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The Times

Steeplechase

Vol. 19, No. 2
Friday, April 27, 2012

Round 3

Tax Ruling goes for history in Iroquois

INSIDE: Black Jack Blues returns with win • Meet Buck Kisor & Ann McIntosh

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here&there... in Steeplechasing



Old Man River. Veteran Swimming River continued his winning ways with another flying performance in the Alfred Hunt Steeplechase at Middleburg April 21. The 10-year-old has won three in a row for Indian Run Farm and jockey Jeff Murphy.

Worth Repeating

"We bred for big and fast and we either got fast or big, never both."

Owner (and former breeder) Buck Kisor
on his experience as a Thoroughbred breeder in Michigan

"Put two horsemen in a room and you have six opinions."

Kisor, on long ago negotiations to buy a racetrack in Michigan
(and in many ways the current status of Thoroughbred racing)

"He looks like he just stepped off a Currier and Ives."

Owner Irv Naylor about new horse Via Galilei

"Feeding time at the zoo."

Trainer Janet Elliot, who had just set her
feed tubs before answering her mobile phone

"I don't think there's a lot I can teach that horse. He knows more about timber racing than we'll every know."

Jockey Willie Dowling, about Bubble Economy

"It's a huge honor to have a ride. There are 40 runners, but there are a lot more than 40 jockeys who want to ride in it. I would ride a three-legged donkey around it, I enjoyed it so much."

Jockey Ross Geraghty, on the Aintree Grand National

"You can't just tell yourself 'these things are in my way' and kick on."

Geraghty, on riding timber races

"There are mornings you look at the horses you get on . . . Lake Placid, Black Jack (Blues), Decoy Daddy, that's not a bad day. Some days you have to really pinch yourself."

Geraghty, on riding the stars of Irv Naylor's string in the morning

"I'm very often on the cover of 'Foot in Mouth' magazine."

Jockey Jody Petty, on saying the wrong thing at the wrong time

"That's when I was useta – I useta be able to do that."

Steeplechase fan Amos Fenstermacher,
watching a youngster do push-ups at My Lady's Manor

"We'd be full up to the brim and get another horse and the question always became 'Well, where's he going to live?' He lived in the hot-walking shed, he lived in the stall we normally put hay and straw in. I thought he was going to come home and live with me a couple of times."

Assistant trainer Jim Bergen, on life for Italian Wedding
around the Jonathan Sheppard stable

"She rang me up three months ago. I jumped on the plane."

Irish jockey Joey Elliott, on taking Ann Stewart's
call about riding Incomplete this spring

"He was so happy not to see a timber fence that he ran the race of his life."

Trainer Kathy Neilson on Almarooq, who fell over timber at My Lady's
Manor April 14 and won over hurdles at Block House April 21.

"If it's not a stinkbug, I don't consider it a pest."

Owner Joe Davies, on spring insects

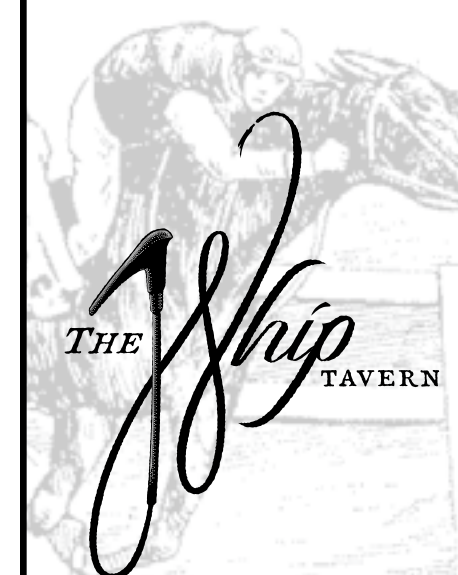
"I was definitely not tucked up in a ball."

Three-time champion jockey Paddy Young,
about a Camden fall where he broke his right arm

"I thought I was going to puke until the last jump race was done, with the hard ground, you just worry that somebody's going to get hurt. The only fall was in the maiden. I was glad the day was over, I can tell you that."

Middleburg's clerk of the course Doug Fout after a stressful day

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Entries

What's Happening and Where To Find It

Here's your newspaper. Plowing ahead. The spring season has hit full gallop with horses, races, meets, participants and fans traveling all over the East Coast. As usual for this time of year, all eyes are starting to turn toward Nashville and the rich Iroquois meet. Cover boy Tax Ruling goes for a historic third consecutive win. Through it all, ST gets used to a new print schedule. Read it all here, and check out st-publishing.com for the most current news.



PAGES 3-8

Here and There

Three pages of quotes, bits and bobs from the circuit (and a great photo of Swimming River looking majestic in the Alfred Hunt).



PAGES 10-20

Jumping Around

We covered the races like always – just on the web. Here are snippets of each, and the photographic evidence to prove it.



PAGES 23-24

Owner Profiles

Meet longtime steeplechase owner Buck Kisor and rookie steeplechase owner Ann McIntosh, both winners this year. He's a former college professor, she's an ace angler.



PAGES 26-27

Hitting a Triple?

Irv Naylor's Tax Ruling tries to go where no steeplechaser has gone before and win a third consecutive Iroquois Steeplechase. The pages of history – from Rockmayne to Good Night Shirt – are stacked against him.



PAGES 28-29

Losing a Legend

Two-time steeplechase champion – and world-class lead pony/stable mascot – Flat Top dies at age 19. We're going to miss him.

The Steeplechase Times

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On the Cover

Tax Ruling attempts history as he takes aim at a third consecutive Iroquois Steeplechase victory for owner Irv Naylor.

Photo by
Tod Marks



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here&there... in Steeplechasing

Worth Repeating

“It’s such a lottery.”
Trainer Kathy Neilson, about the Maryland Hunt Cup

“We went around there going one and a half miles an hour. Do you know how much patience you have to have to drive a tractor one and half miles an hour?”
Trainer Todd Wyatt, about catching a ride with Bill Fritz, who spent 12 hours (each) aerating the My Lady’s Manor and Elkridge-Harford courses

“I’ve got six weeks to go that I’m counting down.”
Apprentice jockey Gus Dahl, about finishing his junior year of high school

“We told (jockey Alberto Delgado) that he would finish last but he wouldn’t be able to pull him up.”
Trainer Lilith Boucher, about running Stoneybrook winner Class Brahms on the flat

“It has a friendly atmosphere, there’s not that edge. You can bring your kids, it’s all the little things. Toby does a great job. There’s no screaming, nobody was yelling.”
Lilith Boucher, about Stoneybrook and race director Toby Edwards

“I tried to sell him for \$10,000, so, no, I don’t think so.”
Trainer Jonathan Sheppard, asked if in his wildest dreams he could have imagined winning a novice stakes with Sergeant Karakorum

“You’ve never seen a hearse with a trailer hitch. You can’t take it with you.”
Fairfax Point-to-Point auctioneer, provoking another bid

“Emily and I are back to where we were when we first got married, no help, doing it all, we’re both fit and in good shape.”
Trainer Jimmy Day, after winning the maiden at Camden

“They deliberated about it for a long time, when Catherine (French) came and told me she actually got it, I was practically in tears. I was pretty proud of the filly.”
Jockey/trainer Danielle Hodsdon after winning the filly and mare maiden with Cubist at Atlanta

“I really liked the other half of my entry on this particular day, because he was schooling and training aggressively, he was squirrely over the first and they parted company.”
Trainer Arch Kingsley, after winning the maiden with Trippo at Atlanta

“He seems to enjoy making me swallow my heart.”
Jockey Richard Boucher, about Aiken winner Flight Movie

“She said efficiently, not brilliantly.”
Trainer Ricky Hendriks, describing his mother’s description of Aiken winner Embezzle’s jumping

“I was showing him over the summer.”
Owner/trainer Allison White, about Aiken winner Hold Your Course

“He just likes it, I think he can be rated if I wanted, but he likes racing that way, that’s him.”
Jockey Ross Geraghty about champion Black Jack Blues

“I have no hesitation about the trip.”
Geraghty about Black Jack Blues going 3 miles in the Iroquois

“It’s a lot of fun, if you don’t enjoy it, you’re a fool, don’t do it. I want people that I don’t even know to do good just because I know how hard the game is. You watch Karen Gray win with Cuse, you’ve got to be happy for her.”
Owner/trainer Michael Leaf after winning at Stoneybrook

“I said he’s green but he’s a pretty shade of green.”
Leaf, recalling his instructions to Kevin Tobin when Durer made his debut last spring



Get a Grip. Douglas Lees Ivan Dowling hangs on – barely – after Elusive Prince landed over a fence at the Grand National. The jockey made the save, and they finished fifth.

