

Opinion Of Johnny Longden

Horse Racing Is Cleanest Sport

By PATRICK HINDERT

Horse racing is the cleanest sport in the world.

That is the word from Johnny Longden, the celebrated jockey who brought home 6,026 winners during a 40-year career that ended in 1966. Now a leading West Coast trainer, Longden flew into the Hazel Park Race Track Monday to enjoy a day in his honor. Longden rode his first race

in California in 1927 and, when he hung up his tack two years ago, he had become the winningest rider in the history of the North American turf. In four decades, Longden went to the post 32,405 times, bringing home 6,026 winners and earning \$24,665,800. Longden was witnessed at first hand the tremendous expansion of thoroughbred racing until now it ranks as the No. 1 spectator sport in North

America.

What have been the greatest changes Longden has observed since he started in racing? "Racing was not always as clean as it is today," he recalls. "Back rail fights used to be a common and ugly fact of racing. That has all changed now."

"Today, the photo finish camera takes all of the guesswork out of picking a winner. And the camera patrol can detect fouls anywhere on the course. These are the most useful of the new scientific devices which are constantly used by horse racing to police itself," Longden insists.

"Another important change," says Longden, "has been the fantastic increase in purse money. In 1927, \$250 seemed like a good sized purse. But today, they run in excess of \$100,000." The largest purse Longden ever won was \$125,000 in the Santa Anita Handicap.

The greatest thrill of Longden's illustrious career came in 1943 when he won the triple crown aboard Count Fleet. "That was the fastest horse I have ever ridden or seen," he says.

Longden suffered several serious injuries during his racing years, including a broken back that sidelined him for eight months. A concussion that plunged him into a coma for

10 days, and numerous broken bones. Yet he never lost his desire to win or his readiness to trust his cool judgment in tight spots.

"When I quit two years ago, it was because my rudeness had begun slowing down," Longden says. "I would see an opening, but by the time I reacted, my chance was gone."

A man who neither smokes nor drinks, and who always watches his diet, Longden's best riding weight was 120 pounds. He stayed close to that mark for 40 years. Now 61 years old, the five-foot-tall-Goliath of the race track has ballooned to 142 pounds.

Normally a reserved man

who answers all questions with patience and cooperation, Longden becomes more emotional when the conversation switches to the controversial 1968 Kentucky Derby.

"Dancer's Image got a raw deal," according to Longden. "Butastidin (the drug that caused the disqualification of Dancer's Image) should be legalized," he says. "It is neither a depressant nor a stimulant, but a pain killer. It can help cure a sick horse."

As to the future of horse racing, Longden predicts unprecedented success.

"There is no place to go but up," he states with firm optimism.



RACING DAYS OF YORE are described to Observer Intern Reporter Pat Hindert by Johnny Longden, who was one of the nation's top jockeys for more years than he cared to discuss. Longden was a Monday visitor at Hazel Park Track.

12 From Area Will Compete In Car Races

The Waterford Hills Sports Car Racing Club will play host to 150 drivers from eight states Saturday and Sunday, June 29-30, as the Detroit region of the Sports Car Club of America conducts qualifying competition for its national meeting.

Top Golfer

KALAMAZOO -- When Timo Kilpelainen, of Farmington, tied for second with a 54-hole score of 207 in this year's Mid-American Conference golf meet, it was the highest finish in 12 years by a Western Michigan University golfer.

Pins

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THE WILLIAMS - JACKSON duo was way above the league averages. Miss Williams, with a 130 average and a 147 pin handicap, had actual games of 187, 176 and 171 and gross scores of 236, 225 and 220 for 681.

The Canadian pair, who hail from a couple of small towns southeast of Windsor, made their bid Sunday night. Miss Scratch, who has a 134 average in Canada picked up a 138 pin handicap and rolled games of 221, 164 and 161 which grew to 267, 210 and 207 with handicap. Her partner, with a 173 average and 54 pin handicap, had actual games of 215, 172 and 201 which became 232, 190 and 210 for 642.

For the first time in tournament history, top prize winners came from two states and two countries.

The Scratch-Uppott duo gave an international flavor to the journey and the team of Alverine and W.H. Foster, of Trafford, Pa., came from the greatest distance.

The Observer Newspapers will publish the complete list of prize winners as soon as it is available from Director Goldman and his crew of tabulators.



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