

DRC shaken after tragic fire

Track vice president Dick Wilson, a veteran of more than 25 years in the sport, took back on the barn fire that killed 30 thoroughbred race horses at Detroit Race Course Monday night and called it "the thing that tracks all over the country worry most about."

"Lots of folks don't realize that it's a stable 'community' in a track stable area," he said. "Some 1,000 people work there and the horse colony itself numbers between 1,300 and 1,400 head. When you have that much activity there's the normal community risk of something unfortunate happening."

Raising the death toll in what was one of the Detroit area's worst race track fires was the inborn instinct of a horse to seek the only shelter he knows at a time of danger. Many of the horses which perished had been led out of their stalls by quick acting groomers and horsemen, only to break loose and dash back into blazing barn W.

Trainer Henry Ramirez, who couldn't hold three of the seven horses he dragged from the fire, said: "It's the one home they know; they just instinctively try to stay there."

HARDEST HIT IN the early evening fire was popular DRC trainer Dale Thirney, who lost all 10 of his horses quartered at the track. A first reaction of the Searcy, Ark., native, however, was deep concern over his 65-year-old groom, Harry Wagner, who had been known to nap in one of the barn's tack rooms. First was reported dead by early witnesses at the fire, then "missing" when police and firemen did not find a body. Thirney was one of the most joyful at the scene when Wagner arrived safe and sound after actually being away from the track during the evening.

One of the few other pleasant surprises in the aftermath of the blaze was the revelation early Tuesday morning that the fine Michigan-bred stake horse Fickle Fate was not a victim, as had earlier been reported. Winner at DRC last year of a \$25,000 division of the Michigan Futurity for 3-year-old homebreds, Fickle Fate it was finally discovered was quartered in another section of the grounds.

Several thoroughbreds well known to Detroit race fans did die. They include Naders Rader, Dublin Deb and Irish Mary M of the Thirney stable; Oslem Olsen and Search For Money, trained by Carl Stevenson of Detroit; Sirbad's Wake and Miss Stay Bright, trained by Roy Hutchinson of Milford; and Magic Reward and Rican Run, trained by Virginia Payne, Hot Springs, Ark.

Only two of the dead horses had been scheduled to race on Tuesday. Dee Dee's Dear, a 3-year-old colt

trained by Al Spirdone of Detroit, was canceled in the first race, while the 6-year-old gelding Oslem Olsen was a part of the fifth race field.

Because of the heavy population of horses at DRC, "short fields" did not result from the absence of the fire victims. The first race found eight horses in the starting gate, the fifth race went off with seven.

IDENTIFICATION OF MANY of the dead animals had to wait until late Tuesday morning, when the rescued horses to hot-walker machines in the stable area or secure them in empty stalls in other barns. Owners and trainers arriving at the track later had to search the grounds to determine if their horses had been among the victims in the large 75-horse barn.

At Hazel Park, rescued horses had been turned loose in the barn area and many injured themselves in the wild confusion.

There was one ironic "in memoriam" to the dead animals Tuesday when Brave Blade, one of the 30 horses safely led from the fire, impressively won the fourth race. Over a span of the last four years, it was the 6-year-old thoroughbred's first victory in 71 starts.

DRC pressbox wags, as sorrowful as any over the tragic fire, watched Brave Blade win after 70 straight losses and could not help but comment: "A horse you have to set a fire under."

Glenn girls beat Spartans

Karen McDougal took a pair of firsts and the John Glenn girls' track team went on to defeat Livonia Stevenson last Friday 61-42.

McDougal showed her diversification by taking both the long jump and the 100-yard dash, to pace the Rockets.

Glenn swept all three relay events in the meet. Sharon Solak topped Stevenson with firsts in the shot put and the disc.

Long Jump—1. McDougal (G) 2. Plasterer (S) 3. Bishop (S) Distance: 14' 4". Shot Put—1. Solak (S) 2. Moore (G) 3. Brady (S) Distance: 28-3. Disc—1. Solak (S) 2. Stevenson (S) 3. Glenn (S) Distance: 28-3. 100 Relay—1. John Glenn 2. Stevenson Time: 1:12.9.

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