“She’s big, tall, lanky, she never had a race long enough on the flat, she just took a long time to grow up.”
Trainer Doug Fout about Camden winner Quiet Flaine

“In front of my laptop, by myself, jumping up and down, it was pretty close finish.”
Owner Jane Buchanan about watching Tap Night win a Group II hurdle in Scotland

Mignon C. Smith
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Class Bopper, Class Yankee, Complete Zen, Class Vantage, Class Shadow, Class Real Rock, Class Skip . . . stakes winners on the flat and over jumps. Thank you for the opportunity, the memories and all the horses. You were one of a kind, never to be replaced.

~ Richard and Lilith

Photo by Tod Marks

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here&there... in Steeplechasing

Worth Repeating

"I've had some success, I got my name out there a little bit last year, but I didn't have the quality of horses, I'm hoping this year will be better. Like this horse, he's one to look forward to."

Jockey Willie McCarthy, after winning the allowance on Baltic Shore at Camden

"Mr. Stubborn had to come to the barn and mow gallops on his first day back."

Trainer/wife Leslie Young, about three-time champion jockey Paddy Young breaking his arm

"I did say to him we didn't come down here for the fun of it, we think he has a shot."

Trainer Leslie Young, about giving substitute jockey Darren Nagle instructions for Camden winner Dance Faster

"They gave me a cup and some big-ass trophy, I said to my wife, well girlfriend then, I said did they just give you that or did you sign something? She said, 'I signed something.' It had to be insured for \$27,000 or something. I was like 'take this thing back.'"

Owner/trainer Michael Leaf about winning a race in 1994

"She lives there with nine of my others, they all live outside, together."

Owner Rusty Cline, about Middleburg winner Better Than Even

"Tensions are always high this time of year."

Trainer Dawn Williams about spring in Maryland steeplechase country

"Everybody had it in their heads that it was rock-hard ground, to go steady. After that, you should be able to really go to the last few and that's the way it went. People had horse to go at the last few. When we go fast early, they're getting tired and they start making jumping mistakes."

Jockey Mark Beecher, on pace in timber races

By The Numbers

3: Times Ann Stewart called fellow trainer Bruce Miller for advice about running Incomplete at My Lady's Manor.

314.02: Time difference in seconds between And The Eagle Flies' first career victory (4 1/2 furlongs in 54.98 seconds) in 2005 and his Grand National victory (3 1/4 miles in 6:09) in 2012.

1: Loose horse – an outrider's – during the pony race at Fair Hill Point-to-Point April 22.

7: Fence where Irv Naylor's Alfa Beat lost his jockey Davy Russell in the English Grand National – ending the American owner's bid at the historic race at Aintree.

Names of the Month

Via Galilei: The Irish-bred's name is a play on his sire (Galileo) and dam (Manger Square), with some spelling issues tossed in. The astronomer Galileo's last name was Galilei. He lived from 1564-1642 and was one of the first scientists to suggest that Earth and the other planets orbited the sun. So that's the sire. The dam is a pretty obvious reference and Galilee is a region in Israel where Jesus lived for 30 years.

Nadal and Djokovic: The training flat winners – named for tennis rivals – are both by Grand Slam.

Bruno Frigerio: It's got nothing to do with his breeding, but apparently the 4-year-old is named for an Italian actor (or not). Bruno Frigerio had a role in the 1985 film Una Donna Allo Specchio (A Woman in the Mirror). He's also a high school athlete in Maryland, though we don't think they're the same person. Now you know.



Douglas Lees

Manor Manners. A rammy Incomplete makes Beth Supick work after winning the My Lady's Manor timber stakes April 14.

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Jumping Around

Reports from the steeplechase circuit



Tod Marks

Champion Black Jack Blues flashes his jumping form while leading Country Cousin and All Together in the Carolina Cup at Camden March 31. Next stop for the burgeoning star, the Iroquois.

Spring has sprung and Steeplechase Times has covered all the racing, like we've done since 1994, just in a different way. Full race coverage – from Aiken to Tryon – has been available on our website throughout the spring. Here, we give you a snippet of each story.

The website also previewed each weekend, checked in with Ross Geraghty about what it's like to ride the Grand National at Aintree, went down memory lane with some facts about Americans and Aintree and summarized Dynaformer's phenomenal career as a steeplechase sire.

See www.st-publishing.com for all that and more.

– Aiken – Pullyourfingerout adds to Naylor arsenal

After Aiken's Imperial Cup, a rival trainer lamented and complimented all at the same time, "I think we're going to see the green and yellow on our hang tags for a while." The trainer referred to Irv Naylor's green and yellow silks which adorn the NSA parking passes, hanging from most rearview mirrors in steeplechasing. And, yes, the man, the silks and the horses aren't going anywhere.

Naylor's Pullyourfingerout dominated the Budweiser Imperial Cup at Aiken, taking the first stakes of the year with a cool 11 3/4-length win over Class Indian and Birthday Beau. Trained by J.W. Delozier and ridden by Ross Geraghty, the Irish-bred 5-year-old adopted a rating spot in second before cruising to his fifth career victory.

With the likes of Eclipse Award winner Black Jack Blues and recent import Nearby aiming at the Carolina Cup and novice champion Lake Placid and Colonial Cup winner Tax Ruling waiting in the wings, Naylor looks locked and loaded for his third consecutive championship.



Tod Marks

Pullyourfingerout surges away from the field in Aiken's Imperial Cup March 24.

– Carolina Cup – Same dealer, Black Jack wins again

And that makes three . . . and four . . . and six . . . and nine. Eclipse Award winner Black Jack Blues won his third race in America, fourth in a row, sixth of his last seven and ninth overall with another compelling and controlling victory on the front end, wiring five rivals in the first open stakes of the year, the Carolina Cup.

Part of Irv Naylor's ever-growing, ex-European brigade, the Irish-bred secured a length or two lead the whole way before drawing off to win by 6 1/4 lengths.

See [JUMPING AROUND](http://www.st-publishing.com) page 11 ►

Ridden by Ross Geraghty and trained by J.W. Delozier, Black Jack Blues skipped clear to beat Country Cousin, making his first start since June, and All Together, making his first start out of the novice ranks.

"He's done it pretty well, he was going a good gallop the whole way, I needed every jump down the backstretch, just to fend them off, but he's done it well, he's going to improve from that run," Geraghty said of the 9-year-old's first race since winning the Grand National at Far Hills in October. "He feels

Jumping Around –

■ Continued from page 10

a better horse this year, he's stronger, he's improved and I think there's more improvement there. He was bought to race on good ground, he handles soft ground also, which is a bonus, but a lot of that is just he has that bit of class to him."

– My Lady's Manor – The Complete Incomplete

Bruce Fenwick has seen a few timber races so when he called Saturday's My Lady's Manor "maybe the best timber race we'll see all year," people listened. Right or wrong, the veteran horseman was in the neighborhood.

