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\$2 Daily

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T O D A Y

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T H R E A T S

DIAZO HURT, OUT OF BIG 'CAP Allen Paulson's **Diazo** (Jade Hunter) suffered a fractured left front cannon bone in Sunday's mile workout and will miss Saturday's Santa Anita H. "It's a clean break and the prognosis is good that he'll race again. He'll probably be back in six months," said trainer Bill Shoemaker. Diazo underwent surgery Monday morning, during which two screws were inserted in his cannon bone.

PURSES INCREASE TO RECORD LEVEL AT GULFSTREAM PARK Gulfstream Park is raising its overnight purses another five percent, effective today, bringing the total increase in overnight purses to 30 percent since the start of the '94 meet. Daily overnight purses are now a state-record high of \$235,000. "We are pleased purses continue to escalate due to strong on-track and simulcasting business," said Gulfstream's President and CEO Doug Donn. "Our on-track patrons and those at the simulcasting sites have demonstrated their approval of our racing programs far beyond our projections."

CAUSE OF FONNER PARK BARN FIRE DETERMINED A barn fire at Nebraska's Fonner Park which killed 35 horses early Saturday morning was caused by an electrical fault in an immersion-type heater, it has been determined by the Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau. The appliance, used to heat water, had been left unattended in the barn. The fire killed all of the horses stabled in Fonner's Barn K, but was contained to the one structure by the Grand Island Fire Department. The investigation was conducted by the Fire Department, the Nebraska State Racing Commission and the TRPB; the fire was termed accidental.

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LAST WEEK ON THE TRIPLE CROWN TRAIL

There has never been an Oklahoma-bred winner of the Kentucky Derby, but **Silver Goblin** (Silver Ghost) has taken the first steps down the road to the Triple Crown. The grey gelding is now five-for-six lifetime after a three-and-a-half length triumph in Sunday's Budweiser S. at Remington Park; he now has to prove he can win beyond seven furlongs--and then outside the state of Oklahoma.

THIS WEEK'S TRIPLE CROWN PREPS

- 3/2 \$75,000a **Bolsa Chica S., 6f, Santa Anita**
- 3/4 \$50,000 **Cherry Hill Mile, 8f, Garden State**
- 3/5 \$50,000 **Risen Star S., 8.5f, Fair Grounds**
- 3/6 GII \$150,000a **San Rafael S., 8f, Santa Anita**

Three-year-olds will be getting geared up across the country this week, but Sunday's San Rafael S. at Santa Anita will attract the most attention. Ten of California's top prospects will head to the gate for the \$150,000a, one-mile contest. Last year's Breeders' Cup Juvenile winner **Brocco** (Kris S.) is a strong possibility to make his first appearance of the year; the colt worked seven furlongs yesterday in 1:24 4/5, and trainer Randy Winick pronounced his runner "85 percent fit" to run in the San Rafael. "We'll think about it and I probably won't decide before Wednesday." If Brocco passes this race, he'll head for the San Felipe (March 20). Probable for this GII race are **Argolid** (Saros {GB}), **Flying Sensation** (Flying Paster), the undefeated **Fly'n J. Bryan** (Ogygian), **Fumo di Londra** (Indian Ridge {IRE}), **Shepherd's Field** (Spectacular Bid) and El Camino Real Derby winner **Tabasco Cat** (Storm Cat). Argolid worked six furlongs in 1:11 2/5 at Santa Anita Monday. Charlie Whittingham will saddle either **Numerous** (Mr. Prospector) or **Strodes Creek** (Halo); **Powis Castle** (Rare Brick) and **Cois Na Tine** (Double Schwartz {IRE}) are also possible.



O • P • I • N • I • O • N

MAKING THE GRADE

by Tom Jicha

The Buffalo Bills have won four straight American Conference championships. The Dallas Cowboys have won just two consecutive Super Bowls. No one would suggest that the Bills' achievements outrank the Cowboys.

Well, that's not exactly true. The people who run horse racing might make this argument. In a way, they do with the way they grade stakes.

Obviously, the AFC and NFC championship games are mere preludes, or preps, for the Super Bowl. A victory in either is not afforded the prestige of winning The Big One. However, in horse racing, as far as the committee that ranks the value of stakes is concerned, there is no distinction between winning the Florida Derby and the Kentucky Derby; the Santa Anita Derby and the Preakness; the Wood Memorial and the Belmont Stakes--at least for this year.

There is no cogent argument to justify the attachment of the same status to a prep as to the main event. Thus, it stands to reason there should be no Grade I races limited to three-year-olds until the Triple Crown events. Preps should achieve no ranking higher than a Grade II.

