. He has another son in Japan, Ho O Biscuits who is aiming for the Japan Derby.

Posse is the sire of Mind Your Biscuits who was a Grade 2 winning horse in the US at sprint distances.

Dam of Derma Sogotake is Amour Poesie and it is from her that the stamina enters into the picture. Her race career wasn't high profile but she did win a listed stakes at 2100 meters and this was on a sloppy track. That was the Kanto Oaks. After that, she started 9 times and didn't come close to the top three. Prior to that, she had 4 wins at 1800 meters. Her dam is Happy Request which won on dirt and turf and did like a distance of ground. She won minor stake races. She is also the dam of Grade 3 takes winning sprinter Million Disk (by Canadian-bred Champion Afleet). Her sire is the Japan Derby winner and Japan three year old champion colt Neo Universe, who excelled on turf and over a distance of ground. And his sire was the US bred Kentucky Derby winner Sunday Silence who single handedly turned breeding in Japan on it's ear back in the day. Rejected by the US, this son of Halo was in another stratosphere when it came to breeding in Japan. I remember his derby well. My sister is not a racing fan (how did this happen?) and in order to get her interested, I appealed to her fondness for black horse by saying "black horse, red roses". I myself had chosen the two year old Champion Easy Goer who was second in the Derby. They would go on to a historic rivalry with Sunday Silence defeating Easy Goer in the Preakness as well but Easy Goer getting revenge in the Belmont Stakes. It was a super time for horse racing...Awesome Inspiring (who went to stud in Japan), Opening Verse, Flying Continental, Criminal Type, Is It True...real race horses! Anyway, Neo Universe himself proved to be an outstanding stallion having sired the likes of Dubai World Cup winner Victoire Pisa, Japan Derby winner Logi Universe, and so many others. Neo Universe died in 2021.

Amour Poesie has had 4 other foals to race, all of which have found careers on a dirt surface. First was the French Deputy horse, Pop Francais, which won at 1800 meters followed by Reality World (by South Vigorous) who preferred sprints winning at 1000, 1200 & 1400 meters. Then came the unimpressive gelding Shostakovich (by Belmont Stakes winner Creator) which has not won in 24 career starts to date and Big Factor, also a gelding, which has won at 1400 and 1600 meters but thusfar in 2023 has raced 7 starts and has only managed a fourth. So that makes Derma Sogotake her best.

The "other" Japanese horse is CONTINUAR. he gets into the Derby off a 3rd place in the UAE Derby and defections of a few US horses. His lifetime record is two wins (both in Japan) at distances of 1600m & 1800m. He was 5th in the Saudi Derby. By the US-bred stallion, sprint Champion Drefong, Baffert trained winner of the Breeder's Cup Sprint, Continuar is in his first crop of foals. Drefong has also sired Japan 2000 Guineas winner Geoglyth, who was his sire's first stakes and first Grade 1 stakes winner; stakes winner Consigliere; and stakes winners Kawakita Reverie, Taisei Drefong, Desierto and others so he is off to a promising start in his new career. Dam of Continuar is Pan De Ring (by King Kamehaneha) who was unraced and is the dam of two others to race, one winner (on turf). There is no doubt that her value was more as a broodmare as she is a half sister to the Japanese Horse of the Year Almond Eye, which also won the Filly Triple Crown, twice won the Japan Cup and so on. A turf specialist, she loved a distance of ground. The dam, Fusaichi Pandora, is also dam of 7 other winners, one having placed in a listed stakes.

OK, on to other news. BLAZING SEVENS connections say the the Blue Grass Stakes 3rd place finisher will be aimed for the Preakness. That moves up JACE'S ROAD. As of today, the "top twenty" by points are Forte, Practical Move, Angel of Empire, Tapit Trice, Two Phil's, Lord Miles, Derma Sotogake, Kingsbarns, Raise Cain, Rocket Can, Hit Show, Confidence Game, Verifying, Sun Thunder, Mage, Disarm, Reincarnate, Continuar (Jpn) and Skinner. Monday is the post position draw, of course. 7 days til the Derby. So much can happen in seven days!

Talk to you in a few days!