The \$30,000 stakes lured four of the division's best in Bon Caddo, Bubble Economy, Incomplete and South Monarch and after 2 1/2 miles of bidding their time they hit the stretch together.

Incomplete saw out the victory, surging clear over the final two fences to win by 1 3/4 lengths for Bob Kinsley, Ann Stewart and jockey Joey Elliott. In his first start since May 2010, Bubble Economy (Willie Dowling) claimed second with Bon Caddo third and South Monarch fourth.

Stewart and Kinsley engaged Elliott, brother of Irish trainer Gordon, to ride their timber star this year and so far they are 2-for-2 with a season-opening score at Brandywine Point-



Dogulas Lees

See [JUMPING AROUND](http://www.st-publishing.com) page 13 ►

Incomplete (right) battles Bubble Economy in the My Lady's Manor, the first timber stakes of 2012, April 14.



Tod Marks photo

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Jamey Price

Cuse shows the way at Stoneybrook, his sixth win in 51 jump starts.

Jumping Around —

■ Continued from page 11

to-Point April 1. Next comes a try at the \$75,000 Virginia Gold Cup May 5.

"He's a nice horse," Elliott said of Incomplete. "He stays, he jumps, and he travels — everything you want in a timber horse."

— Stoneybrook —

Cuse cruises to Sandhills Cup win

Every young jockey needs an old horse. One who will teach, nurture and take the wheel at the busy intersections. Eleven-year-old Cuse has provided high school junior Gus Dahl with lessons and successes. The duo won again, upsetting the Sandhills Cup at Stoneybrook April 7.

Owned and trained by Karen Gray, Cuse hammerlocked the \$20,000 feature, opening a big lead over History Boy, On The Corner, Classic Bridges and Union Army. Making his 51st start over jumps, Cuse kicked to a 20-length lead early while jumping fluently and quickly. History Boy closed the gap to a half-length but that was it. Cuse earned his sixth career jump win, ticking over the \$120,000 earnings mark.

Dahl partnered Cuse to two wins last spring, accomplished in the same style.

See **JUMPING AROUND** page 19 ►



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— Richard Valentine, NSF board member
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A New Leaf

Former jockey returns to winner's circle again as owner/trainer at Stoneybrook

BY SEAN CLANCY

OWNER/TRAINER PROFILE

Michael Leaf cut through the center of the Great Meadow course, abandoning his course walk.

Comrades yelled to him, "What are you doing? You've still got half the course to walk."

The too-tall, starving, wanna-be jockey shook his head, waved his arm and told them the deal.

"There ain't no sense in me walking the whole course, there is no chance I'm getting this far," Leaf said, barely slowing his pace. He went back to the jocks' room.

It was 1994, Leaf, an outsider in an insular game, shipped Sunny Express to Great Meadow to run in a maiden claimer. He designated his mom, Patricia Leaf, as trainer, his girlfriend (future wife) Carol Lane down as owner.

Purchased from Ross Pearce, Sunny Express wasn't much horse. By Sunny's Halo out of a Cannonade mare ("crazy on crazy," as Leaf put it), the 4-year-old took Leaf farther than he expected, still peddling as the field went down the backside the last time. Leaf started counting and plotting.

"It was a 14-horse field and I was number 13. I sat back there, because I didn't want to get run over if I came off. He trashed a couple of fences, the final time down the backside I still had the Vulcan death grip on him," Leaf said. "I started counting horses in front of me,

I'm thinking to myself, 'OK, I get 2 percent if I move up to sixth, 3 percent if I . . . I'm like, 'this will pay for my mom's license, if I pick up one more, this will pay for my wife's license.'"

Sunny Express forced Leaf to do new math.

"It was a photo finish, won by a head. Chip Miller and Jonathan Kiser, a dead heat for second," Leaf said. "I couldn't believe it. That was probably my best day of racing."

Sunny Express earned \$2,500 and Leaf had his first and only win as a jockey.

Eighteen years later, three of the 14 jockeys in that race are dead, five train steeplechase horses, one runs a race meet, others left the grid. Richard Boucher is the only one still riding professionally. Chip Miller and Brooks Durkee have come back as amateurs. Leaf is still in the game, still paying for those licenses, 1 percent at a time.

A blacksmith by trade, Leaf pays his bills by hammering shoes for loyal clients like Michael Hankin and Alicia Murphy. Leaf feeds his competitive bug by training five horses off a family farm in Hampstead, Md. With help from Doug Bailey, Leaf trains for fun. He produced Durer to win the maiden claimer at Stoneybrook.

See **LEAF** page 16 ►



Tod Marks

Trainer Michael Leaf said hello to steeplechasing again at Stoneybrook.



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Catherine French
Durer (right) got up to win at Stoneybrook, continuing owner/trainer Michael Leaf's connection to the game.

Leaf —

■ Continued from page 14

Leaf, 41, is the blacksmith, exercise rider, van driver . . . all for the love of the game, instilled in him from his dad, Robert Leaf, who rode jumpers in the 1940s.

"He was the first one to school Neji, he was a good horse," Leaf said of the champion. "He got to ride some good horses, they had good horses, nothing but good horses."

Leaf shoes nice horses and tries to develop nice horses on a modest budget.

"I have to go shoe and make money, my bills get paid regardless of how my horses run, which is good, I can play the game the way it's meant to be played. There's no desperation, 'I hope I win because I have a bill in hand,' " Leaf said. "I've got my son, he's 5, he can grow up on the farm. My mother has a house on the

farm, I have a house on the farm, it's sweet, I love it."

In steeplechasing — life, for that matter — perspective is lost more often than it's gained. The perspective gained by trying to do it yourself, trying to roll that rock up that hill one more time, is more difficult to lose. Leaf was counting places to pay for licenses in 1994, that's perspective. And, yes, 18 years later, it's still there, still at a premium.

"It's a fun game, it's the Sport of Kings, you don't make any money, a \$5,000 claimer at Charles Town runs for more purse money than a lot of jump races, that's going 4 1/2 furlongs on the flat," Leaf said. "You either have a lot of money or you really enjoy it and I really enjoy it. I fully accept I won't have any money but I'm going to have a load of fun. If you don't enjoy it, you're a fool, don't do it."

From Sunny Express to Durer, Leaf has enjoyed it.

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Sergeant Karakorum (left) battles Wantan late in the Georgia Cup novice at Atlanta April 14. Catherine French

Jumping Around –

■ Continued from page 13

Atlanta –

A win over jumps, a loss on flat, confusion all around

Jonathan Sheppard walked out of the races Saturday, April 14 – flummoxed by the performance of a horse in the feature. Walked out, once. Flummoxed, twice.

Sheppard's best 3-year-old Ever So Lucky failed to deliver in the Grade I Blue Grass Stakes at Keeneland (Sheppard was there). Four hundred miles south, Sheppard's Sergeant Karakorum upset the Georgia Cup at the Atlanta Steeplechase in Kingston, Ga.

Ever So Lucky cost Augustin Stable six figures at the 2-year-old sales last year. Sergeant Karakorum cost Sheppard a board bill.

Another day as a horse trainer.

– Block House –

Next stop Iroquois for Divine Fortune

Like a child to a swing set, a rock star after a groupie, an old man to a park bench, Jonathan Sheppard raided Block House's feature yet again. This time, the Hall of Fame trainer shipped two-time A.P. Smithwick winner Divine Fortune for another plunder of the \$25,000 feature April 21. Bill Pape's 9-year-old tuned up for the Iroquois with a facile win over Cuse, the only finishers from three starters.

