

Freak break

High hopes end for Royal Gint

The 28th Michigan Mile is now history. It will go into the record books as Sharp Gary, the winner, Methioxya, second and Dan Lasater, third.

Years from now, only close reviewing of the files will show what many will remember as the last career race for the 19th millionaire in the history of thoroughbred racing, Royal Gint.

Royal Gint, Dan Lasater's six-year-old Round Table gelding, broke down in the 100,000 race just as he was beginning to draw away in the nine-horse field. He was 3.5 in the waning and broke a lot of hearts as well as pocketbooks.

Dick Wilson, general manager of the Detroit Race Course, felt that the near fatal injury to Royal Gint had an upsetting effect on many of the crowd of 10,200.

The betting handle on the last race—the race following the Mile—dropped off more than \$60,000 from last year's total race on Michigan Mile day. We feel that the injury to Royal Gint bothered a lot of people.

One person it didn't seem to bother too much or as much as one might guess was Dan Lasater, youthful owner of Royal Gint.

What can you say about something like this? asked in a post-race interview. He was perfectly sound going into the

race and there was nothing wrong with the racetrack and there is nobody to blame, it's just one of those freak things that happens in racing.

"His racing days are over and we're going to do our best to save his life," Lasater said. "That gelding doesn't owe me a thing. I can guarantee that he will be taken care of on a farm because he's taken awfully good care of me."

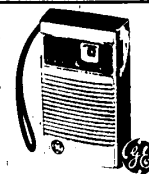
The career-ending injury left Royal Gint with final money earnings of \$1,094,815. The gelding started a total of 52 times, winning 21 races, including 15 stakes, was second nine times, six in stakes and was third four times, twice in stakes.

The fact that Royal Gint broke down did not dampen the enthusiasm of Sharp Gary's connections. The five-year-old gelding sired by 1961 Kentucky Derby winner Carry Back, was ridden by local jockey Sam Maple.

At 14.1 odds, Sharp Gary was a huge overlay in the betting. The winner's share of \$65,000 boosted Sharp Gary's career bankroll over the half million dollar mark.

The victory for Maple, who now lives on his recently purchased 30-acre farm in Ortonville, Mich., was the third 100 grand stakes win of 1976.

The 23-year-old native of Carrollton, Ohio, previously won aboard Joachim and Dracnet in six-figure races at Ak Sar Ben racetrack in Omaha, Neb.



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Sharp Gary, winner of the Michigan Mile with Sam Maple in the saddle, appears to

be flying as he is chased by Methioxya at the finish.

He's off to coach Olympians

By JOHN BOZZO

John Mason, who built a dynasty at head coach of the Cranbrook Swim Club for the past nine years, has accepted an assistant coaching job at a California swim club which placed six members on the 1976 U.S. Olympic team.

News of Mason's new job comes after he led the Cranbrook club to its fifth straight Northern Suburban Swim League championship. The club has not been beaten in dual meets since 1971, winning 32 in a row. He also was head coach of the Birmingham Groves girls swimming team, the Michigan Statevars A&J club and assistant

coach of the boys' team at Groves. Mason said that coaches at clubs like the Mission Viejo Swim Club in Mission Viejo, Calif., where he will soon be working, are allowed to implement the type of program which develops Olympic quality swimmers.

"This area is a hot bed of swimming and has got such good swimming facilities," Mason said. "But people won't let the coach put in the type of program to develop swimmers. Each little town wants its own club and its own name stamped on it. Until they get over that they'll never have swimmers of national caliber."

"Birmingham, Bloomfield, and South field should combine for one team," Mason added. "It's close enough so that they wouldn't have to travel a long way and their better swimmers could work out together—and that's the secret."

"It's competition during practice which makes you go faster and improve your self," Mason explained. "If you're running down the road by yourself you set your own pace, but if there's someone next to you running fast you're going to go fast to keep up."

IDEAL FACILITIES for a super-duper program are also lacking in the Detroit metropolitan area, Mason said.