American horsemen will concede that the Florida Derby, Santa Anita Derby and Wood Memorial, as rewarding as they are, are nothing more than steppingstones to the universally coveted prizes, the Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont. Only the race-grading committee places them on equal footing.

Grade I races enhance the earnings potential of breeders and the box office appeal of tracks. A "Grade I" designation juices both. As a result, there is no reasonable hope that there will be a significant decline in the number of races boasting this status symbol. There is, however, a way to bring justice to the process. Create a category that supercedes Grade I: Grade I Classic.

The Classic designation would be doled out solely on merit. For example, Hollywood Park might not agree with naming the Santa Anita Handicap a Classic while passing over the Hollywood Gold Cup but truth is, tradition and longevity do matter. The Big 'Cap has a special place in racing lore. The Hollywood Gold Cup is one of many important races.

As with any rule, there must be exceptions. One exception to the rule of longevity is the Breeders' Cup. The seven Event Day races have become a focal point of the racing scene and each deserves Classic designation.

However, the Juvenile and Juvenile Fillies are the only races for two-year-olds which merit this distinc-

tion. The Hopeful, the Sapling, the Champagne and the Arlington-Washington Futurity offer rich tradition and bulging purses but their fields in recent years have been too often quantity rich and quality poor. The Grade I Hopeful does not equal the Grade I Kentucky Derby. Remember, no juvenile champion has won a Triple Crown race since Spectacular Bid 15 years ago.

As for three-year-olds, there are three Classics and that is all there should be. A case could be made for the Travers, because of its place on the calendar, \$1 million purse and the fact that in recent years it has become a magnet for the best of a generation. But it just doesn't have the panache of the Derby, Preakness and Belmont.

Nor should there be gender equity. Kentucky has its Oaks, Maryland its Black Eyed Susan, New York its Triple Tiara, and California any number of prestigious filly races but only the management of the various tracks would label any of these Classics. Each has its special years but each also has many renewals that are ho-hummers. Fillies are eligible to the Triple Crown, so if they want a Classic victory on their resume, they have the opportunity to get it outside races that de facto exclude half the thoroughbreds of a generation. Winning Colors did it. Genuine Risk did it. So it's not asking the impossible.

A similar argument pertains to older distaffers. They have their opportunity to compete for a Classic exclusively within their sex in the Breeders' Cup. That should be it. If they want more, let them earn it in open competition, as they must in most of the rest of the racing world.

Other than the Big 'Cap, the only stakes for older horses that jumps out as an obvious Classic is the Metropolitan Handicap. Every Memorial Day weekend, East meets West, crack sprinters stretch out and the creme de la creme of the stamina set turn back in the Met Mile. The Brooklyn and Suburban used to be on equal footing with the Metropolitan but scheduling has diminished the importance of both. The Pimlico Special has begun to regain the importance it once had but it's hard to call a race a Classic that wasn't contested for 30 years in the second half of the 20th century.

Europe being the world hub of turf racing, it's debatable whether there is an American turf classic. If there is, it would have to be the Arlington Million, which attracts top European racers.

The Breeders' Cup, the Triple Crown, the Big Cap, the Met Mile and the Arlington Million; this is an exclusive group of 13 races. It should be. This is what makes them Classics.

But every horse of every age and of every particular talent would have an opportunity to win one. And those that don't make the grade would still have dozens of Grade I's as consolation prizes.



News cont.

BIG 'CAP BREEZES Five of the contenders for Saturday's GI Santa Anita H. tuned up for the big event Monday morning. At Santa Anita, San Antonio H. winner **The Wicked North** (Far North) went a half-mile in :47 $\frac{3}{5}$, breezing; **Nonproductiveasset** (Stalwart) went five-eighths in 1:01 $\frac{4}{5}$, while **Myrakalu** (Kaldoun {FR}), who will make his first dirt start in the \$1,000,000 race, went the same distance in :59. At Hollywood Park, trainer Jack Van Berg sent out a pair of Big 'Cap hopefuls to go seven furlongs. **Hill Pass** (Temperence Hill) went in 1:26 $\frac{3}{5}$ while **Kissin Kris** (Kris S.) got the distance in 1:27 $\frac{1}{5}$.

RICK COWAN RESIGNS FROM OJC Rick Cowan, executive vice president and chief operating officer, has tendered his resignation to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of the Ontario Jockey Club. Cowan stated that he regretted leaving, but has accepted an offer within the racing industry in the U.S.