See **JUMPING AROUND** page 20 ►



Cubist enjoys some alone time in her stall at Camden before winning at Atlanta. Tod Marks

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Jumping Around —

■ Continued from page 19

— Middleburg Spring —

Naylor newcomer strikes again

Country Cousin scrapped from the inside. Sermon Of Love scoured from between horses. Pierrot Lunaire loomed large. Then Via Galilei slammed the door on those rivals and opened another gun shaft of the Irv Naylor juggernaut, winning the Temple Gwathmey at Middleburg April 21. The British import arrived Friday night, schooled Saturday morning and won the \$50,000 stakes Saturday afternoon. They say plan your work, work your plan — Naylor, trainer J.W. Delozier and jockey Ross Geraghty did it again, winning their third spring stakes with a European import.



Via Galilei (left) cuts the corner with Sermon Of Love (center) and Country Cousin in the Gwathmey. Tod Marks



Douglas Lees

And The Eagle Flies leads Private Attack early in the Grand National.

— Grand National —

Eagle takes off, lands in timber stakes

Breathe in, breathe out. Run, jump. Win. Riding the energy of a recent wind surgery, Jean Class' And The Eagle Flies soared to victory in the \$30,000 Grand National timber stakes at Butler, Md. Saturday.

Trained and ridden by Billy Meister, the 10-year-old took control of the pace early, set a moderate tempo and kicked clear of favorite Private Attack in the final furlong to win by 3 lengths. It's not often a horse breaks his maiden and becomes a stakes winner in the same race.

"That's really helped make a difference with him," Meister said of the myectomy procedure. "I almost pulled him up in the Hunt Cup last year because he was choking up so badly but that's not bothering him at all now."

Photos: See todmarks.photoshelter.com, eclipsesportswire.com or jameyprice.photoshelter.com. Entries, results, standings and more: See nationalsteeplechase.com.

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Buck's Path

Kisor enjoys ride with Berryman, Block House winner Sumo Power

BY JOE CLANCY

Manown “Buck” Kisor paused, thought a minute and remembered a horse.

“King’s Reverse was the first or one of the first anyway,” he said of his initial forays into steeplechasing. “He could either run or jump, he couldn’t do both at the same time. I rode him myself a few times, it felt like we hit every single fence.”

Despite the humble start with his homebred son of Bayduc in the mid-1980s, Kisor stuck with it. He’s still a steeplechase owner and still with trainer Mike Berryman. Their Sumo Power collected a maiden claiming win at Block House April 14 to extend a long relationship. Kisor and Berryman first connected when the owner hosted a \$3,000 timber race at a point-to-point in Michigan. Berryman called about bringing a horse and they’ve been friends ever since, even if the horse never made it.

Since then, they’ve campaigned numerous horses together and enjoyed the ride with Sumo Power, Gather No Moss, Lochnagar, Tillo and a slew of others.

OWNER PROFILE

“You couldn’t find a better guy than Mike,” said Kisor, 75. “He’s as honest as the day is long, loyal, good to his horses and a tremendous horseman. Give him a prospect and he’ll make you a runner. Give him a good horse and he’ll make you a really good horse.”

Kisor stays involved in racehorses – without the danger of riding them – and enjoys the company of Berryman and others on the circuit. He’s twice retired, from 35 years in the investment business and a second career as a professor of finance at Bridgewater College in Virginia.

Horses came into his life early. The nickname came from his grandfather’s proclamation “He looks like a little buckaroo” when he put the 6-month-old Kisor on a horse’s back. Later, that same grandfather took Kisor to the old Airlie Racecourse in Virginia to see a steeplechase – an introduction that is still paying dividends.

Kisor grew up near Chicago. His brother Henry is an author and former book editor of the Chicago Sun-Times while Kisor’s views on economics and



Tod Marks

Sumo Power clears a fence at Aiken, where he was second to start the season.

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Tod Marks

Owner Buck Kisor (right), trainer Mike Berryman (center) and Mark Watts teamed up for a win at Block House with Sumo Power.

investing have also been published numerous times.

Kisor graduated from Trinity College in Connecticut before graduate school at Northwestern in Chicago and New York University. He worked for a variety of investment banks including The Bank of New York on Wall Street. While there, he bought ponies for his daughters and dove further into horses when the family moved to Michigan for another banking job in Detroit. They lived on an 80-acre farm (one of the smallest in the Metamora Hunt country when they made the purchase, one of the largest when they moved away). Kisor eventually rode regularly, became the master at Metamora, organized point-to-points, bred racehorses and was even part of a group that tried to buy Detroit Race Course.

Today, all that horse background makes him a steeplechase owner.

“I get a tremendous amount of pleasure out of it,” he said. “When I rode in a few races I remember thinking that there truly was no sport like it, until I saw downhill skiing at the Olympics on TV. To me, that’s the only thing that can cap the thrill of steeplechasing.”

Kisor gets his equine thrills a little more vicariously these days, watching Sumo Power, Gather No Moss and the others compete. He listed Will Haynes’ victory aboard Gather No Moss at Morven Park in 2009 as a particularly meaningful win. And Sumo Power’s first victory in 14 tries was a nice boost to the 2012 season.

“As an owner, the most important thing is to realize you’re in it for the sport,” he said. “You need to have patience. You have to commit to the sport and take the downs along with the ups. As long as they get around and come back sound it’s been a good day.”

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Getting Hooked

McIntosh lands big one with winner Dance Faster

BY JOE CLANCY

Old fishermen like to tell impatient rookies that “It’s called fishing, not catching.”

The same could be said about owning horses – as in “It’s horse racing, not horse winning.”

Of course, new owner and avid angler Ann McIntosh won with her first runner when Dance Faster charged through the stretch in the Carolina Cup’s allowance timber March 31. A longtime fan of Maryland timber racing and noted fly fisherman (fisherwoman?), McIntosh participated in the Scanden Stable steeplechase partnerships, but took the idea a step further when she bought Dance Faster. The 2011 hurdle winner made the transition to timber this year and won at first asking for trainer Leslie Young and McIntosh’s River Bend Stable.

“That was a thrill, a total surprise, completely,” said McIntosh, 72. “The horse came on at the end after the last fence and won by a head. That told us he had some kick at the end, which was nice to see.”

The Monkton, Md. resident talked to the Youngs



Douglas Lees

Steeplechase owner Ann McIntosh pursues her other passion – fly fishing – on the Spruce Creek in Pennsylvania.

about getting a horse last year and jumped (cast?) at the chance when Dance Faster became available. Paddy had ridden the Pennsylvania-bred regularly for Ricky Hendriks and thought timber might suit. At Camden, the jockey went down with a broken arm in the race before – leaving the ride to Darren Nagle, who filled in admirably.

The instant success made the game seem easy, but McIntosh knows patience still pays. She’s written two books on fishing – “Trout Fishing Near American Cities” and “The Mid-Atlantic Budget Angler.” She’s a regular on local streams in the region and has fished all over the world.

“I started fishing when I was 8 years old, my father taught me how in the Griswolds’ pond,” she said. “Then I got into trout fishing when I was all grown up. It’s cheaper than horses, but just as addictive.”

The books just happened.

“I write about where to do it, rather than how,” she said. “People loved them and they sold nicely, but they don’t pay all that well. I had fun doing it.”

McIntosh listed the Gunpowder – because it’s full of “all wild fish” and therefore “more real and more fun” and Shenandoah Park in Virginia as the best places to fish on the steeplechase circuit.

Just like her fishing lessons, McIntosh learned steeplechasing at an early age – attending the Maryland timber meets as a child and following the various heroes through the historic races at My Lady’s Manor, the Grand National and the Maryland Hunt Cup.

“I’ve been going to these races for as long as I can remember,” said McIntosh, who owns Dance Faster in partnership with John Hawkes. “I lived in New York and Boston in my life, but this is home. I grew up here, grew up with (steeplechasing) in my life. I got a little bit of money and I decided to get into it as an owner.”

Encore

After banner 2011, Naylor stable starts new season with stakes wins

BY JOE CLANCY

After setting a record for single-season steeplechase earnings last year, owner Irv Naylor appears bent on a repeat as his horses won three of the first four hurdle stakes of 2012.