"We're one of the only big city and suburbs that does not have a 50-meter indoor pool," Mason said. "All the summer camp championships and the Olympics are conducted in 50-meter pools which we call long course. There's a big difference mentally and physically in swimming long course as opposed to short course and you need to train for it."

The few long course pools we have you can't get into until the middle of June and the championships are held in the middle of August. You only have 1 1/2 months of long course training and that puts you at a distinct disadvantage."

Mason guessed that the largest swim club in the state is the Michigan Statevars, of which he is also head coach. He said the Mission Viejo Swim Club has 600 members. He added that by combining members club could combine pool time and split available pool time more efficiently between the different skill levels of swimmers because there would be larger groups of swimmers.

Mission Viejo has an impressive record for producing top quality swim teams and swimmers. Mason explained that Brian Goodell and Shirley Babashoff, both Olympic gold medal winners, swam with the club. The club won the girls' senior national title three times running and in the recent national meet won both the girls' and boys' titles, according to Mason.

Mason added that the Mission Viejo head coach, Mark Schubert, was voted coach of the year by the American Swimming Coaches Association.

A 1968 GRADUATE of Pontiac Central High School, Mason took over the reins of the Cranbrook Swim Club that same year. He turned the club around from a seventh place team to a perennial champion. He also earned a BS in social science from MSU during the first four years as a Cranbrook coach.

The Michigan Statevars had their first representative at the national swimming championships this past summer and the Groves girls have finished fourth, second and third under his direction. As assistant boys' coach at Groves, Mason has helped head coach John Wreck guide his squad to two third places and one state championship in the past three seasons.

Cranbrook did give me the opportunity to get into coaching," Mason said. "You certainly learn by trial and error and through the years I have tried to improve my coaching techniques. I learned a lot working under John Wreck at Groves. He's one of the best."

"I'm going to miss the kids here," Mason added. "I have kids who started on the team when they were seven or eight years old and now they're too old to swim in the program. I've seen some kids practically grow up and I am certainly going to miss a lot of those kids."

While watching the swimmers grow up he has also been observed in his development as a coach by parents.

"WE'VE SEEN HIM grow up from a 17-year-old to a 26-year-old," said Mrs. Jeanne Bice, whose family joined the Cranbrook Swim Club nine years ago when Mason first signed on as a swimming coach.

"We've seen him learn and teach the children what he has learned going to clinics and doing whatever he could to improve his techniques," Mrs. Bice said. "He took some kids who didn't know how to swim, like my son Gary, and first put them in the water and many of them have earned college scholarships." Gary Bice is on the swimming team at Wake Forest, N.C.

"He's been very demanding with the kids," Mrs. Bice added. "Some are more receptive to this and some are not. The place where he is going is generally more acceptable for this type of coaching. I think we could win it five straight at that time."

Mason visited the Mission Viejo club to observe their training program last April. During that time he was asked if he would be interested in coaching at Mission Viejo and responded favorably. When the Mission Viejo assistant coach took another coaching job this summer, Mason was asked if he would fill the assistant's position.

Mason is enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with what he called "Olympic-caliber swimmers. He will assume his new job Sept. 13 and noted that he will get his feet wet quick when the head coach leaves for a clinic and he has to take over the whole squad."

In taking this job I made a big jump, Mason said. "I'm going to get the experience and contacts out there in two years that would take me 10 years here."

It's not only the swimming opportunity, just going to California was a thrill. There's a full year round and all that great stuff."

Mason said that his career goal is to become coaching a big A&J swim team or college team. He said the only problem with college coaching is that recruiting is a "hassle."

As far as coaching an Olympic gold medal winner, Mason said, "I haven't quite made up my mind how I'm going to put a two-time gold medal winner to pick up the pace. He's liable to look up at me and say 'Who are you, buddy.'"

He added that the big difference between coaching a beginning swimmer and a real good swimmer is motivation, getting the swimmer to keep working past what coaches call the pain barrier.

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