Pullyoungerout, Black Jack Blues and Via Galilei all won \$50,000 stakes (at Aiken, Camden and Middleburg, respectively) to pace Naylor’s early lead in the NSA standings. Maiden Almar-mooq chipped in another victory to make the squad 4-for-25 to start the spring season.

The green, gold and white team races mainly out of Naylor’s Stillwater Farm in Maryland, where private trainer J.W. Delozier’s string continues to grow. European imports headline the shedrow and are led by 2011 Eclipse Award winner Black Jack Blues.

The Irish-bred opened 2012 with a powerhouse score in the Carolina Cup and drew a hefty 162 pounds in the Temple Gwathmey Handicap, a weight assignment Delozier opted to pass. No matter, he and Naylor won it anyway with Via Galilei – a recruit from Eng-

land who had arrived that week.

“He got off the plane, went to quarantine, we gave him a school and went to Middleburg,” Naylor said. “If he can do that it tells you somebody knew what they were doing when they picked him out.”

Naylor’s big three sit atop the horse standings with \$30,000 each while surprise novice stakes winner Sergeant Karkaorum is just behind with \$29,400 for owner/trainer Jonathan Sheppard.

Naylor credited bloodstock agent Nick Carter and Delozier with the work importing and preparing the current lineup (Via Galilei, Black Jack Blues, Pullyoungerout and so on).

“I haven’t bought them all, he’s brought me some that I haven’t been able to afford,” Naylor said of Carter. “I try to look at each horse to see how he’s going to pay for himself.”

They’re off to a good start.

Naylor heads to Nashville’s rich Iroquois meet with eyes on a duplication (or more) of last year’s banner day of three wins and \$156,000 earned.

The Grade I Iroquois looks like an all-Naylor affair headed by two-time



Tod Marks

New import Via Galilei helped Irv Naylor’s stable get rolling with a win in the Temple Gwathmey.

race winner Tax Ruling from the barn of Brianne Slater and Black Jack Blues. The former is a 3-mile ace, the latter has been nothing but brilliant in three American starts. Potential key opponents are Arcadius, Divine Fortune, Pierrot Lunaire and others.

Early standings watchers will also take note of owner Maggie Bryant’s strong start. Her horses matched Naylor’s with four wins, but have done so from just 11 starts (courtesy of a variety of trainers).

Among the trainers, it’s early but Delozier, Sheppard, Arch Kingsley, and Neil Morris jumped out with three wins apiece. Doug Fout, Lilith Boucher and Ricky Hendriks each doubled in the season’s first few weeks.

Without three-time champion Paddy Young (broken arm), the jockeys are sharing. Jacob Roberts, whose wins have come for Morris (two), Michael Leaf and Simon Hobson, shows the way with four wins. Five jockeys have three wins apiece.

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TIME *for a* Triple CROWN?

Tax Ruling aims for historic three-peat at the Iroquois

BY JOE CLANCY

Chris Read leaned over Sur La Tete's withers and waited. The moment neared. All Read had to do was say when. His horse would do the rest. An extension of his stride, a lowering of his head, an acceleration. Sur La Tete would catch Good Night Shirt and make history.

And then he wouldn't. Or couldn't.

Sur La Tete never accelerated, never caught Good Night Shirt, never made history. He finished second, while bidding to become the first horse to win three consecutive runnings of the Iroquois Steeplechase.

That was 2007. Read and Sur La Tete finished second to Willie Dowling and Good Night Shirt, beaten 5 1/4 lengths. A year later, Good Night Shirt won a second Iroquois. A year after that, he lost in his bid at history. The recipe produces another chance May 12 when Tax Ruling bids for a three-peat in the spring schedule's richest and longest hurdle race. First run in 1941, the 3-mile classic has produced 13 back-to-back winners. None returned to add a third successive triumph.

The reasons make a long list. Luck, weather, time, distance, opposition, health, decisions, history, pressure.

"He did everything he normally did, got off the bridle and sat mid-field," Read said of Sur La Tete's loss in 2007. "On the backside, he started to move up, I was thinking 'OK here we go.' Just as we started to come up the hill, I could feel him take a breath and I had to wiggle on him. That was the first time I had to ask him anything on that course. He'd get there so easily – that day I had to get after him a little bit. I knew he was in trouble. I was hoping Good Night Shirt would come back to me, but he never did."

Read, trainer Neil Morris and owner Zohar Bendov were disappointed, in the circumstances, not the effort. Their horse lost, to a budding star. Sur La Tete was 9 years old, dealing with some leg issues and fighting time – his previous NSA start had come a year earlier. The race attracted 10 runners and, as usual, turned into a blend of speed and stamina late. Good

Night Shirt, 6 years old and coming off a second at Keeneland three weeks earlier, cranked up the pace and Sur La Tete couldn't cover.

"You have to be fit and perfect to be good on that course and he wasn't quite the same horse as he was the other two years," Read said. "He ran his heart out for me, I was proud of him. He was in great shape, just not up to his best. And we ran into a really good horse."

Two years later, it was Dowling's turn to lose, explain, wonder. Good Night Shirt entered the 2009 Iroquois on a seven-race winning streak including a season-opening victory in the Carolina Cup. Nashville's 3-mile Grade I was going to be another crowning moment, another payday, another notch on a rapidly ascending career.

Then it rained. The course came up soft, truly soft, and Good Night Shirt could not outlast recent English import Pierrot Lunaire. Like Sur La Tete, Good Night Shirt settled for second, 3 lengths behind the winner, in an upset that rocked the sport. Owned by Sonny Via and trained by Jack Fisher, the then 8-year-old dominated the 2007 and 2008 seasons – winning eight Grade I stakes and becoming the sport's third millionaire after Lonesome Glory and McDynamo.

None of that mattered in the 2009 Iroquois. Good Night Shirt set the pace, jumped the last fence with a slim lead but was no match for Pierrot Lunaire, who charged past on the outside. Dowling felt trouble long before the stretch.

"It was one of those days where I woke up and thought it was against him," Dowling said of the rain and wet turf. "Going to the start, he wasn't pulling like he normally did, I knew. Everybody says a good horse will go in any ground but he just sort of got stuck in it a bit. He got bogged down, I can't really put it any other way."

Losing the Iroquois felt like more than a defeat. It was a missed opportunity – at history. With a win, Good Night Shirt could have cemented a legacy. Instead, he went back to the barn a gallant runner-up to a horse who had a very good day. Still active and a possible starter in the 2012 Iroquois, Pierrot Lunaire has yet to win another jump race.

"We were very disappointed after that race," Dowling said. "It felt like we had the champ, but we didn't get to take our best shot with him."

Nobody knew it then, but Good Night Shirt would never run again – sidelined by an ankle injury later that year and retired. He's fat and happy on the farm, unfazed by his Nashville near-miss.

Through The Years

Two stars of the 2000s couldn't complete Iroquois triples, but neither could those that came before them.

Rowdy Irishman, Mistico and Victorian Hill each won two in the 1990s. Uncle Edwin, the only horse to win three (just not in a row), went back-to-back in the 1980s, as did Census. Owghata Chief and Mabrouk each won two in a row for Augustin Stable in the 1970s. Appollon's streak reached two in the 1960s. Ginny Bug finished second in her 1956 triple try. Stars of the 1940s, Bluish and Rockmayne couldn't complete the streak either.

As with their modern brethren, the reasons multiply – though they could all start with one simple answer. The race. They don't give the thing away. Even before the big money, the National Fences, the professional jockeys, the race was a target. Participants wanted to win, and sent their best. Today, it's a Grade I, worth \$150,000. The best horses show up, every year – even more so now that the Iroquois stands alone as the only six-figure stop before Saratoga.

"Look at the horses that have won the race, no wonder it's hard to win it three times," said Dowling. "There's usually an up-and-coming young horse that can beat you, the champ from the year before almost always runs in it. Winning once isn't easy."

Trainer Janet Elliot supervised two back-to-backers, winning a pair with Victorian Hill and guiding Census to the second half of his double. She gave credit to the horses, who have to be special to tackle the distance, the jumps, the course, the hype, the pressure, the trip from Pennsylvania or some other steeplechase state.

She called 1991-92 winner Victorian Hill "an out-and-out stayer" who could stretch horses with

See **TRIPLE CROWN** page 27 ►

Triple Crown—

■ Continued from page 26

his jumping and his speed. He thrived on Nashville's long straightaways and could drag opponents up the hill. Census won his first for Henry Wood, with plenty of advice from Elliot, in 1983 and doubled up the next year. Like Victorian Hill, the chestnut loved Nashville but was good anywhere. Neither of Elliot's stars could rise up and win the race a third time, however – Census missed the 1985 race, but was second in 1986; Victorian Hill finished fifth in 1993, third twice after that.

"No question, it's not an easy thing to do," Elliot said of winning three in a row. "For starters, you have to keep the beast sound for three years. Then, it's the 3 miles. Do they like that distance? Then, there's the course. Certain horses are going to run better on a flat course than they are coming up that hill."

Elliot trained her Iroquois winners for the race – using the hills of Pennsylvania for fitness.

"The way we train them, where we train them matters, I think," she said. "Does that make a difference? If you only have a flat surface to train on I think it would be harder for them to go to Nashville and do well – even if they like 3 miles."

At its core, the Iroquois demands quality. Past winners are champions, Hall of Famers, legends, all-timers. Some of the best (Flatterer, Lonesome Glory, McDynamo) could only win it

once. Others managed to double up. None could win three in a row, but their reputations shouldn't suffer.

"They're pretty darn nice horses if they manage to get it done a couple of times," said Elliot. "One time might be a freak, the second time is not. We'll see if somebody ever wins it three times in a row."

Making History

Tax Ruling, of course, knows nothing of the bias he's running against. In 2009, he took over from Slip Away late and won by nearly 5 lengths. Also in his wake came champion Mixed Up and major winners Arcadius and Your Sum Man. Irv Naylor's son of Dynaformer was 7, a veteran but a newcomer to Grade I victories for trainer Desmond Fogarty and jockey Darren Nagle.

Last year, Tax Ruling returned – a proven commodity at 3 miles – and won again for Nagle in his first NSA start for trainer Brianne Slater. The horse again turned aside Slip Away, the reigning steeplechase champion, after a race-long battle. This 5-length victory was an arrival at the top of the class, a signal that Tax Ruling belonged. A third win would cast him in bronze when it comes to Iroquois discussions.

The 9-year-old won a point-to-point flat prep back in March and finished a solid fifth in his final tightener at Fairfax Point-to-Point April 22.

"I don't care if we win those, but he was a bit farther back than he was in the other race," said Slater. "He was fine and really finished well. Right after the wire he was running past horses

Back-to-back Iroquois Wins

Years	Horse	What happened?
2007-08	Good Night Shirt	Second to Pierrot Lunaire.
2005-06	Sur La Tete	Second to Good Night Shirt.
1998-99	Rowdy Irishman	Last of six behind Pinkie Swear.
1993-94	Mistico	Didn't run. Third in 1996.
1991-92	Victorian Hill	Fifth behind Mistico. Third in 1994 and 1995.
1985-86	Uncle Edwin*	Fourth behind Flatterer.
1983-84	Census	Didn't run. Second in 1986.
1978-79	Owhata Chief	Didn't run. Second to Uncle Edwin in 1982.
1971-72	Mabrouk	Second to He's Trouble.
1967-68	Appollon	Didn't run.
1954-55	Ginny Bug	Second to Jarrin John.
1947-48	Bluish	Fifth behind Fatal Interview.
1941-42	Rockmayne	Unavailable.
*Also won in 1982; only three-time winner.		

and galloped out an extra half. He did it great. He thinks he won, he was bouncing the whole way back."

The final preparations complete, Slater will train her horse up to his first jump start since November's Colonial Cup victory. One work (May 6 or 7 most likely) and two schooling sessions will put the fuel in the tank. Fitness matters most at Percy Warner Park.

"It comes down to who can gut it out and who's the fittest and who's the best jumper," Slater said. "His jumping is so good he can use it to his advantage late in a race like he did last year. It will be a good race, it's always a good race."

Beyond the work, the gallops, the schooling, Slater will deal with some anxious moments.

"Just getting there three years in a row is difficult," she said of the potential history-making victory. "I remember thinking Good Night Shirt was going to do it a few years ago and he couldn't. I know I won't get much sleep between now and then."

Elliot knows how Slater feels: "I don't envy the pressure. You just have to get your horse there in the best form you can, take it like it's one race, not three and just hope there isn't some bright new star coming along."



Tod Marks

Tax Ruling flies the last fence en route to his second consecutive Iroquois victory in 2011. He goes for three in a row May 12.



Tod Marks

Calvin Houghland's recent import Pierrot Lunaire (left) denied a history-seeking Good Night Shirt in the 2009 Iroquois.



Tod Marks

In the first of his back-to-back triumphs in the race, Good Night Shirt (right) thwarted an Iroquois triple attempt by Sur La Tete in 2007.

Dual champion Flat Top dies at 19

Stable pony for trainer Elliot won two Colonial Cups, Eclipse Awards

Two-time champion Flat Top died April 19 after a bout of colic.

The 19-year-old had been a mainstay on the circuit, serving as trainer Janet Elliot's lead pony since running his last race in 2004. Owned by Nancy Gerry, the son of Alleged ran sparingly but made them count, starting 18 times over hurdles and winning nine times, including the Breeders' Cup (twice), Colonial Cup (twice), Royal Chase, Zeke Ferguson, Arthur McCashin Novice and Raymond Woolfe. He earned Eclipse Awards in 1998 and 2002. He ran once in between, taking the 2000 Royal Chase at Keeneland. Purchased as a 3-year-old from owners Ken and Sarah Ramsey after three poor performances on the flat, Flat Top burst onto the steeplechase scene, winning his debut at Virginia Fall for jockey/owner Jeff Teter.

Sold to Gerry, Flat Top returned to win the Woolfe with a wild front-running performance. Flat Top made two disappointing starts to open his 4-year-old season before wiring a tough field of novices in the McCashin at Morven Park. As a 5-year-old, he missed in two allowance starts at Saratoga before hooking up with Bitsy Patterson to sweep the Ferguson and Breeders' Cup Grand National. He dominated the Colonial Cup when jockey Gregg Ryan deputized for Patterson who was injured earlier in the day.

Flat Top missed all of 1999 before returning to win the Royal Chase for jockey Blythe Miller. Back to the sidelines, he missed the rest of 2000 and all of 2001. Elliot managed to get her delicate veteran back to the races in 2002 when he finished third in the Royal Chase, third in the Iroquois and third in the New York Turf Writers Cup. Finally back to his best, the 9-year-old won another Breeders' Cup at Far Hills and finished the year with a flamboyant victory over Tres Touche in an epic Colonial Cup for jockey Rob Massey. He returned to finish seventh in the Breeders' Cup in 2004. That would be his last start. But not his last appearance.

The classy veteran made all the stops over the years, ponying horses to the start, giving leads in the morning and wowing any fan of the sport who recognized the narrow white snip of hair that fell off the left side of his face.

Flat Top retired with \$592,306 in earnings – still one of only 13 U.S. steeplechasers to pass \$500,000.



Two-time steeplechase champion Flat Top walks the paddock at Far Hills.

Tod Marks



Maggie Kimmitt

Flat Top (with Harry in the background) was still enjoying an active retirement this spring in Camden, S.C.

Coast to Coast

- Eagle Poise finishes second, beaten a nose, in Gr. II San Juan Capistrano at Santa Anita.
- Embezzle goes 2-for-2 with wins at Aiken and Block House.
- Memorial Maniac, Classic Bridges, Almarmooq and Sumo Power break maidens.
- Brave Prospect wins allowance at Middleburg.
- Guts For Garters finishes second at the Grand National.
- Bubble Economy returns to finish second in the Manor.
- Cornhusker finishes second at Foxfield.
- El Crespo finishes third in hurdle debut.

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BY SEAN CLANCY

It's the lives they touch. Not the races, the results, the money or the lines in a newspaper. It's simply the lives horses touch that are important, lasting.

You can question and wonder why we chase horses around in circles, hanging on every result, every move. You're right, it doesn't make a lot of sense when you stop and analyze it. Better, to not stop and analyze it and simply think about the horse and who he touches. It's not about victories or championships, it's about relationships and experiences.

The Kentucky businessman made his own money, wheeling and dealing in real estate and telephone towers. His first horse has one eye, never wins a race. He talks fast, moves fast, bets with both fists. He throws paint like Jackson Pollock, all over the place in a sport that spits out the undisciplined. He sells the raw 3-year-old for peanuts after three dismal flat starts, then sees his old horse walk into the winner's circle at Keeneland six years later, sees him win a championship. He thinks he should be in the game too, a dozen years later, he too, owns a steeplechase champion.

An old jump jockey, winding down his career, buys a horse cheap, brings him home, teaches him to jump, plays with him, nurtures him, rides him to a debut win and sells him in the barn, turns a profit, keeps the ride, wins again. The horse teaches the old man in a kid's world that, perhaps, he can do something else. He's long retired when his pupil reaches the pinnacle.

The lady trainer takes a horse, a free-wheeling, headstrong horse with talent brewing and bubbling like a chemistry experiment. She's had front-runners before and will have front-runners again but this one needs to be harnessed, not snuffed. He also must be coddled and controlled, just enough to make it happen. Slow down, take a deep breath, chill out. She

Touching Horse

plays with him, he wins twice at 3, then is blanked in the spring of his 4-year-old when she tells the jockeys to rate him too harshly. She keeps playing with him, those long, steady gallops, riders standing up, pulling on the yoke instead of the mouth. She rides him, knowing he's everything but could be nothing. He comes around, begins to catch on to the lessons, starts winning, again and again, coming back when he should be over the top, he runs once in four years, winning a Grade I. He wins championships for the lady trainer. Defies everything.

The lady owner loves the game. She's the best owner around, never putting pressure on, always taking it off. She loves her horses, loves the sport. She's never had a horse who's defined her, the one who puts a trophy square in the center of her mantle. The one who would wear her silks in the commissioned painting in her library. She cherishes the horse, travels the country, meeting people, making friends, enjoying the fruits of a life well lived.

The struggling jockey gets the call, his first stakes ride for months. He nearly retired nine months earlier after too many concussions, knows he's on borrowed time, has headaches if he sneezes too hard. The call comes to ride a horse he thinks he can ride better than most, in a stakes, for a trainer he needs. Trainer and jockey talk in the paddock, they are on the same page, same book. He puts him on the lead, he jumps like a cat over a puddle and wins a stakes named for a legendary horseman and mentor of his dad's. The jockey feels like he's back.

The young girl from a good family was never meant to be a jockey. She had a college degree from Virginia, liked to ride as an aside, a capable amateur with soft hands. Sweet girl, great smile. Worked in real estate, was good at that. She was there every morning, working harder than the professional boys, earning the ride on the best horse in the game, winning the biggest race of the year. It was an unfathomable partnership, her moment in time. Weeks later, the bittersweetness of the game slams home, it gives and it takes, a hammer and a pillow all at the same time.

The rich kid won everything there was to win at his level. The amateur, insurance guy carved a niche, somehow earned respect from the professionals. He's the last guy in the room for the biggest race of the year on the last day of the year when he gets the nod, the emergency relief pitcher; he comes in from the bullpen, throws a perfect game in his one and only attempt. He has his moment in time.

The British-born vegetarian limps away from his homeland, unable to make it big. He's branded a bumper jockey, wins flat races, nothing else. Comes to America, finds a peg in the room, wins races, makes some money, staves off the worry of his soft-spoken parents an ocean away. The horse is old, the jockey is too, they team up like lost lovers, creating one more win, and then another, one more championship, one more relationship, one more experience.

Rest in peace, Flat Top. They couldn't have done it without you.



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TIMES EDITORIAL

Bravo for a Barn

Saratoga is looming. The historic meet begins in late July and offers steeplechasing its biggest purses and best opportunity. Yes, the hunt meets matter, but no place showcases the jumpers like Saratoga, placing steeplechasing on a stage in front of Thoroughbred racing's elite horsemen and fans. It's Broadway, baby.

Some owners own jumpers because they've seen them race at Saratoga, they own jumpers because they want to race at Saratoga.

In recent years, the sport has struggled to fill races at Saratoga. So far this spring, the horse population looks light and it's certainly a concern again that the sport could stumble when it comes to fielding a team for the six weeks of racing at Saratoga.

In sport as in life, there is nothing more damaging than a squandered opportunity.

There is a plethora of reasons why the NSA has struggled to provide a strong product at Saratoga.

- Costs. Licensing, accommodations, shipping, entry fees, insurance. . .

- Reduced opportunity. The number of races were reduced from 12 to six several summers ago, creating a critical mass issue, where horsemen opted to stay home because their chances of success had gone down. Some would argue it's tougher to fill six races than 12 because you don't have the critical mass.

- Summer training. Firm ground in the summer knocks horses off the active list. There is nothing more taxing to a jumper than to run all spring and train all summer, especially on a farm when the ground gets firm.

- Shipping. Saratoga-based trainers have dominated in recent years. Tom Voss and Jonathan Sheppard stable on the grounds and they have won the majority of the races. Their horses walk across Fifth Avenue while the rest ship up the Northway, bed down in the receiving barn or somewhere else not as suitable. No shipper won a race at the meet last year.

Ah, that last issue has been rectified, or at least, helped this year. Something was done about it. We'll say it again, something was done about it.

The Steeplechase Owners and Trainers Association stepped up and proactively did something about one of the biggest obstacles facing owners and trainers at Saratoga. The organization found a private barn, negotiated a price, risked its money and basically put 19 steeplechase horses within walking distance of the paddock.

That's huge. It's easier to run when you're in town and this should help fill the races, level the playing field between locals and shippers and make life easier on horsemen.

It's not perfect. Set up on a first-come, first-serve basis, the barn will house just a handful of trainers and isn't able to accommodate everybody. Still, it's the best choice and it should help.

Like always, the owners have taken the brunt of the risk and the expense, renting stalls at the meet adds to the red side of the ledger, for sure, but it's a strong, tangible move that can only help. There will be hiccups, of course, hopefully SOTA, NYRA and the NSA can keep them from boiling over.

Kudos to SOTA president Kate Dalton, who hitched the wagon and the rest of the SOTA board for getting it done. Kudos to the owners who, yet again, reached in their pockets for the good of the game.

See you around the barn.



Tod Marks

First First. Classic Bridges (foreground) flies the last fence, and outjumps Ez Mac, in a maiden hurdle score at Aiken – the first jump race of 2012.

Waiting Game

Poise tested on wrong side of photo finish

Alex Solis looks me dead in the eye.

"I don't know, Sean. I don't know." Solis slips from Eagle Poise's back and stands next to me, in the middle of the main track at Santa Anita. Dirt on our soles, angst in our souls. Solis always looks a little sad, sincere, too respectful for the role of risktaker, the high-wire act of being a jockey. He's never looked more soulful as when he whispers these painful, telling words after the San Juan Capistrano. I want him to say, "We got it. Don't worry. Go to the window." I somehow knew he wouldn't say that, but his look, his complete unknowing, his pain is like a knife.

I remember the same look when he came back on Johar after the Breeders' Cup Turf in 2003. As a writer, I clawed to the edge of trainer Richard Mandella and waited for the photo. Minutes ticked past, I felt invested, I think I bet on Johar. He got the deadheat.

But, now, I'm invested to my bones. This is my horse, my dream, my neck on the line. I bought him, represented him, stood by him, convinced a client to buy him. I decided to ship him 2,000 miles to Santa

Inside —

■ Continued from page 30

my God, he's flying. Come on wire. Come on wire. Get there. One time. One time in the biggest race of my life. One time. I celebrate when he hits the wire, sure he won, sure of it, and I take off running out of Hall of Famer Ron McAnally's box. Where am I going? Where am I going? I hug Motion's assistant Heather Craig, then whip around and hug my wife, hug them like they're the last women on Earth, next stop electric chair. Then I stop, I'm no rookie, you never celebrate when it's in doubt, but it's not in doubt, he got it, right, he got it, right, he got it . . . right? I whip around to writer/friend/confidant Jay Hovdey, he was here for John Henry in 1982, for that deadheat in 2003, he's seen it all, I whip around to him, poke him in the chest, we got it, we got it, we got it . . . right? He looks confident. "Go get your picture taken," he says. He can't be wrong. We sprint past the boxes, the boxes that have held Charlie Whittingham, Ben Jones, Frankel, all the Santa Anita greats. I look across the winner's circle as the replay flashes across the big screen . . . it's closer than I thought, oh God, so much closer than I thought. I've only read about energy leaving your body, your blood running cold. Now, I feel it. I'm numb. Gone.

My phone is blowing up in my pocket. The crowd applauds Eagle Poise when he gallops back. They don't applaud Bourbon Bay. Do they know? I hope they know.

The longest turf race in North America seems short compared to the wait. The wait. Unfamiliar with Santa Anita's toteboard, I search for where the numbers will be posted, needing to be the first to know. Blank. Just the photo

sign. That damn photo sign. Waiting, the longer it goes, the more I think, at the worst, it's a deadheat. I'll take a deadheat right about now.

I sense Bourbon Bay circling behind me. I see Eagle Poise circling in front of me. Overgirths dangling. Sides heaving. Still fire in their veins. They can't know the enormity, can they?

We wait. And wait. And wait.

I keep reciting his number in my mind . . . 4 . . . 4 . . . 4 . . . 4, dying to look, afraid to look.

The 2 flashes, then the 4. It's not a deadheat.

I swallow hard, the wait has at least defused the reflex of anger, it's simply resignation tinged with disappointment. We've all been there, the wrong side of the photo, the wrong stride, head up instead of down, a little late, a little early. I walk over to Eagle Poise and give him a pat. He's just a horse. It's just a race. He doesn't know he lost. At least, I don't think he knows.

I drink two Stellas at the bar (champagne is for winners), cash an empty exacta ticket and I melt back to the barn, spent. Eagle Poise hangs his head over the webbing, still revving from the energy, the effort. I give him another salute. I go to The Derby, the iconic racetrack hangout, just down the road from Santa Anita for dinner with my wife. History oozes from the walls, along with a thousand wins, losses, improbable photo finishes and tough beats.

Earlier in the week, Hovdey had asked me if I was writing anything good. I told him, apologetically, "Nothing any good. Hate to say it but I've been focusing on buying and managing horses more than writing."

There was a long pause, before he said, "We can make history in different ways."

Almost. Almost.



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STEEPLECHASE 'Pick Six' FANTASY STABLE GAME

Presented by The Whip Tavern and Embrace The Race

Here We Go Again

The Pick Six is back for another year. After showing up in late fall 2011, Black Jack Blues made his presence felt in steeplechasing – and with the 2012 Pick Six players. The champion appears in most stables and bankrolls leader Sight Unseen. Congratulations, but we've got a long way to go.

As for the prizes, look for the April leader online after the races of April 28. The Most Creative Stable Name award goes to Jean McLane's Eenie, Meenie, Minie . . . Whoa.

The top 15 (through April 27) are listed. Check www.st-publishing.com for full and current standings.

Sight Unseen	Brad Galyean
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Pullyourfingerout	\$30,000
Incomplete	\$18,000
Duc De Savoie	\$15,000
Classic Bridges	\$9,000
Well Fashioned	\$0
.....	\$102,000
Steeplestakes	Van Cushny
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Pullyourfingerout	\$30,000
Duc De Savoie	\$15,000
Classic Bridges	\$9,000
Quiet Flaine	\$9,000
Bon Caddo	\$3,000
.....	\$96,000
Stupid for Steeplechasing	Lisa McLane
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Pullyourfingerout	\$30,000
Incomplete	\$18,000
Cubist.....	\$9,000
En Fuego	\$2,700
Nadal	\$0
.....	\$89,700

Sparklehorse	Tina Lippincott
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Pullyourfingerout	\$30,000
Duc De Savoie.....	\$15,000
Quiet Flaine	\$9,000
Manacor	\$4,500
Triple Dip.....	\$0
.....	\$88,500
After Midnight	Betty Sanchez
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Pullyourfingerout	\$30,000
Duc De Savoie.....	\$15,000
Old Timer	\$9,000
Bon Caddo	\$3,000
Sweet Shani	\$0
.....	\$87,000
Sugar Magnolia	Allison West
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Pullyourfingerout	\$30,000
Duc De Savoie.....	\$15,000
Classic Bridges	\$9,000
Bon Caddo	\$3,000
Well Fashioned	\$0
.....	\$87,000
Visions of Saratoga	Mike Cushny
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Sergeant Karakorum	\$29,400
Duc De Savoie.....	\$15,000
Old Timer	\$9,000
Bon Caddo	\$3,000
Well Fashioned	\$0
.....	\$86,400
Silver Clipper	Coaralie Galyean
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Pullyourfingerout	\$30,000
Duc De Savoie.....	\$15,000
Classic Bridges	\$9,000
Battle Op	\$0
Sweet Shani	\$0
.....	\$84,000
Chiki's Chasers	Roshna Kapadia
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Via Galilei	\$30,000
Duc De Savoie.....	\$15,000
Bruno Frigerio	\$2,700
Well Fashioned	\$0
Delta Park	\$0
.....	\$77,700
Taffy 3 Racing Stable	Jack Lock
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Baltic Shore.....	\$18,000
Duc De Savoie.....	\$15,000
Old Timer	\$9,000
Bubble Economy	\$5,400
Sweet Shani	\$0
.....	\$77,400
Casi Cielo	Maggie Kimmitt
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Sergeant Karakorum	\$29,400
Embezzle.....	\$12,000
Bubble Economy	\$5,400
Seven In Heaven	\$0
Maggie Neary	\$0
.....	\$76,800
Titanic Racing Stables	Kathryn Lindquist
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Sergeant Karakorum	\$29,400
Cubist.....	\$9,000
Bubble Economy	\$5,400
Memorial Maniac	\$2,700
Sweet Shani	\$0
.....	\$76,500
Night Lily	Cora Cushny
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Flight Movie	\$17,500
Duc De Savoie.....	\$15,000
Old Timer	\$9,000
Bon Caddo	\$3,000
Well Fashioned	\$0
.....	\$74,500
Feelinglucky Stable	Douglas Jennings
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Country Cousin	\$18,000
El Season	\$16,250
Alfarabi.....	\$4,500
Four Schools.....	\$3,600
Well Fashioned	\$0
.....	\$72,350
Pony Girl Stables	Elizabeth Watrous
Black Jack Blues	\$30,000
Incomplete	\$18,000
Duc De Savoie.....	\$15,000
Old Timer	\$9,000
Green Velvet.....	\$0
Arcadius	\$0
.....	\$72,000



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